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## 6.2: Corporate Involvement in Image Events

### Corporate Involvement in Image Events: Media Stunts, Guerrilla Marketing and the Problem of Political Interpretation

Jo Littler, Middlesex University

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It is sometimes easy to think of what this collection terms "image events" as *de facto* subaltern, radical, and leftwing. To focus on this aspect is both a means of being optimistic and a way of thinking about how their progressive potential can be expanded. However, at the same time, it is clearly the case that corporations have produced their own versions of image events, and that corporate discourse interacts with the visual and rhetorical strategies deployed by the more "radical" variants of image events in complex ways. What this piece does, therefore, is map out some of the basic or key modes of this relationship. It considers such examples as a management course that was designed to rebut staged acts of anti-capitalist protest and marginalize the subsequent media fallout for corporations; a branding company that "infiltrated" anti-Iraq war marches with "teaser" posters trying to raise its corporate profile; and a men's magazine that projected an image of a naked female model onto a side wall of the British Houses of Parliament. These examples suggest that we might, perhaps, divide the issue of corporate involvement with image events into three different yet related categories: firstly, the political ambivalence of image events as a form; secondly, the corporate "neutralisation" of image events; and thirdly, the corporate co-option of image events.

Drawing from a variety of tools in cultural, media, and communications studies, this piece aims to historicize these categories of corporate behaviour and to theorize the wider political implications of their actions. For example, the political ambivalence of image events as a form can be understood in relation to theories of articulation and "chains of equivalence": in short, as malleable political forms which can be connected to a variety of political needs and ends (Grossberg; Hall; Laclau and Mouffe). The "neutralization" of radical image events can both be situated in a long historical story about the slow evolution of PR as a discipline and understood as a particularly modern technique of media management in our "information age" (Ewen; Castells; Webster, *Theories, The Information*). Drawing from cultural studies of "post-Fordist" promotional culture (Lash and Urry; Lury) can help explain the rise of corporate co-option of image events in the context of a broader media climate of cross-promotion and synergy.

Analyzing and breaking down the issue in this way can, I argue, help us better understand the fraught and complex relationship between corporations and radical image events and the extent of the variations that exist within their contemporary relationship. Writing from an anti-corporate perspective, I nonetheless argue that image events are unavoidably imbricated with corporate discourse. Toward the end of this piece, adapting Chantal Mouffe's recent work in *On the Political*, I argue that recognizing the nature of this imbrication is necessary in order to extend the effectiveness and discursive reach of "radical" image events. This piece therefore attempts to evolve a perspective that can recognize the extent of corporate involvement in image events whilst continuing to mobilize an anti-corporate politics. By using a range of examples, which graduate throughout the piece from simple to complex, it attempts to create a workable set of terms with which to discuss the role of corporations in radical "image events."

#### The Political Ambivalence of Image Events as a Form

We can start by noting a simple yet significant point: image events do not themselves have an innate politics inscribed into their very form. In other words, it is not only "radical" or left-wing organizations that initiate

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and deploy image events in order to gain a higher and wider profile for their "message," but corporations themselves too.

One very conspicuous example of the corporate use of image events in Britain was the strategy used in 2000 to promote the glossy men's magazine *FHM*. The words "Vote Gail" were projected, alongside an 25-meter high image of the naked model Gail Porter, onto the side of Westminster's Houses of Parliament to promote *FHM*'s "100 Sexiest Women" competition. The event was designed and carried out by the then very new and very small "guerrilla marketing" agency Cunning Stunts. [1] They had been employed by the well-known advertising agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty (BBH) to contribute to BBH's promotional strategy. The image gained widespread media coverage and was voted "Stunt of the Century" by BBC Radio 4. As one of the company's founders, Anna Carlross, put it, "Every new communication business needs its *FHM*/Gail Porter and we're eternally grateful for ours." [2]

Whether described as "new," guerrilla, experiential, or ambient marketing, such media stunts have a correlation to those used in left-wing or social movement protests, as they often thrive on appearing similarly "grassroots," spectacular and yet low-budget. Although the corporate versions of such "guerrilla" tactics are often perceived as being a "new" strategy—particularly as dedicated organizations are now being established solely to create stunt-based image events—they have a longer history within PR practice. Forms of PR which function in order to give the appearance of being spontaneous and working from the "grassroots" have long been used within the PR industry, and are sometimes described as modes of "astroturf organising" (Ewen 29).

