

## ChinTaFREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

*How does one point out to a group of people their inclusion in a community they may not have known existed? What is the optimal medium for such communication?*

La Fiambrera, Spain:

When the Seville city council decided to organize a "Euromediterranean Conference on Sustainable Cities," they never imagined the sustained feeling of embarrassment that would result.

The conference was part of their recent project of projecting a new, modern image; the most visible symbol of this effort was the transformation of the city logo from an old baroque-looking thing to a modern, efficient design.

The main content of the logo were the letters "No&Do," which was something king Fernando III gave over to the city as a reminder of its loyalty: No&Do means, and everybody knows it in Seville, "I have not been abandoned".

We were engaged in organizing a counter-conference based in La Alameda, a district in the old center of the city which was in that stage of gentrification in which the streets become abandoned, with the aim of making people so miserable in their barrio that they become ready to sell their houses at low prices or just leave their rented homes without any compensation.

So it was really easy to connect the official logo of our city with the way our barrio was: just by changing two letters, it now would read: "Si&Do" ("I have indeed been abandoned").

The diffusion of the new logo had to be guaranteed, along with its connection to the neighborhood, and it had to happen through some easy, cheap and recognizable media.

Internet? Not in Seville. Graphics? Not that many people stop in the street to read ads...

We came upon the perfect medium for diffusion when we noticed the enormous quantity of dogshit in the streets of our barrio--which obviously had some relationship with our dogs' inner pulsions, but had equally to do with the policy of the city council, whose cleaning brigades had not come to our barrio in months and months...

So we made several thousand of these little red paper flags, with the new, more truthful logo, and fixed them on any dogshit we saw around, there were so many.

The campaign was immediately successful: people could read the "I have been abandoned" and relate it at the same time with the city council (its logo being nearly identical) and with the way their barrio was being treated. The red flags were also useful as warnings not to step on any of the little artworks/political platforms our dogs kept producing day after day.

The press immediately reported on the issue as a kind of mystery, and sent reporters to find out who was responsible for so many redefinitions.

By that time the official conference on sustainable cities started, as did the alternative one. The official guests appreciated the usefulness of our intervention and were curious about the explanation, so they would ask the mayor and other officials to explain the sense of the city logo, and why it had been changed for our barrio...

At the same time, the counter-conference of La Alameda took over the "Si&Do" logo to vindicate so many different actions, so people and media could start relating the abandonment issue with gentrification, speculation, evictions...

The "Si&Do" has become an identity for the opposition to the gentrification process in La Alameda, and has empowered people to see how their problems are

related and can be attacked under a wider political cover that just their local and immediate reaction.

This story is an excellent introduction to something we have come to call "tactical embarrassment." The Si&Do intervention was tactical since it used the elements and media already commonly available (the official logo and the shit), and the work was just that slight repackaging that allowed Fiambrera to hegemonize the ongoing conflict. It was quite embarrassing for the mayor, and that embarrassment had an effect: the city started sending the cleaning brigades, and began doing cleanup work the neighbours had been requesting for years. Some of the plans for buying houses had to stop, and finally the mayor lost the election some months later (was the dogshit *that fatal?*).

Referring to work as "tactically embarrassing" assumes that it happens in a politically articulated way, The Si&Do story would have just been a more or less witty intervention had it not really been done in the streets, where all the necessary elements lay strewn about, and had it not been connected with the whole network of social movements that could derive political advantage from that embarrassment. These elements were necessary for the work to be effective politically and also aesthetically.

At the same time, Fiambrera's dogshit technique was quite different from the classic "recruitment" style of so much political activism--not just in the nature and tactics of the P.R. involved, but because of the ways it brought together and defined a community (those victimized by gentrification) and contained, intrinsically, proposals for alternative organization, and of acting politically with more aspects of our sensibilities and intelligence.

So much has been written and said about the Zapatistas, so many experts have appeared everywhere suddenly discovering where Chiapas is, that it becomes embarrassing to talk about this bunch of men and women who have shown the rest of the world the practical use value of words such as dignity.

