

Title *The Yes Men Hoax the World: Re-Imagining Utopia Through Humour, Trickery, and Sincerity*

Summary

This book explores the history, theory, practice, politics and efficacy of media hoaxing through an in-depth study of the Yes Men, the most important new media activist group to have emerged in the past decade.

Description

This book examines the widespread proliferation of contemporary media hoaxes, with an eye toward unpacking the deeper motivations behind such practices. While in most cases, the financial incentives underpinning a given hoax are unflappable, aesthetic, social, interpersonal, and professional motives abound. As my study of the Yes Men makes clear, the political dimensions of hoaxing cannot be understated. With a clear political agenda that enacts a utopian vision for how the world could be, the Yes Men's bold, steadfast, and unflinching activism has laid the foundation for organizations, activists, and otherwise apolitical audiences to carry out their work. Their mischievous hoaxes are ushering in an era in which the call for greater social justice can be funny, playful, heartfelt, ethical, serious, and scathing.

Rationale

The book offers the first book-length discussion of the Yes Men. To date, the only book-length work devoted to the Yes Men was written by the Yes Men themselves—over ten years ago. While the book provides a wonderful glimpse of the Yes Men's political motivations and tactics, it is largely descriptive; it does not contextualize their work in relation to broader economic, political and technological changes, nor does it provide an in-depth analysis and evaluation of their hoaxes.

Short non-technical description

In the 21st century, the hoax—a humorous or malicious deception—is being used by activists that seek to change the world, galvanize public opinion to take up political causes, and draw attention to abuses of power by corporations and governments. By blending cutting political satire, outlandish humour, and sobering social criticism, they humorously and adroitly expose the wrongdoings of corporations and governments with an aim to making them more accountable, transparent, and responsible to the public. From appearing on the BBC as representatives of Dow Chemical to draw attention to the thousands of people killed or injured in the Bhopal Disaster to publishing a fake (yet optimistic) *New York Times* to imagine a better future, the Yes Men have used the media hoax to

galvanize public opinion. This book sheds light on why hoaxing has emerged as a significant political practice and makes a case for the significance of the media hoax as a positive means of changing the world.

Key features

(1) The Yes Men have been largely celebrated in news and journal articles written by activists, academics, and artists. But what's missing from the discussion is a substantive, context-rich, and book-length analysis and evaluation of the Yes Men. This is what my book offers. I build upon, deepen, and extend existing work on the Yes Men. The Yes Men have already allowed me to interview them and they have graciously given me full access to their archives. This makes my book much more thorough, contextual, and original than the texts currently published about the Yes Men.

(2) The book focuses almost exclusively on media hoaxing. Many existing books and articles have analyzed the intersections between comedy and politics, satire and social change, news parody and contemporary journalism—hallmarks of the fake news genre pioneered by *The Onion*, *The Daily Show*, and *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*. In an era when traditional news journalism is in crisis (due to corporate ownership conglomeration and the loss of audience and ad share to new media), satire has emerged as a welcome political tactic used by comedians and activists for criticizing the status quo. But a full-length study of media hoaxing has yet to be published. Through this well-rounded study of the Yes Men's media hoaxes, this book contributes to and extends this field of inquiry.

(3) This book complicates the longstanding view that hoaxes are essentially detrimental to society. Hoaxing has a negative reputation; it is associated with pejorative words like hearsay, gossip, myth, urban legends, frauds, tricks, jokes, lampoons, mockery, conspiracy theories, and pranks. Hoaxes are viewed as detrimental to society because they wilfully deviate from the truth. The negative view of the hoax has only been exacerbated by the Internet and the World Wide Web, which enable all kinds of hoaxing (fake Twitter accounts, false press releases, dubious conspiracy websites, doctored images, plagiarized texts, fake celebrity sex tapes, and so on). While concerns about the negative impacts of hoaxing are in many instances legitimate, this book contends that the hoax, in and of itself, is neither good nor bad for society, but rather, a tool used by a variety of social groups in struggles to influence public opinion and to change the world, for better or worse. Contemporary culture is awash in both productive and destructive, politically progressive and regressive varieties of hoaxing. This book argues that hoaxing ought to be judged with reference to its practitioners, contextual cues, and larger impacts. Through my study of the Yes Men, I show that hoaxes can

contribute to the greater good. More specifically, I argue that hoaxing can: (1) initiate public debate on matters of great civic importance (e.g., the environment, governance, sustainability); and (2) reveal or draw public attention to the abuses of power by large-scale organizations (corporations, governments, and various media firms).