What the *FHM* example clearly shows is that "image events" can be not only an activity organised by anti-corporate organisations, but one which is paid-for by a corporation in order to boost product visibility and company profits. At its most fundamental, then, we can understand this political ambivalence of image events as a form in relation to the theories of articulation and "chains of equivalence" developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and adopted in cultural studies by writers such as Stuart Hall and Lawrence Grossberg (Grossberg; Hall; Laclau and Mouffe). The theory of articulation is one that accepts the structural diversity of the relations in which social agents are immersed, and replaces the principle of representation with that of articulation. Unity between these agents is then not the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of political contestation and struggle. (Laclau and Mouffe 65)

The image event as an idea or form can be connected, or articulated, to anti-corporate or corporate interests, for example by being designed and executed by one such interest group (or others which are differently identified). In other words, as a *mode*, image events have no "natural" or innate allegiance. They can be constituted through a chain of equivalence ("radical" politics + image event, or corporate strategy + image event). Equally, as we will examine later, such discursive chains can be broken and remade.

### **The Corporate 'Neutralisation' of Image Events**

A second mode of interaction that we might consider is how corporate interests can attempt to quash or neutralise the potential effects of radical image events. For example, the London-based PR agency Register Larkin, which counts many FTSE 100 companies amongst its clients including transnational corporations in the pharmaceutical industry (such as Pfizer and Aventis Pharma) and in the oil and gas industries (such as Shell and Transco) runs a business course entitled "Managing Consumer Activism." This particular course trains companies to "deal effectively" with protests against them by "anti-capitalist and anti-globalization groups:"

Anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation marches and riots in the United States and Europe, on-going campaigns against animal testing, developing world "sweatshops" and against global brands all demonstrate the immediacy, effectiveness and public impact of modern-day activism. [sic] . . . Every company needs to know how to deal effectively with the new forms of political activism, which by-pass traditional channels of lobbying and use new communication technologies to organise and disseminate information. [3]

This training course in managing consumer activism extends Register Larkin's "corporate service portfolio" in the area of crisis and risk communications and enables communications and public relations workers in large businesses to develop skills in rebutting accusations of exploitation and defusing the potential of global justice campaigners. In other words, its activities are squarely pitched at helping large corporations offset the effects of

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anti-corporate "image events."

Clearly, Register Larkin has a number of vested interests in protecting corporations. A large proportion of its work revolves around helping major environmental polluters and powerful corporations protect and extend what they term—in a phrase worthy of Bourdieu—their "reputational capital." According to the Centre for Media and Democracy's *SourceWatch*, Register Larkin has close links to the "Sense about Science" group, which has lobbied in favor of GM crops and also to the right-wing libertarian organization *The Institute of Ideas*, which has come under fire in Britain by left-wing activists such as George Monbiot for promoting corporate and anti-environmental interests in the guise of radical populism (Register Larkin; Monbiot, "Invasion"; SourceWatch).

Register Larkin is however by no means the only example of corporations attempting to quash the "negative brand equity" that can be accrued as an effect of anti-corporate actions, and it is worth briefly mentioning a few more examples to emphasise the diversity of approaches corporations can take. For instance, a section on "Managing Consumer Activism" also formed part of a major international PR conference held in London in 2004 ("Powerful PR: A Force for the Future") and was organised by a relatively senior figure in the diamond trading industry—an industry which is, of course, notorious for its human rights abuses and role in perpetuating conflict and imperialist trade dynamics (see for example Amnesty International). [4] Similarly, business trade journals regularly run features designed to educate corporations on being able to assess and deal with the threat of consumer activist protests. *Marketing Week*, for example, asked its readership: "Brand Bashers: How Scary are the *No Logo* iconoclasts?" in an issue pitched at helping marketers and corporate image-building professionals "troubleshoot" anti-corporate messages (*Marketing Week*). In this context, it is worth noting that books such as *No Logo*, Naomi Klein's bestselling text crystallising and promoting the issue of corporate exploitation and the work of the global justice movement, have been pitched by booksellers towards the business community as well as "generation why" (Klein; Littler, *Radical 70-77*). In Britain, books like *The Silent Takeover* and *The Corporation* have featured prominently in the "Business and Management" section of bookshops such as WH Smith and Waterstones on shelves otherwise devoted to popular texts outlining how to improve management skills and company profits (Hertz; Bakan).

