

Badgering Big Brother: Spectacle, Surveillance, and Politics in the Flash Mob

Rebecca A. Walker

*The art of 'pulling tricks' involves of a sense of the opportunities afforded by a particular occasion [...] a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order to suddenly produce a **flash** shedding a different light on the language of a place and to strike the bearer. (de Certeau 37-38; emphasis added)*

A Story

When I was six, my big brother pulled a nasty trick on me. He was ten, and this trick of his stands out in my memory for its cunning, danger, and illumination of his character. Up until this point, I had always trusted my big brother implicitly, viewing him as my personal teacher: a wise sharer of secrets and purveyor of real, capital "T" Truth. Using this belief to his advantage on one particular spring day, when my mother was out of the house and my father otherwise disposed in the den, my brother convinced me to climb inside our 1970s, avocado-green Hotpoint style dryer and take a ride. He did so by proclaiming, "It's just like a roller coaster."

After a very short, noisy, and painful ride in the dryer, I emerged, crestfallen and suspicious. "Was the dryer really like a roller coaster ride?" If so, it certainly failed to meet my expectations. Had my brother lied to me? This seemed more likely; however, his reasons for doing so made no sense to my small mind. Why put me in the dryer? Did he desire to hurt me? Did he simply want to see what would happen? Or was it the pleasure of pulling one over on me, of accomplishing one of his first tricks?

A good trick, as the de Certeau quote above notes, relies upon seizing unique opportunities afforded by specific occasions. In the case of my brother, his trick relied upon the convergence of three separate points: my mother's absence from the house, my blind faith in whatever he said, and a recent family trip to a theme park with roller coasters where, unlike my brother, I had been too terrified to take a ride. Realizing the

Rebecca A. Walker (PhD, Louisiana State University) is an Instructor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of North Texas. This essay is drawn from work in the Walker's dissertation, "Eight is Not Enough: A Historical, Cultural, and Philosophical Analysis of the Flash Mob." She would like to thank John Protevi, Tracy Stephenson Shaffer, Benjamin Powell, and Holley Vaughn, whose instruction, editing, and conversation made this article possible.

unique opportunity afforded by such a convergence, my brother jumped upon the chance to pull one over on his sister. What he failed to foresee was the enlightenment such a trick produced in my young self. In a flash, I realized my brother could not always be trusted and that his motivations were not necessarily good. Such a realization did indeed, as de Certeau suggests, shed a different light on the situation.

Flash mobs are a type of performance that emerged on the streets of New York City in the spring of 2003. They are essentially choreographed group tricks. Whether created as complex communal in-jokes or a modern form of cultural critique, flash mobs act as elaborate pranks played out within the quasi-public realm of the capitalist city, exposing its heretofore unrealized methods of operation. These methods of operation, both of the capitalist city and of the flash mob, serve as the focus of this article. In the following pages, I analyze the ability of Bill Wasik's eight original flash mobs to highlight the dominant strategies of surveillance, standardization, and structure operating within the capitalist system. In so doing, I explore the tactical nature of the flash mob as a performance event. I conduct this analysis and exploration through a critical application of concepts developed by Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. While primarily focused on questions of aim and intent, I also consider the often-disregarded question of audience. After all, within the larger examination of Wasik's flash mobs as communicative events, one must not pay so much attention to the sender of the message that she forgets the importance of the receiver. Stated differently, what good is a trick if you have no one to pull it on?

Introduction

He hardly noticed the displacement booths. They were part of the background. The displacement booths were the most important part of a newspaper's life, and still he hardly noticed their existence. Until the day they turned on him.

– Larry Niven, “Flash Crowd” (1)

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau discusses the methods for creative work within a highly structured capitalist society. According to de Certeau, capitalism casts individuals either in roles of consumers of merchandise, or as the employee-workers producing goods for sale. Within such a system, one might feel the absence of any space for truly creative endeavors – those undertaken without a monetary profit in mind. As de Certeau suggests, however, such spaces for creativity do exist, primarily within the ways we refashion and remodel the leftovers of capital, as well as the items we purchase:

The ‘making’ in question is a production, a poiesis – but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of ‘production’ . . . and because the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves ‘consumers’ any *place* in which they can indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems. (xii)

Published in 1984, de Certeau's argument sounds strikingly similar to those expressed by Bill Wasik thirty years later regarding the lack of truly public space. Although in most early interviews Wasik denies the existence of any political aim at work in the flash mob, by 2004 he admits to at least one, the liberation of public space. In an interview with *LA Weekly*, Wasik acknowledges:

the more I did them, the more I realized the mobs actually did have a deeply political value. The nature of public space in America today has changed. It's shopping malls, large chain stores, that kind of thing. The presumption is that you're going to purchase something, but once you try to express yourself in any other way, suddenly you're trespassing. New York City is blessed with a bunch of real public spaces, but at this point, if you're young in America, chances are you have grown up without authentic public space. I discovered it was political to go into one of those stores. (Bemis)

Furthermore, the hidden poesis outlined by de Certeau reminds one not only of the Situationist's *detournement*, but also of the modern hipster's cultural aesthetic – reclamations of old, existing products of a capitalist system, remade into symbols of fashionable youth culture. Critics often deride the modern hipster's ironic stance and particular fashion sense as empty trademarks pointing towards a hollow society or as some say, “the dead end of Western civilization” (Fletcher). Such remarks usually stem from the modern hipster's fashion sense, one that, according to columnists like Christian Lorentzen, “fetishizes the authentic and regurgitates it with a winking inauthenticity.” In this reiterated fashion, the modern hipster, although a definite product of her time (both historically and capitally), distinguishes herself from her predecessors. Whereas 20th century hipsters borrowed from contemporaneous aspects of the other's culture – such as jazz – to create their fashion, or simply created their own – as in punk - the 21st century hipster recycles the fashion of their predecessors. Simply put, de Certeau was right: as capitalism's control over society and social space grew, it did not manage to wipe out, sterilize, or stratify creative endeavors by turning everything into an object for purchase. Rather, such endeavors simply changed tactics, operating within the system as well as without, disguising themselves behind the wigs of ordinary conspicuous consumption and production.¹ In the following pages, I contend that the flash mob is one such endeavor.

Rather than remaking an object though, Wasik's eight original flash mobs refashioned both the spaces of capitalism as well as its structures, if only for a moment. The flash mob reveals the sometimes hidden power relations inherent in the capitalist model, through its tactical takeovers and makeovers of capitalism's pseudo-public space. I argue that flash mobs are a type of performative resistance to what Foucault labels governmentality, existing within what Deleuze and Guattari deem a

¹ de Certeau defines la perruque, or the wig, as “the workers own work disguised as work for his employer” which “actually diverts time . . . from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit” (25).

control society.² I construct this argument in three parts, focusing first on the makeup and power relations of the flash mob, followed by a discussion of surveillance and visibility, and ending by outlining the specific tactics of the flash mob as a form of resistance. Throughout this discussion I urge the reader to recall de Certeau's opening comments regarding the art of pulling tricks: "a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order to suddenly produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place (37-38)."