But Zapatistas have indeed been actualizing the "dogshit" model of a broader sense of political activism. Whenever there has appeared to be a crisis in their long, and still not so sure, way towards survival and dignity, their communiqués in the form of "Viejo Antonio" (Paul Bunyan) tales have not only defined lines of tactics, but have actualized old and new knowledges and resistances, recuperated figures that had been circulating for centuries in their oral traditions, and shown all the "matrices" of the appropriation processes: all the irony, distancing, and ability to laugh that--and this is perhaps the most important thing--brought new kinds of solidarity, new sources of legitimacy, and new channels of effectiveness.

But Zapatistas are not alone at all; around the world, in global protests as well as in local conflicts, we find people getting organized in horizontal networks, getting attached to direct actions and ways of doing politics which tend more to tell stories than to merely assert one truth or other, that tend to include more and more senses, ironies and pleasures. "This is not a protest," says the leaflet for May Day Guerrilla Gardening, organized by Reclaim the Streets:

Direct action is about taking control of every aspect of our own lives, the homes we build, the food we eat, the way we travel, the culture we enjoy, the games we play--it's not just about the occasional protest but about taking power away from the politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats, and participating immediately and directly in radical social and ecological change.

Tactical embarrassment is not a trumpet for class struggle, it merely helps to create a sense of recognition for power structures and for the possibility to temporarily change them--tactically, as long as the golden sun of revolution is not in sight. And perhaps direct action and

practices--these concrete mediations and broader ways of articulating political practices and ways of doing--are simply finishing De Certeau's work.

### *Can this kind of tactical embarrassment be practised on the Internet?*

Tactical embarrassment practices are happening in many different media. Although the internet at first sight seems to be an entirely different arena than the streets of Seville, we find the same concept in operation.

The internet takes the place of the streets, for some people, those who live where physical streets do not. It is in such places--perhaps most common in the U.S.--that using the internet is a practice of daily life, helps to develop and maintain social relationships, and is a conduit to information of all sorts--from train times to phone rates to world news. It is logical that people who live in such places, and who are up for tactical embarrassment, feel invited by its potential.

RTMark, USA:

Back in October 1999, someone who happened to register GATT.org on a lark gave it to RTMark, knowing the sort of thing we were likely to do with it.

GATT stands for Global Agreements on Tariffs and Trade, the predecessor to the WTO; some people confuse the two, and come to GATT.org looking for WTO.org.

What we set about doing was not to just create a webpage with information critical of the WTO, which would have been the *strategic* method, one at the same time more ambitious and, perhaps, less realistic. Instead, we operated within the space of the power that was already there. With slight changes of content, we faked the existing site while maintaining its aesthetics; we attempted to subvert the voice of power, rather than plainly confronting it with rational criticism. In this way accidental visitors would be confronted with a critical position when they least expected it.

We felt that such an approach was likely to be more effective at making people think than a site that very clearly, obviously, immediately revealed its purposes and affiliations: in such a case, a "hostile" visitor, arriving at the site, would simply "turn off" upon noting the subject. The aim was instead to create a moment of confusion. *It looks official enough--but could the WTO itself be possibly so self-critical? Maybe these statements are true after all?*

Perhaps for this reason, because there was a possibility of seriously crossed wires, or perhaps simply because they were stupid and thought it would work, the WTO decided to react rather heavily to the fake website. They chose to issue a press release accusing the makers of GATT.org of creating confusion and undermining "transparency." Their press release just made them look ridiculous, much as George W. Bush's attack of GWBush.com had, and it gave RTMark a good excuse for a press release of its own. Being in the place of power worked against them.

There was, for the media as for many others, some pleasure in seeing a massive organization deceived by some geeks--the David and Goliath model. The story also appealed to the media because it was a classic "man bites dog" story. There was nothing newsworthy about a half-dozen harmless citizens displaying anger at the WTO, especially when thousands were already doing so, quite spectacularly; but the WTO displaying anger at a few harmless citizens? People laugh when the rich and powerful are made to behave inappropriately, and it makes for good copy.