PR and risk management discourse regularly prides itself on working "invisibly" in so as to be most effective (Oliver; Theaker). Attempts by corporations to neutralise radical image events, for example, have involved hiring private investigators and bringing legal action. As the notorious "McLibel" trial in Britain brought by McDonalds against two British Greenpeace activists proved, McDonalds hired several "spies" to infiltrate the North London branch of Greenpeace, the site where activists planned image events and produced their leaflet outlining the environmental impacts of the fast food giant (Armstrong). In a similarly covert vein, a number of small organizations denying climate change and opposing environmental activism, which emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s and appeared to be run by members of the public, have since been revealed to have been instigated and funded by corporate giants Philip Morris and Exxon (Monbiot, *Heat* 20-42).

These combined activities—from training courses to swotting-up, from spying to public presentations—indicate how major corporations have attempted to deal with the effects of "radical image events" by neutralising their impact. Of course, "corporations" themselves are multi-faceted and have a multitude of differences in terms of their degrees of exploitation, their mode of behavior, and company cultures (du Gay; du Gay and Pryke). But, as these examples show, there is a concerted engagement by larger corporations in particular to seek to "neutralize" the threat of bad publicity from left-wing and environmental activists in order to protect their private interests and profit.

Such a "neutralization" of image events can be situated in relation to a longer historical story about the slow evolution of PR as a discipline and practice. In *A Social History of Spin*, Stuart Ewen provides an outline of the rise of public relations—described as the attempt "to contain the forces of chaos"—as a twentieth-century industry within European and American societies (Ewen 36). Interestingly, Ewen finds antecedents of modern "public relations" on different sides of the political spectrum: including both the "muckraking" Progressive

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journalism of the late nineteenth century, with its attacks on excessive corporate power and belief in a rational public sphere, and the early PR practitioners like Ivy Lee who saw themselves functioning as "physicians for corporate bodies" (Ewen 76). Early PR practitioners like Lee, Ewen contends, drew from Gustav Le Bon's middle-class fear of the potential of the crowd and harnessed Gabriel Tarde's sense of how a "public" could be spiritually connected through media. In doing so they came to shape the PR industry towards corporate interests by inverting progressive politics.

The implication of this history of PR is twofold. First, it indicates the rather obvious point that that public relations *per se* does not necessarily *have* to work in the corporate interest, and second, it indicates that from its early stages, PR as a delineated field of practice obviously *did*, however, predominantly develop its identity and specific range of tools by focusing on providing damage control for fragile corporate reputations. To cite one notorious example, Ivy Lee was employed by John D. Rockefeller to counteract the bad publicity received after the Colorado Ludlow Massacre of 1914, "in which 14 striking miners, miner's wives and children were viciously slaughtered on behalf of Rockefeller iron and fuel mine interests." Lee worked to place stories in the press that downplayed the deaths and created a negative image for the miners (Ewen 77-79). Such dramatic events can be seen as a kind of antecedent to the "damage control" strategies corporations employ today in managing consumer activism.