Table of contents

Chapter One: Fakery Incorporated

Straddling Three Realms: Political Satire, Journalism, and Media Activism
No Media Hoaxing Without News
Unprecedented Crises In/Across Mainstream Media
Fake News Stories Saturate the News Media Landscape
Broader Currents of Media Activism
Media Spectacle
Pseudo-Events and Media Spectacle
Re-Imagining Spectacle

Chapter Two: On Hoaxing

How Did We Get Here? Notes on Self-Deception, Lying, and Bullshit
Lies and Lying
“Historians Admit To Inventing Ancient Greeks”
“I can believe anything provided it is incredible”
Setting Things Up: Radio Theatre, Fake Biography, and Art Forgery
Risks and Consequences
Fact + Fiction = Factual Fictions
Swift’s “Bickerstaff Hoax”
Swift’s *A Modest Proposal*
Hoaxing and Mass Media
The Unevenness of (Mass Media) Hoaxing: Motives, Outcomes, Longevity
Incentives and Motivations (A brief overview)
Media Hoaxing as Welcome Deceptions
Prologue: A Brief Overview of the Yes Men’s Hoaxing Style

Chapter Three: Coming to a Conference Near You

The Modern Conference
The Yes Men as the World Trade Organization
First Conference: Salzburg!
“We Really Were Going To Prison!”
Interlude: “European Marketwrap”
“I’m Very Excited To Be Here”: Introducing The Management Leisure
Suit
2nd Interlude: “We Had Finally Done It”
Shutting It Down

Same Emphasis, New Target: “We would become the government”
“You Just Pulled Off a Heck of a Hoax”
ExxonMobil in Alberta
“I Think I’d Like to Be a Candle”
Halliburton Presents the Survivaball: Ensuring Human Continuity for
Generations to Come
“Worries about climate change? Don’t sweat it.”

Chapter Four: The Yes Men on the Web

“Two guys with cheap suits and fake websites”
GWBush.com
Dow Chemical vs. The People of Bhopal
“Dow Accepts Full Responsibility”
Some Hoaxes Take Years to Materialize
Environment Canada
Building Something Out of Nothing: Yes Men at the World Economic
Forum
“We can no longer endanger the world for the benefit of the few”
“World Leaders Pledge Strategy To End Poverty Now”
Chevron (Thinks We’re Stupid): Anatomy of a Greenwashing Campaign
We Agree: The Multi-Million Dollar Pitch

Chapter Five: The Yes Men in the News

When/How News Hoaxes Materialize
Re-Imagining Establishment Journalism
Journalism in Crisis
Fake News Stories Saturate the News Media Landscape
Taming the Watchdogs
New Alternatives and Possibilities: The Yes Men’s Fake News
New York Times “Special Edition”: “All the News We Hope to Print”
A Word About Fantasy and Utopia
Why Hijack the *NYT*?
Culture Jamming Advertising in the *NYT*
Expanding the Audience: From Print to Internet Hoax
Citizen Journalism
A Hoax With a Twist: The New York Post “Special Edition”
“This could be, and should be, a real *New York Post*”
“We’re Screwed: What You’re Not Being Told”
“Thinking of Headlines We’d Like to See”

Chapter Six: Expanding The Yes Men Brand

The Early Days: ®TMark and the Limits of Online Collaboration and Community
Building

Rules For Radicals: A Word on Organizing Social Protest
Training and Mentoring For a Better World: The Yes Lab for Creative Activism
Levelling the Playing Field
The Yes Lab vs. The Chamber of Commerce
C.R.I.M.E.: A Hoax for Haiti
#Shellfail
Epic. PR. Fail.
“It’s like in *Spinal Tap* where they turn the amp to 11”
If You (and the Yes Lab) Owned Bank of America | “*Your* Bank of America”