It is almost essential for examples of tactical embarrassment to make use of humor, if they are to make it into the media; for this reason, and also because laughter can act as a social

bonding force as powerful as anger, the degree to which a story is funny can be one gauge of its effectiveness as a tactical embarrassment.

***How many people can a tactical approach to political protest or counterprotest involve? How might a large-scale event look and feel?***

Church of the Subgenius, Germany:

Clerical Fundamentalists - a Nuisance

In summer 2000, angry clerical fundamentalists were campaigning in Germany against the performance of the avantgarde theatre play *Corpus Christi* by Terence McNally, which deals with homosexuality, homophobia and the Church.

Wherever the play was performed, a fundamentalist Catholic priest and his followers turned up like a travelling circus. In some cases, christian and muslim fundamentalists formed alliances during these demonstrations. As a reaction, some local theatres in south-Germany put the play on their programme out of solidarity. Some local councils, however, prohibited it, claiming security risks.

When the play came to the south-German town of Tübingen, the angry priest placed an advertisement in the local paper to invite citizens to join a rally in the market place. In addition, they could participate in a phone vote for or against „Corpus Christi". 97% of those who called were opposed to the allegedly blasphemic theatre performance. Thus democratically legitimized, the self-rightous priest expected up to 1000 supporters.

Some local leftists remembered their own religious feelings and quickly founded the "Church of Subgenius"--assuming that the fundamentalist rally could do with some support in the liberal University town of Tübingen.

Taking action

On the day, there were only 40 clericals present--plus some dedicated followers of the Church of Subgenius. The fundamentalist priest started speaking to the people, encouraging them to oppose the fat-cats wasting taxpayers money on scandalous theatre plays promoting evil sexual habits, condemning the director of the play whom he insisted in calling "the Jew X," conjuring up some sort of Jewish-homosexual world conspiracy.

Accompanied by the deafening sound of church bells, a small procession of monks in proper habits (courtesy of the local theatre) marched into the market place and drew its circles around the fountain. Under a black canopy, they carried a meaningful object (a white cube). :Thou shalt not let the non-believers live! [www.god.de](http://www.god.de)" a banner called out. A tall, skinny prophet, bible in hand, raised his thundering voice to the people, quoting Ezekiel: "On the fifth day of the forth month of the thirtieth year, when I was staying at the river capron, with those led to the right path, the heavens broke open and god gave me visions."

Some misguided clericals tried to stop the prophet, but to no avail – he simply thundered through them, while his disciples, being a proper church, missioned the public with pamphlets bearing the word of god – only visible for the real believers though, everybody else only saw white, empty paper.

It was a weird day, a weird place – another group of penitential monks made their way in diagonals across the market place, while rhythmically beating their heads with large books. Their habits with big crosses painted on the backs, however, seemed to have derived from the hooded shirts of skinhead thugs.

The soundsystem of the clericals was a bit weak – yet the Church of Subgenious had installed their own in one of the residential flats. Specially hired DJs accompanied the angry speech of the priest with Händel's Christmas Oratorio, and the "Halleluja" went wonderfully with his sermon, just as the Swingle Singers' a capella motets for the more cheerful parts of his speech. He, however, in his blindness, and not understanding the aesthetic beauty of rap, turned his volume up, creating some accoustic cacophony. Only when the music stopped now and then, his angry shouting came through.

He tried to get people to chant: "We are the people" (the slogan used in 89 to bring down the east-German government). "We are the cross" - answered the crowd. And more: "John Paul the Second, we are on your side," supporting the Pope. The clerical outburst against misguided, ill and neurotic homosexuals who need to be shown the path of righteousness, but don't deserve civil rights since they don't produce children, was merrily affirmed: "Away with gays, except within schools."