Assemblage & Power Relations: Flash mob as a war machine

As products of the digital age, flash mobs require the use of e-mail and text message technology created in the latter part of the 20th century. Every flash mob begins with an e-mail announcing the date and time of occurrence, along with either a set of instructions for action or the promise of instructions to be delivered on site. Recipients then forward this e-mail to others in cyberspace through computers and cell phones, forming the mob (or at least its virtual potential) with each successive email or text message. Usually, upon arrival, participants are given instructions on fliers detailing what they should do during the flash mob. As a rule, the actions or performative interventions of flash mobs tend to last no longer than ten minutes (Wasik 66). Participants arrive at a site, perform their action(s), and then leave, often just before the police arrive. These actions are often suggested by the site of the mob, and usually involve some sort of behavior atypical of the particular time and place, such as pretending to stand in line for concert tickets on the sidewalk outside of a church. The relationship between man and tool, or participant and computer/cell phone, allowing for the origination of flash mobs is an assemblage, or merging of singular entities with a shared goal to create a new, composite body. Individual and technology work together in this assemblage to create the virtual potential of the mob, in cyberspace, which is then actualized in reality at the mob site the day of the performance.

The flash mob itself, however, also forms an assemblage, with what Deleuze and Guattari would call the corporation machine. I offer an example and a few definitions to begin. First, the prison system offers the best example of the machinic assemblage. To start, one can view the prison system as a machine made up of multiple parts working together, a living, social semiotic; examples of these parts include a safe, well-constructed building, well-trained guards, well-behaved prisoners, and a desire within

² Deleuze argued that with the advent of new technologies, most notably the computer, one no longer seeks control over individual bodies, but over networks and populations. To achieve such control, individual forms of testing and labeling that were typical of the disciplinary society, such as the examination, are replaced with more continuous forms of control, such as perpetual training. In other words, one does not move from one institution to another, as in the disciplinary society. Rather, "one is never finished with anything" but always co-existing between institutions, whose controls are manifested as slight modulations or adjustments (1).

society to rehabilitate those prisoners. For the theorists, every social machine – such as the prison machine – operates on two levels: one of content and one of expression. In other words, when examining how a machine such as the prison functions, one must look at both the components of that machine (content) as well as the discourse surrounding it (expression). According to Deleuze and Guattari, these two levels of content and expression (both of which operate simultaneously) form a *double articulation* of stratification. The term “stratification” here is used in the sociological sense, to refer to a way of dividing based on the rank, or hierarchy, within a particular category. For example, within late capitalist society, caviar appears at a higher level, or layer, of strata than shrimp cocktail. Social machines such as the prison machine form a *double* articulation of stratification because each articulation – that of content as well as that of expression – has a specific form and substance. Drawing from Kenneth Burke, one can think of form as the container and substance as the thing that it contains. Consequently, every social machine (such as the prison machine) contains a form of content and substance of content, as well as a form of expression and substance of expression. For instance, one can discuss the material makeup of a machine’s components as its substance of content, while also discussing the way those components are organized/arranged as the machine’s form of content.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that behind every machinic assemblage, such as the corporation machine or the prison machine, lies an abstract machine seeking to find a function for the matter with which it is concerned – a pack of human bodies. The prison machine’s function is to discipline those individual bodies, to render them docile and therefore useful to those in power (the warden, the State, or any other sort of Big Brother). In order to do so, the machine of the prison is created. In other words, it is abstract machines, always concerned with finding functions for human bodies, that lead to the creation of social machines like the prison or corporation.

Prisoners are the homogenized substance of content of the prison machine; the first articulation of stratification. That is to say, prisoners are the primary material content with which the larger prison system is concerned. What Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the form of content is the ordering of those bodies by a particular code – in this case, the prison building would serve as the form of content, as the layout of the building itself serves as a method for separating prisoners and restricting their movements, similar in form to the way iambic pentameter controls the form of a Shakespearean sonnet. In other words, by taking a group of individuals and dressing them as prisoners, placing them within cells, and forcing them to follow the rules of movement and behavior for the prison building one successfully forms those individuals into prisoners, just as by following ABAB rhyme patterns and iambic pentameters one forms words into a sonnet. The prison building (or form of content) is then doubly articulated at the level of expression. In the case of the prison machine, the form of expression is the criminological discourse about delinquency. In other words, just as the layout of the prison building (form of content) controls the manner in which prisoners (substance of content) move and interact, the scientific study/discussion of criminal offenders and their rehabilitation (form of expression)

shapes the way our society views and relates to the prison (substance of expression). In the present scenario, the substance of expression becomes dominant for society, forming a carceral logic of organization that eventually reaches other institutions, such as cities or classrooms.

To study the flash mob, I move from a discussion of the prison machine to the corporation machine. In this type of machinic assemblage, the substance of content would be the consumers of the various products it produces, and the form of content would be the store or marketplace in which those products are sold. Consumption is the overwhelmingly privileged form of expression in the corporation machine, which is normative and based on a set of implicit rules. The substance of expression, therefore, would be the capitalist society in which we find ourselves. The flash mob, by joining with the corporation machine to create a new assemblage, offers its participants a new form of expression (what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a potential “line of flight”) from the previously mentioned form of expression – normative rule-based conspicuous consumption. This line of flight serves as an experimental pathway of deterritorialization, or a change in habit, allowing participants to explore alternate possibilities emergent in their daily lives and actions.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization occurs when old habits of behavior are broken, and new habits are formed. A person’s typical morning routine can be thought of as a territorialization, or set of habits: wake up, make coffee, feed the pet, read the paper, shower, and dress. An act as simple as changing this routine can be thought of as a deterritorialization: wake up, shower, dress, and drink juice instead of caffeine. Such a simple change can affect our perception and encounters throughout the day, therefore opening us up to new possibilities of connection. In addition, if we adopt this *new* routine and habitually begin to enact it each morning, a reterritorialization would occur. In the flash mob, the behavioral norms of conspicuous consumption are deterritorialized into a new form of expression based upon a playful (or false) mass capitulation. I return to Wasik’s original eight mobs for an example.