Conclusion

Cultivating Skepticism, Improving Information Literacy
Problems, Shortcomings, and Limitations
The Limits of Media Hoaxing
Critiques of the Yes Men
Why The Yes Men Matter

Chapter outlines

Chapter One: Fakery Incorporated

The book’s opening chapter introduces the Yes Men under the assumption that the reader is encountering their work for the first time. In an attempt to better situate the reader, I frame their larger story through the lens of three overlapping realms: journalism, media activism, and popular culture. One hook for engaging uninitiated readers is to discuss the widespread popularity of *fake news*, that is, of the various incarnations of news parody that have commanded considerable critical attention and popular praise in the 2000s. Drawing parallels between the fake news popularized by *The Onion* and *The Daily Show*, and the fake headlines orchestrated by the Yes Men presents an important bridge for thinking about the role humour plays in popular culture. Indeed, fake news figures prominently as an organizing theme in the book precisely because it prepares the way for a better understanding of the satirist’s relationship to contemporary journalism. Given the Yes Men’s dependence on mainstream media to disseminate its work by way of their elaborate hoaxes, it is also crucial to shed light on the mechanisms that allow these activists to penetrate the gatekeeping establishment. If journalists and news organizations were fulfilling their roles as a critical check on power, there would be less impetus for the Yes Men to hijack their operations; if journalists and news organizations took greater care to vet their experts before a newscast, it would be inconceivable that the Yes Men would ever gain access to these channels of communication. Finally, given the fact that the large bulk of their activist projects are both conceived of and executed via the Web, their story meshes quite nicely with recent developments in contemporary media activism. This third strand is meant to explain the rise of Internet activism in the 2000s, highlighting that the Yes Men’s work runs parallel to a number of recent experiments in social

media mobilization and protest—MoveOn, Avaaz, Wikileaks, and Anonymous. In wedding these three overlapping phenomena, I provide the reader with a brief overview of the book's larger terrain, before turning to a more focused discussion of what exactly the Yes Men do. This section offers a concise overview of *what they do*, *how they do it*, and *why they do it*. The chapter ends with a succinct chapter-by-chapter breakdown, pointing the reader to various places of interest.

Chapter Two: On Hoaxing

Chapter Two explores the fascinating realm of media spectacle through the lens of hoaxing. I begin the chapter with a brief discussion of the broader terrain of hoaxing, informed by ideas surrounding truth, lying, self-deception, and bullshit. This section grapples not only with the ubiquity of hoaxing, but also with human beings' susceptibility to fall for (or even relish) the hoax as an artful mode of communication. I then move on to a brief discussion of two notable hoaxes—the first, orchestrated by *The Onion*; the second, perpetrated by Jonathan Swift. While both examples are worlds apart in terms of the politics they enact (*The Onion* irreverently satirizing the entire Western philosophical tradition, Swift leveraging the hoax as a potent form of social protest), each respective hoax establishes the centrality of humour and satire to the hoaxer's larger goals (a crucial aspect of the Yes Men's work). But what exactly are the hoaxer's goals and why is the hoax the chosen means for carrying out a particular vision? To answer this question, I move to a larger discussion of the complex meanings behind contemporary hoaxing through an exploration of representative historical examples. Given the broad range of materials—war propaganda, fake literary biographies, performance art, culture jamming experiments, art forgeries, magic tricks, fake newspapers, celebrity freak-outs, academic parodies, viral videos—ascribing positive or negative values to a given hoax is a difficult undertaking. That said, each set of hoaxes reveals the varied and complex motivations that underpin the act; some are rooted in anarchic aggression (challenging the illegality of pranking) while others are borne out of an ethical or moral desire to serve a greater good; yet another band of hoaxes is politically, socially, and ethically neutral. Together these tensions effectively give the hoaxes their magnetism, the charge that fuels the public's fascination with, and appetite for, even more kinds of hoaxing. Thus, this chapter's careful overview of various hoaxes (see TOC) suggests that there are gradations of both good and bad hoaxes and that no single hoax can be taken at face value. In concluding this chapter, I reinforce the strengths of hoaxing practices, particularly with respect to the ethical dimensions at work in these spectacles, as a bridge to discussing the Yes Men's media hoaxes—the subject of Chapters Three, Four, and Five.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five