The palaver lasted nearly two hours. Neither the clericals nor the Church of Subgenious gave up. The angry priest was rather overwhelmed by all the fuss. His own discourse slipped – what was meant to address the "healthy feelings of the local people" turned into a sermon of chastisement, permanently reinforced by chants: "God our father doesn't go to the theater." Picturesque Tübingen turned into Sodom and Gomorrah, where you can't even say your prayers properly ("Nebuchadnezzar was an old heretic"). He didn't like the solemn music either, threatened to cover the place with fire and brimstone plus earthquakes, and announced that for the first time ever he would refuse to give his blessings to a place.

That was serious. The subgenious DJs changed their strategy. Songs like ACDC's "Hells Bells" and the Stones' "Sympathy with the Devil" turned the marketplace into a party. After a great deal of party behavior, involving crazy repartee with the priest, the Church of Subgenious finally thanked the public for being there, creating a nice atmosphere and closing with an invitation to come again.

The woman who served the post-penitential Coke & Lemonade in a nearby pub really liked the religious intervention--just like many passers-by who were glad that someone had queered the clerical's pitch, and had very much enjoyed the party.

### A Tactical Approach to Politics and Performance

A strange action, put together by some people more or less on one evening, on the basis of local knowledge, and anger about the unacceptable demand to let an antisemitic, homophobic, racist and nationalist priest pontificate in their local space.

The activists from the Church of Subgenious were aware that they had no chance to strategically get rid of Christian fundamentalists once and for all. Katja Hellrath: "Being only few people anyway, we decided to turn to tactics. We would not disturb or close down the clerical rally, but support it, and thereby make it our own show." A tactical approach to the negotiations about hegemony means to act in the space of power, playing with the codes rather than trying to overturn them. Tactics can involve interventions in a specific place and time that are close enough to the local environment to allow many people to agree, or join in on their own account.

Local citizens might not be prepared to get rid of fundamentalists in a bottle-throwing way – but they like their local theatre, and they don't like plague and cholera conjured down on them. In a way, the clericals were fair game. Many in that liberal town like to support a spectacle.

So when the anti-fundamentalists asked around to find the right place for the soundsystem – high up and away from the grasp of the police - they were sent to people who lived in a flat in the market place. The statement: "We want to support the

local theatre" opened the doors, no questions were asked, and the sound-system was installed in their windows. Of course, the theatre itself provided the habits needed – not quite enough of them, though, some monks had to make do with some kimonos of a secret buddhist.

### Tactical Embarrassment - Locally Connected

The general idea was a subversive affirmation of the form, but not of the contents. Katja Hellrath explains: "There was no central planning, but quite a few groups and individuals picked up on the general idea. Probably, the clerical priest would have preferred to have his face smashed to become a martyr. We didn't do him the favour, although he would have deserved it with his racist, antisemite and extremely right wing propaganda." In fact, it was more effective to use the principle of "tactical embarrassment." The activists of the Church of Subgenious didn't want to rely on the bogged-down framework of the image "demo-counterdemo," which isn't tempting anyone anymore. Rather, they created a situation, where the clericals, although they strongly disapproved of the chaos in "their" rally, had no other choice but acting their part in the subgenious production – and it worked. The proof of the pudding is the laughing effect of the story. But even on the day, it was clear that the "false" clericals had won when the angry priest suddenly changed his discourse. Instead of merging with the decent local taxpayers, he was forced to drift into condemning them as Sodom and Gomorrah. His escape into a sermon of chastisement was not stupid – he tried to win back the defining power on the show. Yet this turned into a chance to introduce some familiar popular forms – the songs, the closely-danced blues everybody knows from their teenage years. His strategy was neutralised: condemning a bunch of sex-obsessed devils for being sex-obsessed devils is plainly embarrassing, especially if they have nothing in mind but being called exactly that.