In Mob #6, Wasik instructed his participants to gather in front of a robotic dinosaur in the Times Square Toys ‘R Us and – on cue – fall to their knees and cower before the dinosaur for a set time before leaving. Figure 1 captures the scene. When a customer likes something for sale in a store, she typically picks up the item, brings it to a cashier, pays for the item, and leaves. This is the typical form of expression one finds in the capitalist marketplace. Expressions of praise, worship, and submission, such as those in Figure 1, are atypical of the average retail store. Rather, one expects to find such behavior in a charismatic church, where parishioners prostrate themselves before an iconic image or manifestation of their God. By taking the behaviors typical (or habitual) of the church environment and making them the behaviors of the department store, participants in Mob #6 successfully deterritorialized their traditional form of expression – conspicuous consumption – and replaced it with a playful (or false) act of capitulation, or worship. Through this act of deterritorialization, the flash mob participants make themselves and any other

customers who happen to be in the store at the time of the mob aware of the unspoken rules or codes of normative behavior, as well as the possibilities lying beyond those normative boundaries.



Figure 1: Mob #6

Unfortunately, the machines whose hegemonic, normative forms of expression the flash mob dissects and interrogates typically do not welcome such deterritorializations. During the Toys 'R Us flash mob, the actions of the participants were dangerous enough to prompt store employees and managers to call the police, who arrived just as the mob participants were leaving. Acts of deterritorialization are dangerous to those who could potentially lose power or profits were such behaviors to catch on in the population as a whole. Therefore, social machines like the corporation machine typically feel an immediate need to re-territorialize and thereby reassert their power and dominance when such actions take place. Multiple strategies exist for such re-assertions. Before I discuss these strategies, I return to the work of Michel Foucault on power for a fuller understanding of the issues at hand.

Foucault defines power as the action on the field of possible actions of another (Foucault "Power" 340). In this sense, power is not inherently bad or good, but rather "dangerous" (Foucault "Michel Foucault" 231-2). Although power can be used to limit another's actions, and in some cases dominate or control, power for Foucault is not simply repressive; it is often productive. Limiting one's possible actions by forcing her to sit quietly in a schoolroom or spend an hour every morning in the gym can push that person closer to a desired goal of knowledge or physical prowess. Power relations, for Foucault, occur when two free subjects engage in a relationship alternating between domination and struggle. Power relations are not found in situations of complete domination, such as in the relationship of slave and master. Conversely, power relations are also not found when two equal adversaries confront one another, for the relationship between the two becomes that of a static equilibrium. Rather, power relations exist in the push-and-pull exchange between two free subjects whose exercise of power alternates.

Three primary sets of power relations operate in the flash mob. The first exists in the relationship between the mob organizer and the mob participants. The mob organizer seeks to control and organize the actions of the mob participants by instructing them on where to congregate, what to do, and when to leave. The mob participants agree to this temporary direction of their actions in order to amass a large mob that can act upon the governmentalized institution represented by the mob site. The use of the term “governmentalized institution” here refers to the fact that each of these sites can be viewed as an institution which has unwritten rules of conduct and behavior which we as citizens abide by in order to get what we desire from that institution. Even more compelling, this first power relationship occurs almost completely within social and personal media. As Bill Wasik explains, often the originator of the mob sends out the call to organize as a forwarded message – in other words, a message that the organizer sent from an unrecognizable e-mail account to his own phone in the form of a text message – in order to “conceal my identity as its original author” (Wasik 57). Due to this anonymity, no outlet for discussion or negotiation exists between a potential mob participant and the mob organizer regarding the particular actions of the mob. Rather, mob organizers rely upon a certain amount of discipline, or training, to provide participants for their flash mobs. Stated differently, the mob organizer trusts that the person receiving the invite will want to be a part of the in-crowd that makes up the mob so badly that they are willing to follow along and do as they are told by the mob organizer. In truth, the only way to act against the mob organizer is not to attend the mob (or try to spoil it). For those who do wish to take part in the mob, the entire process of acquiescing to the mob organizer’s invitation/command takes place in the realm of social and personal media. Furthermore, upon arrival at the scene of the mob, participants often receive further instructions from someone other than the mob organizer, as another means of retaining the mob organizer’s anonymity. At this point, the participant’s only options are once again either to refuse to participate (either by staying behind or by not acting in concert with other mobbers), or to take part in the mob by following the instructions of an unknown leader.

The second power relationship found in the flash mob is that between the mob and the governmentalized institution serving as the site of the mob. Take, for example, the average retail store, the site of Wasik’s second mob in April 2003. Typically, in order to procure desired goods from a retail store, we acquiesce to certain rules regarding our behavior (possible actions) while shopping – we shop alone, or in small groups; we wait patiently in line in order to check out and pay for our goods; we refrain from throwing clothes on the floor, singing at the top of our lungs and dancing through the aisles. In this manner, we act in accordance with the normative patterns of our socialization; in order to shop in an orderly manner and feel safe while doing so, we agree to control our behavior to a certain extent.

During the flash mob, however, the mob’s mere presence begins to frustrate these rules, as in Mob #2. Two hundred participants suddenly swarmed the rug department of a Macy’s department store and, as instructed, informed the clerks that

they were looking for a “love rug” for their commune in Long Island City (Wasik 57). The befuddled clerks, unsure of what to do when the mob arrived, called the police. They did so not because Wasik’s mobbers did anything truly out of the ordinary – after all they were only shopping – but because they were shopping *en masse*, which was simply not normal. Often, mob participants engage in actions atypical of the site they descend on and this abnormal behavior leads business owners to call the police, unsure of what to do with so many people breaking the (unspoken yet always observed) rules. In this manner, the actions of the mob not only frustrate the rules of particular institutions, but actually violate them as well. In order to regain power, representatives of the institution (employees) call the police in an attempt to maintain control. In this case, Wasik’s flash mob participants never broke any spoken or posted laws. Therefore, the use of the police as a control mechanism supports Foucault’s assertion in *Discipline and Punishment* that the police serve a dual role in society – both to enforce the law and to enforce social norms. The mob participants, on the other hand, maintain power by leaving before the police arrive, an objective at which they typically succeed due to their ten-minute time constraint.

Finally, a unique power relationship operates between the flash mob and its audience, consisting of both those people who work at the site of the mob, as well as any other individuals at the site when the mob occurs. The mob’s presence frustrates the expectations of this audience, and they must choose between acquiescing to the presence of the mob by simply watching it unfold, refusing to acknowledge the mob’s presence by continuing with their regular routine, joining in, or actively fighting back. One group who chooses to engage in the lattermost sort of action are the self-identified “flashmuggers.” This particular group of audience members hijack flash mobs by secretly showing up at the site of a mob and handing out false directions, or by actually mugging flash mob participants and stealing their valuables. In so doing, the flashmuggers move from unaware and passive audience members to active participants in a larger performance. Albeit by suspect means, the flashmuggers seek to regain their agency through hijacking the mob, and often its participants, perhaps in an effort to remind flash mobbers that they too can be rendered audience members to a different sort of performance at a moment’s notice.