During the beginnings of the public relations industry, PR practitioners were often employed *after* or *during* a crisis to provide damage control by liaising between corporate employees and the media. Today, preparing *before* a crisis has also become an important component of PR, and planning how to pre-empt and behave during a crisis scenario is an established aspect of the vast majority of public relations courses and handbooks (Theaker). Such pre-emptive preparation is therefore one constitutive feature of the courses and discussions aimed at educating corporations to managing the threat of consumer activism. Register Larkin's course description, for example, notes that early action is particularly important, as it is "directors, staff and shareholders of companies that are being targeted." [5]

Whilst current strategies aiming to "neutralize" the effects of radical image events can, then, be situated in this longer history and slow evolution of public relations as an industry, at the same they can also be considered in relation to a specifically contemporary context of media management in what has variously become known as our information "age," "economy," or "society" (Castells; Webster, *Theories, The Information*). This is an era which increasingly prizes, and is defined by, the role of communications (Illouz; Hardt and Negri). For Manuel Castells, key features of the information economy include forms of production which increasingly depend on knowledge-based, innovation-based work; the preponderance of the network as an organizational form; the increasing reliance on access to information in order to produce competitiveness; and a partially distributed global information culture inducing, amongst other things, space-time compression. In such instantaneous, networked, knowledge-driven contexts, corporations notoriously contract out the work of production to both poorer countries in the Southern hemisphere and are often reliant on pools of cheap labour from "fourth worlds" or the zones of poverty within the first world that Castells terms "the black holes of information capitalism" (Castells 70-165). Simultaneously, corporations today notoriously spend an increasingly large proportion of time and money in the "first world" on marketing and planning, on managing their identity, brand, and reputation (Klein; Lury).

In this context, managing the media profile of corporate identities has become an intensified zone of concern for larger corporations in particular. To provide an empirical example, companies like Tesco, currently the biggest British supermarket chain, have recently developed dedicated, in-house "Marketing in the Media" centres designed to place news stories obliquely featuring their brand widely throughout press and TV, as Lynda Dyson's work has shown (Dyson). In such an information economy, where corporate reputations are being more highly managed and focussed upon, it becomes both increasingly important and increasingly possible for companies to learn about potential threats to their corporate reputations (Littler, *Radical* 50-69). The types of *anti*-anti-capitalist training courses, sessions and articles mentioned above are precisely part of this intensified process of media management which attempts to neutralise the potential threats posed by the "radical" image event.

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## The Corporate "Co-Option" of Image Events

Attempting to "neutralize" the threat of protests against them is not the only way corporations interact with radical image events, however. Another way is by somehow attempting to *participate* in the events themselves. For example, in the anti-Iraq war rally in London in April 2003, described as "the UK's biggest-ever demonstration" (BBC), a number of different types of posters appeared. One of the most conspicuous were the numerous yellow placards featuring an image of British Prime Minister Tony Blair holding a rifle and sporting an upturned teacup on his head next to the slogan "Make Tea not War." Eye-catching, lightly humorous, and playing on the British obsession with drinking tea, photos featuring these placards found their way into a substantial proportion of media coverage of the event (Williams; Doward and Asthana). If you looked below the anti-war slogan, you could see another word: "Karmarama." As became apparent to those who investigated, Karmarama was a relatively new London-based communications agency specialising in branding, advertising and design. The "Make Tea Not War" placards—still being sold in postcard form by London's anarchist bookshop, Housemans, in 2008—were in part a means of raising the profile of the company by participating in the anti-war march.

This action was effective in raising the profile of Karmarama as a company. An article printed the following February in the British advertising trade journal *Campaign*, for example, stated that Karmarama was now eligible to enter its listings of top advertising agencies because, after being founded three years ago, it "took shape in 2003 with a credible new business performance." As the review continued, this was due to its appearance in the anti-war demo:

Although 70 per cent of the agency's income is derived from advertising, its moment of fame in 2003 was the result of guerrilla activity for the anti-war movement. Karmarama's "Make Tea Not War" signs even earned the agency a namecheck in *The Economist*. (*Campaign*)

Subsequently, Karmarama's big name clients were to include the television channel VH1, the magazine conglomerate EMAP, the internet travel website Opodo, and the furniture company IKEA. It is worth noting that "Make Tea Not War" worked particularly effectively as a media stunt to gain the agency notoriety, kudos, and creative capital *within* the media communications industry, rather than directly with "the public;" whilst the poster gained huge exposure, many were either not interested in what "Karmarama" meant or assumed it meant something different. One anti-war protestor assumed on his website that it was connected to music:

Everyone wanted one of these, which in my opinion nicely expressed the true sentiments of a large proportion of those present, but hardly anyone could find out where they'd come from. They were sponsored by something called Karmarama, which I believe is a band. [6]

To creative and media professionals, however, the conspicuousness of the poster raised the company's stock. One participant in the fifty-second International Advertising Festival, for example, wrote that

I smiled when I spotted this poster at the huge London anti-war rally in April. When I saw ad agency Karmarama's logo in the corner, I felt sick with envy. Sure it was a shameful hijack of an event that sought to highlight the potential of human suffering. But the poster did make the front page of practically every newspaper in the world the next day, and now hangs on the walls of the V&A museum. (Cannes Lions)

In other words, the communications agency established its creative reputation through its posters for the anti-war march. It hijacked an image event with a corporate message of its own.

It is useful to provide some context as to why such a communications agency could emerge. In a marketing-led landscape featuring increasing numbers of quickly manufactured niche products, which are designed around the perceived lifestyle needs of a highly variegated body of consumers (rather than the production-led "mass" products of the Fordist epoch), the need to create and maintain visibility in what Lash and Urry term "economies of signs and space" has become a corporate priority. The impact of the "Make Tea Not War" placards and the rise of corporate co-option of image events can be understood in this context of post-Fordist promotional culture (Lash and Urry). An integral part of post-Fordist promotional culture has been the well-publicized and increasing erosion between "above-the-line" and "below-the-line" promotion. "Above-the-line" mainly connoted a relatively demarcated field of "advertising," predominantly large-scale advertising using agencies; whereas "below-the-line" signified other forms of publicity, such as PR, sales, and direct marketing, with

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"through-the-line" registering an ambivalent mixture of strategies which fell between these two stools (Brierley; Littler, "The Influence"). In the early 1990s, the recession, the much-vaunted crisis within large advertising agencies, a climate of increased media pluralism and the corporate search for new modes of publicity led to the rise of smaller agencies and strategies which sought to develop "new," "creative" forms of promotional power that elided the distinction between above and below the line (Brierley; Nixon; Moor). Smaller "creative" agencies specializing in brand identities and "new" marketing therefore emerged, and it is this context that can be used to understand both Karmarama, creator of "Make Tea Not War," and the agency responsible for projecting the image of a naked Gail Porter onto the Houses of Parliament, Cunning Stunts.

In an increasingly crowded post-Fordist marketplace, in which consumer media habits are much more highly variegated as less easy to reach through expensive advertising channels, the guerrilla strategies of "new marketing" have often attempted to gain impact by reaching into different types of public space (Klein; Moor). Companies like Karmarama and Cunning Stunts function by trying to create "news hooks" for corporations in order to generate media interest in a story. Other work conducted by Cunning Stunts, for example, include "ForeheADS," in which UK students are paid to wear logos on their foreheads, and which the company describe as the creation of a "new brand medium," inviting people to "see how far they could slide on a dog poo" to publicize the TV program Banzai, and "crash landing" a 12-meter diameter replica cookie into Trafalgar Square for the food company Maryland. [7] Karmarama describe themselves to clients on their website as a company specialising in "breakout creativity," outlining what they do in a quirky bar chart featuring a range of categories including "advertising," "brand ideas," "design," "creating a brand language" and "sloganeering." [8] The "Make Tea Not War" placards were the techniques of a brash young commercial company attempting to use and co-opt the anti-war demonstration to sell its own corporate image in a cluttered, post-Fordist, and imagistic marketplace. The demo was a stage for a profit-seeking company to acquire kudos for its through-the-line branding strategies. The exploitative dimension of this relationship did not escape notice at the time: as one commentator on a UK hip hop site bluntly put it: "Is nothing fucking sacred to these vultures?" (UKHH 2005). But whilst such examples can be read as corporate "co-option" of radical events, there was also another reading in circulation. The Scottish cultural and political commentator Pat Kane, for example, cited the placard as an example of how progressive politics can exist in unexpected areas. For Kane, Karmarama's actions were also an example of the possibilities for *expanding* the commons, as it showed how multi-media artists . . . can direct their symbolic skills towards the enrichment of the commons, rather than just the cluttering of our imaginations. I think of that silly design house Karmarama, who nevertheless made that poster Make Tea Not War that defined the million-strong anti-Gulf-War march in London in 2002. I know enough neophiliacs in the style trenches who are only literally on a tour of duty, until they can figure out how to deploy their skills in a less futile direction. [9]