In this action, the trick was to somehow anticipate the counter-strategy of the priest. Everything he might do, would turn into an affirmation of his enemies' performance – the best way to tactically drive him into embarrassment. Instinctively, the "Church of Subgenius" had put on stage exactly the counter-strategy of the clerical fundamentalist – a procession of penitence, which confusingly turned into a blues orgy. So in the end, there was even some confrontation. In order to become representatives of Sodom and Gomorrah, it was enough to draw on well-known popular culture with a slight bend. Processions and carnival are well known practices in the catholic parts of the area, travelling preachers are part of Protestant long term memory, prophetism always works anyway, parties, dancing and music are part of our desires in daily life.

Dennis Kleinfeld, one of the pseudo-monks, explains: "We played the game of the clericals and shamelessly over-affirmed it – until it turned around. We played with and distorted their codes, ridiculed them and had lots of fun ourselves." With this attitude, combined with their skillful use of sound, the anti-clerical troublemakers gained the audiovisual hegemony in a public space. No wonder the local paper enjoyed reporting about the embarrassment of the clericals, reinforcing it again. The whole thing in a way was just a happening, a spectacle, a performance, its outreach temporary and limited. Yet it became relevant because it was inserted into a public event and a broader political discourse. Without the clericals themselves, it would never have worked. Local knowledge was crucial in preparing this action. It worked, because it was developed by people who know and are part of local institutions and discourses, who have been working with most of the left and activist groups over the years. So the performance spoke the right language to get support. Dennis Kleinfeld: "Had we restricted ourselves to a rational analysis of homophobia, antisemitism, and the rest, had we ignored the openness of the creative, material gaze, we would have simply ended up distributing

leaflets." Which would have been less effective, and perhaps equivalently, less fun.

***How do unwitting participants of tactical embarrassment feel about their participation, when they discover it?***

The Yes Men, USA:

We're a group of individuals from various walks of life who enjoy impersonating non-existing figures, in order to gain information not obtainable by other means. Once, for example, we pretended to be the fan club of a comic strip ("Captain Euro") that was obviously antisemitic and nearly obviously fascist--and that had as its goal to sell the idea of a united Europe to seven-year-olds. We found out quite a lot about the strip's creators.

Last year, we received custodianship of GATT.org from RTMark, when they realized that the letters they kept receiving, letters intended for the WTO, might serve us nicely. They did. One invitation intended for the director of the WTO fell into our hands instead, and we soon found ourselves representing the WTO to a group of international trade lawyers, in such a way that they did not know they were being hoodwinked. We got the whole thing on videotape.

One of the lawyers was especially important to the video we assembled. He had asked a question, after the lecture, about the Seattle protesters, and had mentioned that in his opinion they were protesting just because they needed something to do and not out of any real conviction. He was an excellent actor, but of course he meant the whole thing.

On discovering weeks later that he had participated in our little joke, however, the young fellow grew quite irate. He had belittled the protesters; now, however, he explained to us that we should have been more like them: "In my day," he said, "protesters cared deeply about their views and were not afraid to debate them. By cleverly sneaking into the conference, you had a grand opportunity to make a point if you had something to say.... You could have made an impassioned speech against globalization and trade and started a lively debate."

This is the same argument we have heard from time to time from some especially theoretically-inclined activists as well, who feel that our methods are tasteless, or otherwise not appropriate or effective. RTMark has also been accused in this way. But the proof is in the pudding. As we explained to the lawyer, our point was to "illustrate amusingly, through example and some exaggeration, the motives and aims of the WTO.... The point wasn't to illustrate this to... the audience there in Salzburg, but rather to others, in other audiences--of greater number, and more influential."

The full-page article in the Sunday *New York Times*--consisting mostly of excerpted e-mails--was a step towards fulfillment of the goal; a further step is the video we're putting together. The lecture itself was just fodder.

***In what ways, specifically, can tactical embarrassment be more effective than either classical political activism or "engaged art"?***

La Fiambrera, Spain:

It happened that our neighbours in Madrid were fighting the bishop and the mayor, because the latter had taken a nice big piece of land, which was supposed to become a park for the people, and had just given it to the bishop for him to build an office building there with a huge underground parking garage.