While multiple levels of power relations operate in the flash mob, the relationship between the flash mob and the corporation machine (who owns the site upon which the mob acts) often dominates popular discourse. After all, these individuals (employees) must decide what to do: laugh, call the police, or run and hide. Their decisions are the decisions not of an individual, but of the machinic assemblage to which they belong – what I refer to as the corporation machine. Stated differently, employees at the site of a flash mob must ask themselves, “What would my employer do?” not “What would I do?” Calling the police, however, is not the corporation machine’s only alternative, as evidenced in the case of the flash mob. Another strategy is that of co-optation: stealing the deterritorializing tactics of the aberrant, diverse, and disparate population in the flash mob and using them to re-territorialize a preferred set of actions – that of conspicuous consumption – as well as to re-define the

population in a unified manner. In 2005, in an effort to regain and reassert power lost to the flash mob, the corporation machine undertook both these goals.

Three years after flash mobs first stormed the streets of New York City, Bill Wasik outed himself as the flash mob's creator in an article for *Harper's Magazine*, where he was a senior editor. Towards the end of the article, Wasik recounts how in the summer of 2005 Ford Motor Company sought to co-opt the tactics and techniques of the flash mob in an effort to appeal to its newest targeted customer; the coveted twenty to thirty-something hipster crowd, whose preferences dominate trends in conspicuous consumption. Ford wanted to sell their newest product – the Ford Fusion – to this group of individuals, and they thought the flash mob the best way to do so. Ford strategically announced a series of “Fusion Flash Concerts,” via e-mail advertisements, in the hopes of “appropriating the trend . . . in order to make a product seem cool” (Wasik 61). Compared to Wasik's flash mobs, these concerts failed completely. E-mails that typically arrived last minute in a regular flash mob, went out six days prior to the event, and radio stations and newspapers promoted the “secret” concerts with advertisements. The actual events, or concerts, were sparsely attended and lasted much longer than ten minutes. However, Ford's co-optation of the flash mob managed to succeed as an attempt at re-territorialization. By associating themselves (a huge corporation) with the flash mob, Ford successfully made flash mobs passé in the eyes of the general public, thereby emptying out the potential of the flash mob (at least in its original form) for creating future deterritorializations in the eyes of the nation's youth. To put it simply, Ford captured the flash mob, made it uncool, and stuck it on the shelf. This desire of the corporation machine to re-territorialize, both through the display of the police and the Ford Fusion Concert, stands as a testament of the flash mob's deterritorializing power during its initial enactment in 2003. Since that time, hybridizations and offspring of the original flash mob, such as the freeze, dance mob, and zombie mob appeared, providing additional deterritorializations. Ultimately, these new forms of flash mob were re-territorialized through the realm of pop culture, where advertisers, television producers, and even high school band directors began experimenting with the flash mob, once again capturing the phenomenon and making it family-friendly (and therefore less cool).

Multiplicity & Visibility: The becoming-animal of the mob

Flash mobs offered Wasik's hipsters the chance to act in concert, to merge themselves into a large, communal mass of like-minded compatriots. Stated differently, flash mobs join large masses of documented, individualized, and highly visible bodies together into one large mob. In this act of conversion, individual visibility vanishes, while a sort of collective visibility emerges in its place. Furthermore, due to the anonymity of the mob organizer, flash mobs operate with a pack mentality pointing once again toward the somewhat democratizing collective visibility established. It is this pack mentality, different from that of the average crowd or mob, that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a multiplicity. Wasik himself seems fascinated with this desire

to blend in and become part of the herd, what he referred to as the “joining urge, a drive toward deindividuation easily discernible in the New York hipster population” (58).

Moreover, Wasik desired to create an art project based purely on the notion of scene, not to play fascist dictator to his friends and acquaintances. What appears to fascinate Wasik is the fact that people not only answered his e-mails and showed up, but that they forwarded them on to their friends and acquaintances, thereby creating the large amounts of people that gathered on site to form the mob. These individuals did not attend and participate in the mob out of a desire to show off their talents, intellect, or any other special skill. Instead, they wished to be part of the scene – hip enough to know what all the other young hipsters were doing, and doing it themselves. When they arrived at the mob, their goal was not to stand out as special or unique, but to blend into the pack and become a part of the overall herd of bodies. In other words, they gladly shed any identifiers of their distinct individuality in order to be part of a community of bodies acting as one.

This distinction is important for a number of reasons. First it shows us that the flash mob is not an unruly, disorganized crowd comprised of anarchical bodies, wishing to wreak havoc and create chaos in the city merely for chaos’ sake. The flash mob is also not a mindless mass following the whims of a dictator or leader of some sort. Rather, it operates as a pack – a formation of like-minded individuals who either see or feel a kinship with one another and come together to act as one. Elias Canetti, writing on the distinction between crowds and packs in his *Crowds and Power*, states that for the pack – unlike the crowd – “equality and direction really exist. The first thing that strikes one about the pack is its unswerving direction; equality is expressed in the fact that all are obsessed by the same goal” (Canetti 93). Although Canetti would probably classify the flash mob as a crowd, based on its large size, one cannot deny that the mob meets his criteria for the pack. The flash mob forms quickly and solely for the purpose of creating a scene by swarming upon a pre-determined site, and then leaves after a ten-minute interval. Unlike Canetti’s crowd, the flash mob’s direction is unswerving – participants do not move outside the boundaries of the pre-determined site, and they do not linger after the conclusion of the mob. Furthermore, this concerted effort to act as one body in the act of arrival, departure, and the performance of an action is the sole goal of the mob. As such, the flash mob meets Canetti’s second requirement for a pack: the expression of equality through the shared obsession of a particular goal.

Working from Canetti, Deleuze and Guattari make a further distinction between those who lead packs and those who lead groups:

the leader of the pack or the band plays move by move, must wager everything on hand, whereas the group or mass leader consolidates or capitalizes on past gains. The pack, even on its own turf, is constituted by a line of flight or of deterritorialization that is a component part of it, and to which it accredits a high positive value, whereas masses only integrate these lines in order to segment them, obstruct them, ascribe them a negative sign. (33)

For Deleuze and Guattari then, the leader of a group or mass (a crowd) maintains an outside position from which she commands, capitalizes, and consolidates. The leader of a pack, however, remains inside, acting more as a sort of tribal chief who persuades, mobilizes, and catalyzes the other members. Wasik chose the latter of these two options, acting as the leader of a pack more so than that of a crowd or mass. To begin, Wasik took part in each of the eight New York City mobs he created, never revealing his identity as “Bill,” the author of the original e-mails. By maintaining an interior position, Wasik easily provoked and catalyzed action within the crowd, by passing out instructions (along with other pre-determined participants) and prompting the mobbers to begin performing the actions listed on their instruction cards or e-mails by acting them out himself. Furthermore, due to his interior as opposed to exterior position, Wasik played “move by move” (Deleuze and Guattari 33). Although all Wasik’s flash mobs deviated from their printed rules, Mob #8 blatantly highlights their pack mentality.