From this perspective, Karmarama's activity was not "co-option" but rather an example of latent possibility coming to fruition. In such terms, the participation of profit-seeking organizations can play an important role in disseminating the message of the radical image event. Karmarama's placard was extending the "discursive reach" of the anti-war message. [10] In these terms, the life of the poster is enabling the anti-war march to be considered broad-based and inclusive. Its fusion of whimsy with radicalism is making its message less threatening to sections of the audience for whom demonstrating might have been a very new or somewhat frightening idea. It counteracted some of the media framing of radical image events as involving humourless one-dimensional beings. In other words, we can read Karmarama's slick tagline and design as being put to use in the service of the anti-war message by broadening its appeal.

The scope for such contradictory, co-existing readings is also mirrored in Karmarama's various practices as an agency. Its engagement with other various forms of "radical" politics, for example, include its campaign to try and save its corner shop ("The Belmont Mini Market") against the British corporate supermarket giant Sainsburys, and its work for the human rights organisation Amnesty International on the "Violence against Women" campaign. Equally, however, the company accrues a specific image of being "groovy" and "right-on" from these high profile accounts. It is precisely this youthful, creative and slightly "alternative" image that enabled it to get work with major corporate clients such as IKEA and to be employed in media-led attempts and exercises to re-brand the British Conservative party (Guardian). The communications company's intervention in these areas, and with the anti-war movement, in effect worked to expand its corporate client base and its status and profits as a company.

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## Problems of Political Interpretation

Let's recap. Image events might be left-wing and co-opted by corporate interests; they might be subject to attempts by corporate interests to neutralise them; or they might be themselves an expression of and a strategy for furthering corporate interests. The variety of these possibilities brings us to one of the central conceptual problems in this issue, for it indicates how there is no "pure" space, no pure vacuum in which image events can exist which uncontaminated by, or unconnected with, corporations. Whether images of Greenpeace protests, anti-capitalism protests, or Stop the War marches, all need the hegemonic power of the international corporate media to expand their discursive reach, even if such stories have initially been reported by anti-corporate, grassroots, and co-operative structures as Indymedia (Couldry and Curran; de Jong et al.). To imagine otherwise is a wishful fantasy which bypasses the question of how existing power relations might change and how strategic hegemonic alliances are formed. It is equally clear that to simply leave the argument there—to only highlight how it is impossible for a radical image event *not* to come into contact with corporations—is also a position that has some profoundly reactionary implications.

One salient point of reference here is Chantal Mouffe's recent work *On the Political* (Mouffe). In this book, Mouffe takes to task positions that proclaim themselves to be "post-political," particularly the work of theorists Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens and the proclamations of "Third Way" politicians such as British Prime Minister Tony Blair. In laying claims to a position which is "beyond left and right," which seeks to do away with an adversarial model of politics, Mouffe argues that they completely fail to recognize the antagonistic dimension which is essential to the political. The result is a system which autocratically imposes a one-dimensional politics, which seeks obedience for its political party rather than argument and engagement with it, and which therefore extends corporate power, disengages the electorate and breeds extremist responses (currently in the form of right-wing populism and international terror). Such are the shortcomings of the "post-political."

The problem of corporate involvement in image events might be considered with reference to this paradigm. We could argue that to occupy a position which validated the inevitable involvement of corporations with image events—or which sought to promote the linkage of corporate involvement with "radical" activism without discriminating about the *nature* of that relationship—would be a position entirely compatible with Third Way, "post-political" discourse. In other words, merely arguing that the radical image event and corporate power are, simply and inevitably, imbricated, without looking at *how* or what particular power dynamics are in play, necessarily entails an attempt to "go beyond" both terms. As such, it is a position that, were it to be put into practice, would extend the power of corporations through the radical image event (and therefore would effectively become pointless from any genuinely "radical" perspective).