As this fight was just beginning, we found out there would be a religious procession passing in front of the park in question. The festival was for the Virgin of Paloma, and we found out that on this occasion, both the mayor and the bishop would be solemnly marching in front of thousands of neighbours, of course protected by policemen dressed in their nicest uniforms. Leading them and the other processioners would be, as usual, a big wooden statue of the Virgin of Paloma, held aloft by ten or so devotees.

In Spain, when there is one of these processions involving a Virgin, mayor, bishop and so on, it sometimes happens that someone gets carried away with devotion to the Virgin, climbs up on a balcony, and just when the Virgin is passing by, starts singing a *saeta*--a special kind of flamenco song in which the *cantaor* sings without any guitar, alone with his or her voice in front of thousands of people, silencing them with the power of the voice and the deep devotion that is obvious in it.

The *saeta* that is traditionally sung for the Virgin of Paloma goes:

*La viirgen de la Paloomaaaaa  
tiene el corason partiiiiooooo... [pause]  
porque su hijo esta muertooooo  
y en el sepulcroy metioooooo*

*(The Virgen de la Paloma,  
has a broken heart [pause]  
because her son has been killed  
and laid down in a grave)*

On this occasion we found out a neighbor interested in saving the park was an excellent flamenco singer, and we asked him to sing this *saeta* from another neighbor's balcony when the Virgin, the major and the bishop would be crossing in front of our threatened public domain. But first, we changed the lyrics slightly.

That day, as expected, there were several thousands of people in the streets, along with TV cameras and so on.

Suddenly the flamenco-singing neighbour appeared on his balcony and after a deep and flamenco "Ayyyyy"--the depth and sincerity of which alone slowed the procession considerably--he started singing the *saeta*:

*La viirgen de la Paloomaaaaa  
tiene el corason partiiiiooooo...*

By now everyone was completely silent (singing those two lines took more than a minute). The bishop and the mayor were very impressed with such spontaneous religious feeling, and they stood with faces upturned in public rapture... which changed to redness, then whiteness as the second part of the *saeta* was sung over the course of another sixty seconds:

*porque le han quitao el parqueeee  
y oficinaas, le han metioooo*

*(because they have stolen her park  
and have put offices there instead)*

By the end, everybody was laughing and calling the mayor and bishop *chorizos*



(robbers), and at the fervent urging of the bishop and mayor the Virgin resumed its full speed, and more. And then more. A jogging Virgin, who had ever seen such a thing?

Now in this context, we could have made up / played our role as artists, just playing once again with representations and concepts of public space, privatization processes, etc. We could have organized a nice exhibition in some gallery for our friends, and eventually some curator or art critic would have discovered us as engaged artists.

Or we could have simply come in the middle of the procession and started shouting and handing out pamphlets to everyone and surely getting the policemen to get us arrested, so that we would get a reputation as really radical activists.

Neither option would have been tactically justifiable. Neither would have acknowledged the procession and the kind of things that happen there as a political arena, as a place and a process to be politically and aesthetically appreciated and intervened in. Neither would have shown the proper respect to the forum, nor used it a beautiful way so as to earn goodwill from those assembled.

The *saeta* intervention had a lasting empowering effect on the many neighbours involved; even some of the ones taking the Virgin on their shoulders knew of the plot and were part of it. But the action was also good in engaging people whose religious feelings would have been offended by any other kind of intervention, pamphlet style, in the procession. In fact by getting the Virgin herself to participate in the conflict, we were just reproducing the kind of processes of appropriation that are at the origin of every Saint and Virgin. In that sense, the *saeta* intervention was not only politically effective, but aesthetically consistent--and the two aspects were inseparable.

In examining our choice of behaviors in this instance, and comparing it with more traditional possible choices--that of gallery exhibition, on the one hand, and of more usual political activism, on the other--we realize that the concept of tactical action came into play in two different ways.