In Mob #8, participants were told to gather in a concrete alcove on Forty-Second Street and follow the instructions coming from “the performer,” a portable boom box.³ Mobbers arrived at the scene ready to follow instructions, however their collective cheering became so loud it drowned out the instructions emanating from the boom box. Around this time, one individual participant opened a briefcase containing a glowing neon sign, and then held up two fingers. Upon seeing this, the mob assumed this participant (and not the boom box) to be “the performer” providing instruction and collectively began chanting “Peace!” As Wasik states, “the project had been hijacked by a figure more charismatic than myself” (Wasik 60). Hijacking, in my opinion, is not the right word to describe what happened in Wasik’s eighth mob. I believe the mob, acting as a pack or multiplicity, displayed its own mind/will and began to follow its own movements and desires, rather than those predetermined by Wasik. Wasik, at that moment, had to choose between stepping outside the bounds of the pack and asserting his own voice/role as a leader-commander, or remaining within the bounds of the pack and following their wishes. He chose the latter.

Another interesting aspect of the flash mob as a multiplicity lies in what Deleuze and Guattari call a distinction between molar and molecular populations. Molar populations are those that are treated as one, or as a unity. One of the most familiar molar distinctions used in our society is that made between men and women. Our societal status quo bases this distinction on genitalia – men have penises, women have vaginas. In contrast, a molecular conception of the human population treats humankind as a multiplicity – one that consists not just of men with penises and women with vaginas, but men who feel like women sometimes, and women who feel like men – allowing the creation of a broad array of spaces for the multitude of minute and distinct nuances that one finds on the spectrum of sexuality.

³ The following description is taken from Wasik’s own account of the eighth and final mob he created, as described in his article of March 2006.

At first glance, Wasik's flash mobs appear as molar populations. In other words, we treat the flash mobs as a unified whole, as one. However, as the flash mobs themselves often point out, the mob is not unified. Mob #4 serves as an excellent example. In this mob, participants gathered at a Manhattan shoe store and were instructed to pretend they "were on a bus tour from Maryland. You are excited but also bewildered. It is as if the shoes were made in outer space" (Mike "Mob #4"). Such instructions leave much room for interpretation. As I imagine it, the shoe store contained two hundred flash mobbers, all expressing their bewildered excitement over those extra-terrestrial shoes in a unique way. In this manner, the flash mob became a molecular population, allowing for as many possible expressions of bewildered excitement over shoes as there are on the spectrum of sexuality mentioned earlier. Still, one might argue, the flash mob acted as one body – arriving, acting bewildered, and exiting as one. I do not disagree. The goal of Deleuze and Guattari's discourse is not to categorize and thereby stratify a performance like the flash mob by correctly identifying it as one of two possible types (molar and molecular) of populations. Rather, they highlight multiple avenues of articulation, or ways of seeing, the flash mob. Therefore, while it is possible, and sometimes productive, to treat the flash mob as a molar population, to always do so would be as shortsighted as reducing sexuality to genitalia. Furthermore, acknowledging the flash mob as a molecular population begs the question, what happens when that population acts within a corporate, pseudo-public space? Why did Wasik consistently choose such spaces, and what were he and his flash mobbers trying to say?⁴

To explore this question further, I return to the work of Foucault, this time focusing on his discussions of power and visibility. According to Foucault, the examination operates as a power/knowledge mechanism.⁵ As he states in *Discipline and Punishment*, "in this slender technique are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power" (185). Examinations produce knowledge but how does this knowledge produce power? To begin, the examination reverses the economy of visibility, thereby turning it into an exercise of power. Prior to the use of the examination as a means of disciplinary training, power was something that was defined by its visibility in the juridical society. Kings, noblemen and national heroes (or at least their images) could be found everywhere, from the highly visible form of the parade, to the slightly less visible records of written documentation – personal histories, mythological narratives – down to the national currency on which the King's image was invariably stamped. With the onslaught of the examination, a change occurred. Suddenly, every body was worthy of notation; every thought and action worthy of documentation in the new disciplinary society. Those who

⁴ Five of Wasik's eight flash mobs took place in privately-owned public spaces where a capitalist model of consumption reigned – a Claire's Accessories store (Mob #1), a Macy's department store (Mob #2), a hotel (Mob #3), a shoe store (Mob #4), and a Toys 'R Us (Mob #6).

⁵ By examination, Foucault refers to the variety of methods used in testing the proficiency of individuals at a particular task (e.g., written exams, oral exams, physical exams).

previously enjoyed the luxury of remaining unknown in a crowd, were now examined, documented, and categorized in order to produce knowledge useful to the powerful.

Concurrently, those with large amounts of money or power used these gifts to hide themselves from scrutiny, refusing to be subjected to the rigors of the examinations enforced upon the commonwealth. Today, such reversals of the economy of visibility still exist. The awarding of honorary doctorates to people of prestige in American society serves as an example. Instead of submitting to many years of examination and testing in the collegiate system, Presidents, rock stars, actors, and wealthy philanthropists who donate large sums of money to a university often receive honorary doctorates while visiting or speaking at university ceremonies. This honoring of celebrity illustrates the fact that while the ordinary citizen must earn a degree through the process of continuous examination, wealthy and powerful citizens buy a degree with their fame and fortunes, evading examination altogether.

Returning to the flash mob, note that the mob turns the usually invisible audience, who historically sits at the back of a darkened theatre and watches with a degree of invisibility, into a consciously recognized visible set of onlookers. Something about the flash mob shouts, “We know you are watching us daily and that you want to watch something, so let us give you something to watch.” For example, in Wasik’s Toy’s R Us flash mob, one might argue this particular mob speaks back to the retail giant or even Times Square itself. The mob highlights, albeit in a parodic fashion, our own culpability in our consumer culture – our readiness to lie down and prostrate ourselves before the corporate dinosaurs that examine us daily, seeking to appeal to our every need. As one reporter who took part in the mob and subsequently covered it wrote, “I heard more than one person claim that the ‘best part’ had been watching the confused expressions on staff members’ faces” (Berens 112). In this reversal of visibility, the flash mob turns the camera back onto the corporations, the industrial complexes, and the surveillers who intently watch our everyday lives. The mobbers move from acts of obedience – typical of our control society – to acts of performance, intended for an audience that prior to the mob thought themselves powerful and secure in their invisibility. The flash mob, in essence, taunts the tower guard in the panoptic prison, giving him much more to watch than he bargained. The performance of the mob participants, although dependent on a form of discipline, uses that discipline to reverse the power structures inherent in the economy of visibility. In other words, the mobbers use discipline against itself, in an effort to reverse the gaze. This co-optation of disciplinary strategies operates as a repetition with a difference, intended to create a new form of resistance. Stated differently, the flash mob not only taunts the watcher, but pulls back the curtain on the wizard to reveal his true identity.