Equally, however, ignoring the issue that it is impossible for image events to exist *without* some connection to corporate activity—whether through the mobile phone on which the journalist is rung, the ink used to print out publicity leaflets, or the television corporation which publicises the event—risks a *mirroring* of the problems of the "post-political" stance. Validating a radical image event as an activity existing completely *beyond* and *outside* corporations, in other words, is its own way an attempt to be "post-political," in that it brushes messy questions of power under the carpet. This can only serve to add to the threat of anti-corporate activism ghettoizing itself into what Laclau and Mouffe have elsewhere termed "enclave politics" (Laclau and Mouffe; Gilbert).

The alternative here is to acknowledge the complexities of the involvement of corporations in image events. We live at a time when, as Arundhati Roy puts it, a key question is how to act in a world where "there is no innocence . . . [and] all our hands are dirty" (Roy 32). To acknowledge such complexity involves acknowledging the unavoidable role of corporations in the supply of activist resources. At the same time, it involves *working towards* an imagined position that does not involve relying on corporations. The logical conclusion of this analysis is a dual one, one that entails two propositions working together, side-by-side, and in which one is inadequate without the other. These are: first, that genuinely radical image events aim to develop worlds or spaces which are not structured through corporate power; and second, in order to do so, because of the extent to which corporations permeate social and cultural life, they are obliged to rely upon and use some aspects of corporations and their by-products in order to disseminate their discourse.

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This piece has drawn from both media and cultural studies and political theory to argue that, in both historical and theoretical terms, image events as promotional techniques have no "essential" politics. In a contemporary context, they cannot be thought as being in any sense completely "outside" or disconnected from a corporate world, and the imbrications of these areas are necessary for expansion and dissemination, as well as functioning to foreclose and co-opt. But the porous nature of these relationships should not by any means be romanticized: instead, and particularly in an era where corporations are frequently attempting to colonise and neutralize all kinds of activist activity, their power relations need to be rigorously interrogated and critiqued.

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[1] <[http://www.ideasfactory.com/business/marketing/know\\_it/feature2.html](http://www.ideasfactory.com/business/marketing/know_it/feature2.html)>. Accessed June 2005.

[2] <[http://www.ideasfactory.com/business/marketing/know\\_it/feature2.html](http://www.ideasfactory.com/business/marketing/know_it/feature2.html)>. Accessed June 2005.

[3] Regester Larkin, 'Managing Consumer Activism' training course description: <[http://www.regesterlarkin.com/training/man\\_consumer.shtml](http://www.regesterlarkin.com/training/man_consumer.shtml)>. Accessed June 2005.

[4] This slot was featured as part of a session on adding 'Value through Diversity' at the conference organised by the CIPR, the largest public relations institute in Europe. The conference was held at the opulent London hotel Claridges. Sej Motau previously worked for De Beers. <<http://www.cipr.co.uk/conference/programme.asp>>. Accessed June 2005.

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[5] Regester Larkin, 'Managing Consumer Activism' training course description: <  
[http://www.regesterlarkin.com/training/man\\_consumer.shtml](http://www.regesterlarkin.com/training/man_consumer.shtml)>. Accessed June 2005.

[6] <<http://www.subjectline.co.uk/demo>>. Accessed June 2005.

[7] As UK students are currently experiencing more debt than ever before due to the cutting of grants and the introduction of fees over the past few years, this strategy played on the media interest that would be generated by pushing this story onto a new plane of controversy.

[8] <<http://www.karmarama.com>>. Accessed June 2005.

[9] <[http://theplayethic.typepad.com/play\\_journal/2005/02/when\\_its\\_in\\_the.html](http://theplayethic.typepad.com/play_journal/2005/02/when_its_in_the.html)>. Accessed June 2005.

[10] For a discussion of this use of 'discourse', see Foucault 1970 and Mills 1997.