First a tactical approach required us to employ a sense of the topology of relevance, and to identify an arena which would make sense for an intervention. Art galleries are usually places of representation rather than places where neighbors and conflicts happen to be, where tactics can be learned and practiced. Processions, on the other hand, are popular practices, and are often being used for negotiations of conflicts; in fact, all we had to do was to look at the structure of popular tactics and play with them in our own way.

Second, in addition to this topological influence, there was also the methodological influence of a tactical approach: which, tactically speaking, would be the best "way of doing" we should employ in the chosen arena? This is where the aesthetic evaluation came in. Using a really well-sung *saeta* instead of throwing pamphlets meant not only that we respected the procession as a place where politics might happen; but also meant giving weight to the more "popular" proceedings that might occur in such an already "popular" procession.

Methodologically, then, tactics simply meant appreciating the *saeta* as an interesting and powerful medium. It was also the most beautiful choice we could see. The interconnection between these two aspects, the political and the aesthetic, was indissoluble, and each reinforced the other.

While the *saeta* was being sung, a huge group of neighbours was getting organized. They would soon squat this disputed piece of land, clean it, and open it to the public--in fact, they would soon organize an illegal summer cinema on it.

In this process, tactics were taken into the political space. This takes us to the

point where De Certeau has received more criticism; in fact it looks like he has forgotten that those diffuse and so widely extended ways of doing, which obviously have to do with political definitions of supremacy and oppression, should find some way of articulation, of mediation, and therefore perhaps of "strategical" options... (If only we were not interested in glorifying abstractly these newly discovered practices... or converting them into a new excuse for scholars' meetings...)

Of course De Certeau can be useful to clarify art and political practices like the ones we have been commenting on here, but it must be clear that his "discovery" of a wider political speech, of the many other places and ways where politics can be found and performed has still to become articulated if we do not want to keep losing all wars...

***What happens with this way of understanding politics, and this demand for articulation and connection, when it interfaces with existing art practices? Can the interface be fruitful even when contrasting aims are involved?***

RTMark, USA:

There's an expression in English: "War makes for odd bedfellows." (Never mind what "bedfellows" are.... Something from the Middle Ages, I think.)

But what we've discovered is that odd bedfellows and their behavior make for strange, and sometimes strangely successful, situations.

In 1999, when the Swiss art group etoy's existence was seriously threatened by a toy company with nearly the same name, RTMark, like many activists, was outraged. The details were astonishing: multi-billion-dollar eToys, Inc. had convinced a California judge to ban etoy from using etoy.com, which it had been using for three years, far longer than eToys had even existed. The grounds? People might think etoy's slick orange imagery were sellable toys. There are some real hick judges in California.

To help etoy and the cause of expression and art, RTMark created a "mutual fund"--a list of projects--attacking eToys, Inc.. It then issued a press release titled "NEW INTERNET 'GAME' DESIGNED TO DESTROY ETOYS.COM": sensationalist, to provide journalists with a necessary angle for stories, and sounding somewhat "objective."

It worked fairly quickly--not to destroy eToys (none of us were *that* crazy, though that does seem to have happened after all), but to call attention to the case. Literally hundreds of news organs, including CNN, Time Magazine, the Associated Press, etc., covered the story, usually with the angle we provided, and almost always sympathetic to our cause. And strangely enough, eToys' stock price began to slide, and it never stopped sliding: from its high of \$67/share on the day the judge closed down etoy.com, to \$20 by the time eToys caved in to the public outrage and let etoy.com survive. Today the price hovers under \$1, and the company is set to fold....

It took one month of public protest, part of it coordinated by RTMark, to convince eToys it couldn't behave as it did. On Dec. 29, 30 days after the judge's order, eToys announced it was dropping its lawsuit against etoy.com.

A great cry of triumph was about to rise up, when suddenly, things turned sour. etoy announced that eToys, while pretending to drop the suit, was not actually doing so, it had been bluffing! RTMark was as outraged as everyone else, and issued a press release about it (which was reprinted verbatim by Bloomberg, the principle financial news outlet--*that* was a first!).