Tactics & Resistance: Smooth space and swarming

What does a flash mob resist? As a rule, flash mobs espouse no political or social agenda. Rather, flash mobs work against what Foucault referred to as

governmentality, or the conduct of the conduct of others. The aim of the flash mob is to confuse and therefore reveal the power structures that operate in our daily lives. One must see the flash mob not in terms of an agonistic view of power, in which one side is attempting to defeat another and seize power, but rather in a more Arendtian sense of power as “the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (Arendt 44). By viewing power this way, as the power to do something rather than the power to dominate other individuals, one begins to understand the type of performative resistance taking place in the flash mob. Ultimately, according to Foucault, the resistance enacted by the flash mob is an essential part of power itself, or power relations.

For Foucault, governmentality presents itself in those unspoken laws of normative behavior that prevent us from singing at work or dancing in the classroom. Furthermore, recalling Deleuze’s idea of the control society as one in which we are never done with examination and training, one begins to see such governmentality all around. For example, every morning when I log on to my computer and my homepage website appears, so do two or three articles outlining six to ten strategies for how I can better communicate with my boss, make myself attractive to the opposite sex, and avoid those holiday calories. These articles work off an assumption of an ideal norm for physical appearance, attractive behavior, and assertive communication strategies. As such, they operate as reminders of the rules of normative behavior, communication, and appearance that media, society, teachers, family, and friends shared and instructed me in since birth, as a type of ordering regime. Ultimately, the pressure to live up to these ideals, as well as the onslaught of surveillance and other disciplinary measures, creates an unconscious acceptance or docility within most people. After all, such pressures and ideals are only *normal*. Flash mobs seek to transgress against and expose this form of control – this conduct of our conduct. In a flash mob, mob participants break the norms of acceptable behavior and by doing so perform the dual function of: (1) waking up their own participant bodies to the idea that other options for behavior exist, as well as (2) reminding the audience of the mob of the absurd and arbitrary nature of so-called “normal” behavior. In other words, the flash mob reminds us that we actually have a choice.

This idea may not seem radical, let alone dangerous enough to be viewed as a form of resistance to governmentality. However, something about the mob is dangerous, as evidenced in the common reaction of employees working at a site where a mob takes place calling the police. The mob is frightening. Their actions are confusing. Their lack of docility threatens the established power structures. Furthermore, their large, visible status makes them prone to media coverage, promoting their resistance, albeit in a dismissive manner. This fact is important, for as Neve Gordon reminds us, “any form of resistance is also dependent on visibility, on the ability of people to see and hear defiant acts. Without visibility, all confrontations are meaningless” (137). Police successfully shut down Wasik’s first mob after receiving a tip from an invitee regarding its occurrence. Participants arrived at the scene, a Claire’s Boutique accessory store, to find police barricading the door. Mob

#3 ended just as police cruisers were pulling up to the doors of the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In Wasik's Toys 'R Us mob, police arrived at the scene in time to escort mob participants out of the building. In each mob, participants were not breaking any legal rules – they were fully clothed, they did not steal or damage merchandise, or even harass other customers. Instead, they showed up en masse and performed some action entirely out of the ordinary, which apparently made them extremely dangerous individuals. Mobs of any sort frighten the rulers of a control society. One cannot account for individual behavior, or control the cooperative will and desires of the mob, a fact Bill Wasik discovered during Mob #8. This lack of control over the mob's behavior, however, affords the flash mob its unique and particular strength. To understand this strength, as well as its tactical nature, I return to the work of philosophers Deleuze and Guattari.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari outline two types of (orientations to) space: smooth space and striated space. Often misunderstood as designations for particular types of places existing in the world, the terms “smooth” and “striated” actually describe processes or methods of occupying space. Striated space exists when specific points or locations are designated and people are assigned to occupy them. It is thus the space of property; a measured space akin to a suburban home lot or an office cubicle. The authors use a chess game as an example – each piece has a particular spot from which it must start the game, as well as a particular set of rules pertaining to how the piece can be moved, which is related to its identity as defined by the game – a knight, a pawn, a queen. Conversely, smooth space is an open space such as the ocean or desert, where space is not owned or assigned but rather occupied. A person occupying smooth space is not assigned a particular position, but rather can show up at any time and at any point in the space. Deleuze and Guattari's use the game Go as an example, in which the pieces themselves, unlike in chess, are not identifiable as distinct, separate units. Rather, they are small round pellets or disks that are uniform in nature, and could represent a multitude of different subjectivities. Furthermore, although Go and chess are both games of battle and conquest, the battle in Go is not coded by specific rules regarding movement and function of the pieces; rather the object of the game is to use the pieces in such a way as to border, encircle, or shatter the opponent's strategy. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point: the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival. The “smooth” space of Go, as against the “striated” space of chess. (353)

A further important distinction clarifies the difference between movement and speed, as related to smooth and striated space. For Deleuze and Guattari, speed is an intensive property, found amongst the movements of a body or bodies in smooth space, whereas movement is an extensive quality operating in the traveling of a body from one point to another, within striated space. For example, one moves in particular, controlled patterns through the striated space of a planned garden. Even if

one moves very quickly through this space, they still do not have speed, according to Deleuze and Guattari. This is due to the fact that, typically, one moves throughout and occupies the space of a garden by traveling from point to point - turn right on this path, left on that lane, etc. A person moving through a garden feels she is meant to occupy some parts of the space – such as the path – but not others, such as the grass or hedges. However, if one were to treat the garden as an open space, like a field, and ignore those pathways then that person may travel throughout the garden however she sees fit. Regardless of how quickly or slowly she moves, in fact, regardless of whether she moves at all, she still operates at a particular speed, one that allows her to spring up anywhere, at anytime: moving, occupying, and even holding space. Speed and movement are terms applicable to collective, wholly unified bodies or a multiplicity of bodies – such as the flash mob – and neither term contains a connotation of a faster or slower type of travel. Rather, the distinction regards the type of space traversed – smooth or striated – as well as the perception of the combined body traveling across it – that of a unified, collective whole, or that of a body consisting of irreducible parts, the multiplicity. The multiplicity moves in smooth space through the use of speed. The collective travels in striated space through movements from one point to another.

The body of the flash mob is a multiplicity, which realizes its potential during its formation in cyberspace – through e-mail and text messaging transmissions – and then actualizes that potential on the day of the mob at the mob site. The flash mob's use of technology creates an instant mobilization mechanism that allows individuals to turn up at any time in space, thereby escaping – if only for the brief ten minute time period of the mob – the striated, or stratified space they are typically assigned to occupy. Stated differently, the flash mob swarms a site, arriving from multiple locations and points in space to occupy one particular space (the mob site), typically in a method against that of the normative codes of society. In this manner, the mob occupies a smooth space, existing in an intensive zone, where Deleuze and Guattari are quick to remind us, even the smallest change in speed – the slightest sort of movement – produces a qualitative change in the final, actualized production. To elaborate upon this final point, I return to a few specific examples drawn from the literature and commentaries on the mobs themselves.

Recalling Mob #8, discussed earlier, one sees how a slight shift in behavior in a smooth space radically changes the results of an actualized product such as the flash mob. In Mob #8, Wasik intended for his participants to gather in an alcove and follow the instructions blaring at them from a boom box. However, when the mob's own chants became so loud they could not hear the boom box, the mobbers looked within themselves for instructions to follow regarding their behavior. They found those instructions in the person of the unidentified man with the briefcase, who was a participant in the mob with no apparent intention of taking over or directing any other participant's behavior. Nevertheless, caught up (perhaps) in the expression of joy and the swell of positive affect amongst the participants, he held up his hands in a

two-fingered peace sign, and suddenly all the other participants saw him as a leader and began chanting “Peace!” in response.

Another example of how a slight change in the structure or behavior of the mob while in the smooth space of the intensive zone leads to a radically different product originates in the actions of the Ford Motor Company. Ford sought to co-opt the techniques of the flash mob to sell their Ford Fusion to a target audience of hipster young adults. However, Ford failed to follow the outlines or rules governing the occurrence of the mob. To begin, Ford publicized these concerts via radio and print advertisements days, sometimes weeks, in advance. Furthermore, Ford’s events lasted much longer than ten minutes – the typical and often most defining characteristic of any flash mob – thereby taking away the sense of urgency and play found in Wasik’s original eight mobs. As a result, Ford’s attempts at co-optation failed from a strategic marketing angle. By changing the structure of the mob, as well as the rules for movement and participation within it, Ford created an entirely new product – somewhere between an auto show and a flash mob – that hipster young adults for whom that product was intended were apparently not buying.

Still, such changes or modulations do not always result in failure. Although one is hard pressed to find a true flash mob today, a number of flash mob offspring survive and flourish. These offspring, such as zombie mobs, freezes, and dance mobs, tactically manage to operate within a smooth space similar to that of Wasik’s original flash mob, albeit with the addition of a few significant changes (such as enforced dress codes or previously learned dance routines). These changes, like those of Ford Motor Company, alter the mob’s purpose and effect. Unlike Ford Motor Company however, what they fail to alter is the mob’s act of resistance.

Certainly, the mob is uncontrollable beyond a certain point, which is part of its danger. However, this lack of control acts as a fundamental part of the mob’s resistance to the complete control found in the daily exercise of governmentality. Two important facts reiterate the flash mob as a form of resistance. First, the flash mob is a form of resistance operating within the realm of discipline, not outside of it. Without disciplined bodies – that is, bodies used to answering calls and doing what they are told – the mob could not assemble into a large collective body. Second, the resistance found in the flash mob acts as a type of critical performance, similar to notions found in Judith Butler’s discussions of performativity. According to Butler, gender is a repeated performance we engage daily. In order to explore alternate possibilities, one must begin to repeat with a difference, to collect and explore all those moments when we slip up in our regular gender performances and find ourselves performing or acting in another manner.

Discipline, as a method, is based on repetitions, which over time produce docile and productive bodies. The flash mob uses these disciplined bodies to its advantage, asking them to repeat with a difference, to use their particular disciplined body in concert with other disciplined bodies as a way to act back upon the disciplinary structure of society as a whole without stepping outside of its confines. In other words, it is the very ability to follow orders and take instruction that flash mob

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participants use to disrupt the order of everyday society. These disruptions are brief, involve no illegal behavior, and are carried out in relative anonymity, allowing participants to act out and badger Big Brother without fear of being caught and imprisoned. Ultimately, flash mobs operate as artful tricks, seizing opportunities and shedding new light on the arbitrary and unspoken rules of behavior within particular places (their languages, to return to deCerteau).

Biting Back: The lessons of the flash mob

Well, nobody's been hurt, last I heard. And they aren't breaking things. It's not that kind of crowd, and there's nothing to steal but sand, anyway. It's a happy riot, Jansen. There's just a bitch of a lot of people.

"Another flash crowd. It figures," said Jerryberry. "You can get a flash crowd anywhere there are displacement booths."

– Larry Niven, "Flash Crowd" (1)

Just as I will never know for certain why my brother tricked me into the dryer, we may never know why individuals participated in Wasik's flash mobs. However, after undertaking an analysis of the various documentations of flash mobs, their participants and their creator, one does arrive at a few relatively stable revelations. Many people, around the world, have participated in a flash mob at one point in time. In those cases, police and other local authorities were often called in to disperse the large crowds of people forming the mob just as the mob participants were starting to leave a site. Finally, in the case of most mobs, participants did exactly as they were instructed, without much deviation from the apparent rules of the game. Each of these statements begs the question: "Why?" Why did people take part in the flash mobs? Why did people feel the need to call the police when a mob occurred in a public place such as a city street or a department store? And furthermore, why did mob participants do as they were told?

While many people think of the flash mob phenomenon as a short-lived, silly exercise in either futility or scenesterism, I offer an alternative in this article. Although elements of playfulness, anarchy, and de-subjectification do exist within the flash mob, these are not the sole or defining characteristics of such a performance. Rather, one might view flash mobs through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari as the operation of a war machine, whose smoothing of disciplined, striated space lends itself to a playful deterritorialization of the normative habits of behavior found in our capitalist society. As Bill Wasik, the flash mob originator once said:

It's spectacle for spectacle's sake – which is silly, but is also, as I've discovered somewhat to my surprise, genuinely transgressive, which is part of its appeal . . . People feel like there's nothing but order everywhere, and so they love to be a part of just one thing that nobody was expecting. (Hewitt 1-2)

In addition, flash mobs stand as an interesting example of the type of resistance Foucault advocated. They function as a mode of resistance operating within our

discipline-based control society and seek to expose and frustrate society's power structures rather than overturn them. An inherent political statement exists in the flash mob's transgression against the typical order and normative structures of society. The flash mob then, is not simply a silly exercise or fad, but a purposeful performance designed to impact change on its audience, even if that change is only an acknowledgement of the aesthetic possibility of our everyday lives, similar in some aspects to the goals of the Situationists, Dadaists, or Happenings artists.