The fight dragged on for another 18 days, in the middle of which etoy finally unveiled its own protest vehicle, Toywar.com, which it had started back in November, when etoy.com had first been shut off. Toywar.com consisted of graphical images of

little toy fighters, which visitors could adopt as avatars in their fight against the great evil eToys. After adopting a persona, the visitor would await commands from Toywar headquarters, which would then instruct him or her on what to do.

Two of us from RTMark registered to see how it worked, but never received any orders, only some interesting communiques about the direness of the situation. From what we could tell, it was simply a nice art project about protest and resistance. This was recently confirmed by someone on the inside.

As the days dragged on after eToys' announcement and subsequent silence, we at RTMark became angrier and angrier, and began pushing our contacts at etoy very hard to finally do some of the things we'd been pressuring them to do the whole time, and which they hadn't agreed to, on their lawyers' advice. We wanted them to release the full eToys court documents, so that the dozen lawyers who had volunteered their services could have a look. These lawyers wanted to sue eToys in turn, for all kinds of things, but needed to see the actual court documents to know whether it was possible.

Finally, our nagging and begging and cajoling got to be too much for etoy, and they told us the truth. On Dec. 29, eToys had in fact been fully ready to drop the lawsuit, and had offered excellent terms (court costs, etc.). It was etoy that had delayed their acceptance--so that Toywar.com could be put into action! They had worked quite hard on it already, and it still wasn't done. If the whole battle were declared over at this point, etoy would be in the position of a victim to whose aid many activists had come, vanquished the enemy, etc. Not at all fitting their terrorist image. This was a group, after all, that had made its name with a "Digital Hijack," and which had carefully nurtured a strange outlaw image.

Though we had been duped into issuing a press release, fighting on, stoking our compatriots into fighting on, etc., all for no reason, we not get angry: after all, this additional fighting had resulted in considerable press, even more community building, etc. We were happy with the results.

But when it began to be reported that Toywar.com had been primarily responsible for saving etoy from the clutches of eToys, we felt that the activists who had actually done the saving were being slighted, and we felt we had to speak up....

***What might happen when art institutions show interest in these tactical practices? Are they politically annihilated as a result of being diffused or exhibited in museums or galleries?***

Nephew of Polit, Spain:

In our pueblo when there is fiesta you get this bull running around the streets--they just close some of the streets with barricades and set the bull running. People might be talking or having dinner in front of thier houses, and if the bull suddenly appears, everybody will have to run and look for some safe place, something to jump onto--perhaps those bars over the windows that are called *reja*.

Now one night our tio Polit had been drinking in the tavern with some of his friends, and was coming back late, just a little bit tipsy. He felt really great and happy, and he barely wondered why he had to climb over a barricade to get to his house.

All of a sudden, he could see a bull running towards him! But wait: there were two bulls! And that meant there was something wrong because as drunk as he was, he knew they would never ever release more than one bull at a time. He realized that this two-bull phenomenon must have to do with the last few glasses of macabeo wine he had drunk, and though tio polit was terribly fond of epistemology and ontology, he decided the only proper thing to do would be run for a *reja*, since at least one of the entities might be a real bull with real horns on it.

Right around the corner he knew there would be a *reja*, and he would just have to climb up on it and he would be out of reach of the bull--but coming around the corner, suddenly: there were *two rejas*! And that was really weird since he knew perfectly well that there had always been one single *reja* there and not two.

He looked back again, just to see the two bulls thing getting closer and closer...and the two rejas floating up there...what to do?

Some of the people in our pueblo say that tío Polit climbed up the wrong reja and was picked by the right bull...some others will say the bull had also been drinking that night with his friends and was seeing all the time two tíos Polits, so the bull was also really quite confused.

Our tío Polit always claimed that he and the bull finally decided to go together for some more wine while they discussed Kantian categories and Hegelian synthesis.