However, according to most journalists as well as Bill Wasik, flash mobs are a dead art form. Wasik points toward the hipster culture that primarily attended the mobs, as well as the co-optation of the mob's strategies and vocabulary by corporate America as the primary reason. He states:

In fact the flash mob, which dates back only to June 2003, had almost entirely died out by that same winter, despite its having spread during those few months to all the world's continents save Antarctica. . . . it was, in its very form (pointless aggregation and then dispersal), intended as a metaphor for the hollow hipster culture that spawned it. (Wasik 56)

If Wasik is correct, and the flash mob truly is dead, then what might we learn from it? Primarily, I argue we learn how governmentality operates in our daily lives. The mob exposes the unwritten and unspoken rules that govern our daily behavior which we rarely acknowledge, let alone question. Furthermore, the flash mob reminds us of the power of the mob or swarm as an acting body. As Howard Rheingold, speaking to CNN in 2003 pointed out, "All mobs have the potential for danger" (Shmueli 2). To pinpoint the danger present in Wasik's eight flash mobs, one must ask, "What was at risk?" I offer that all of the following were at risk: the specific locations, the modern hipster identity, the status quo, and the individual liberties of the mob participants.

Finally, the flash mob teaches us that new technologies offer new strategies for exposing and even fighting power, in a myriad of different forms. However, flash mobs do not teach a new political program that promotes a better way to govern our society; the flash mob is not the answer to our current frustrations with our system. In this aspect, the lessons of the flash mob phenomenon are very similar to those of Foucault, in refusing to advocate a particular substantive political program. Instead, the mob reminds us the power we have at our disposal – in our ability to gather as a mass through the use of our new technologies – while acknowledging, often in silly, humorous ways, that this new power is neither good nor bad, merely dangerous. As such, one might view the flash mob as both an expression and a critique of the potential of contemporary democracy.

In his 1973 short story, "Flash Crowd," Larry Niven depicts a future where teleportation exists as the primary mode of travel from place to place. Invented sometime in the early 1970s, teleportation takes over short-distance bus and car travel, leaving empty highways in its wake. About twenty years later, long-distance teleportation booths are invented, replacing airplanes. In this futuristic world, the power of the teleportation booth is brought into question. Although teleportation

allows for easy and convenient travel without any reliance on foreign oil, such power leads to other issues, both environmental and social. Niven's short story focuses on the latter. It also serves as the genesis of the flash mob's name, bestowed by a blogger and flash mob participant familiar with the story who saw similarities between Wasik's mobs and Niven's flash crowds, thereby provoking him to refer to them as "flash mobs" on his blog.

In the tale, Niven's protagonist, a newstaper (as opposed to newspaper) man named Jerryberry Jansen finds himself at the scene of an argument between an elderly female shoplifter and a policeman outside of a mall. Quickly, a crowd forms around the policeman and the angry woman, turning into a full-fledged riot within minutes, perhaps because of the presence of Jansen and other newstapers – reporters who capture everything right away on film for the local news affiliates thanks to teleportation. Once footage of the riot is shown – virtually as it is occurring – people begin quickly teleporting to the site, making the riot ever larger in size and strength. The formation of such a large crowd is referred to as a "flash crowd," due to the crowd's ability to form almost instantaneously, or in flash.

In the story, people teleport to the riot for various reasons: some are merely curious, others (including a young female celebrity) want to be seen on television, and some come to take advantage of the criminal possibilities the riot affords. After being accused by the national news anchor of creating the riot by the pointing of his camera, Jansen, who believes teleportation is much more at fault than the media, sets out to discover exactly how the teleportation booths work and were invented. Meanwhile, the riot in question has grown in size and begun roving from place to place, wreaking havoc. By the time Jansen gathers his facts and meets the national news anchor for an evening interview – a mere twelve hours from the point at which both the story and the riot began – he is informed that he is no longer news. Apparently, Jerryberry and his ideas regarding how to stop riot formation and save teleportation are no longer relevant. This is mainly due to the apprehension of the original elderly shoplifter, as well as the formation of a new riot at the beach stemming from a television show guest's anecdotal mention of the site.

Thirty-seven years after Niven published his tale, we may not have teleportation booths, but our society is certainly no stranger to twenty-four hour news cycles and instantaneous forms of communication. In "Flash Crowd," the primary fear discussed is that of an ever-roving, perpetual riot. Although the lack of teleportation prevents us from sharing such fears, we do have similar fears of our own advances in technology – both at present and throughout history. After all, when the internet debuted many feared the spread of information as strongly as those in power feared the invention of the printing press. Certainly many fears exist, thanks to our new technologies: the rapid spread of child pornography online, fake or faux news outlets with twenty-four hour coverage, terror cells with guerilla tactics, and an ever present war on drugs. The root of such fears lies in our lack of control. As members of Deleuze's control society, we should not be so surprised.

Flash mobs, like Niven's flash crowds, frighten us because they can pop up anywhere, at any time, and often in a new, unexpected form we have yet to understand or experience. As such, those at the top as well as the bulk of us at the bottom of society do not know how to deal with them. Even attempts to recapture the flash mob (such as those of the Ford Motor Company with its Ford Flash Fusion Concerts) only result in the invention of new tactics of performative resistance – be they the freeze, the dance mob, the zombie mob, or some other hybridization. Like their predecessor, these new offspring of the flash mob act as forms of resistance to the stifling normative codes of behavior and control found throughout all our modern institutions – art, education, business, and government being just a few. Through the combination of technological tools, performative bodies, and social machines, they form new assemblages offering new methods of living, performing, and communicating within society. In so doing, flash mobs make visible patterns of control and behavior overlooked and ignored by many. Operating as swarms moving within smooth space, flash mobs pop up unexpectedly, often in some new variation of Wasik's formula, provoking fear, delight, and confusion in their audiences. Just as de Certeau suggested, by “shedding a different light on the language of a place,” or pulling one over on us all, these new flashes grab our undivided attention (37-38). It is my hope that such flashes alert their audience not only to the fact that they have been tricked into taking a ride in an avocado-green dryer, but also to the specific ways in which they might get their Big Brother back for such a dirty, dirty deed.

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