The following three chapters serve as the book's core case studies. In the interests of making their work as accessible as possible, I group their hoaxes into three categories: (1) conference hoaxes presented to an elite membership; (2) web-based hoaxes; and (3) news/journalism-related hoaxes. The through line for the book is that each chapter addresses the dynamic ways in which the Yes Men impersonate various corporate and/or institutional entities (e.g., World Trade Organization, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Dow Chemical, the Government of Canada, *NYT*), highlighting the core issues they seek to introduce to a larger public. In "Coming to a Conference Near You," I examine some of the Yes Men's earliest dalliances in the realm of media hoaxing via their outlandish impersonations of the World Trade Organization—from their championing of human slavery to their integration of a phallus-shaped management leisure suit.

Chapter Four delves into the Yes Men's sustained presence on the Web. While there is much overlap in the Yes Men's rich and varied arsenal of hoaxes, a large majority of their work materializes by way of their discrete (and not-so-discrete) operations on the web. This chapter seeks to contextualize the ways in which the Internet has helped facilitate and circulate a broad range of Yes Men hoaxes. In framing this chapter around the uses and gratifications of the Internet, the reader is afforded even greater insight into how the Yes Men function—and how precisely they are able to bypass journalistic and institutional gatekeepers in the creation of their media-savvy spectacles. For example, in their much-discussed impersonation of Environment Canada (EC) at the 2009 Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen, the Yes Men deployed a number of elaborate tactics to convey their larger critique of the Harper Government's catastrophic record on climate change: fake EC websites, press/video releases, and press conference appearances, all circulated far and wide across the web. Within two days, the Yes Men had created a full-blown media spectacle, amplifying the government's poor environmental record to a global audience at a time when policymakers were actively trying to reach consensus on a global climate accord. This hoax represents but one of many examples of the Yes Men's sustained engagement with the web; each example provides a window not only into how the Yes Men make use of the Internet for political purposes, it also foregrounds a whole range of practices currently adopted by media activists around the globe.

Chapter Five shifts our gaze from the larger critique of the corporation or state to a critical reflection on the health, performance, and vitality of news media. In "The Yes Men in the News," I examine a third branch of the activist group's hoaxing practices—news parody. In the activist version of *fake news*, the Yes Men critique both the *New York Times* and the *New York Post* with the express goal of re-imagining contemporary journalism. What emerges in this work is the

expression of a utopian sensibility, one largely missing from the thrust of everyday reportage. Rather than merely depicting the shortcomings of both newsmakers and news gatherers, these fake newspapers present a utopian vision of contemporary journalism and politics as practiced in the not-so-distant future. For example, the fake *NYT* is replete with stories about the end of the Iraq War, universal health care, economic reform, and other socially progressive causes. Together these fake editions deliver their critique through often hilarious and sincere dramatizations of a future in which citizens hold their elected officials and news organizations accountable for the work they do. Importantly, this chapter sheds light on the larger ethical dimensions at work in the Yes Men's media hoaxes; it is also meant to challenge and expand popular notions of the politics of *fake news*. Not content to merely satirize or parody the news of the day, I argue that the Yes Men harness the genre to dramatize some of the most positive, progressive, and life-affirming headlines they hope to see in the world.

Of course, there is a great deal of overlap across these three core chapters, most notably in the sense that each chapter engages the question of (1) how the Yes Men's work is received in the court of public opinion, (2) how their work is covered by news media, and (3) whether their hoaxes achieve their desired or intended effect. Each set of examples prepares the way for the reader to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary media hoaxes. Central to my argument is the notion that the Yes Men's hoaxing serves a legitimate role in engaging timely discussions in the mediated public sphere. In highlighting these strengths across these chapters, I then segue into the most recent incarnation of the Yes Men story—the Yes Lab for Creative Activism.

Chapter Six

In “Expanding The Yes Men Brand,” I turn to some of the group's most recent activities; namely, their founding of the Yes Lab, a training ground of sorts for future Yes Men-style projects. The idea is simple: given the Yes Men's notoriety, (minor) celebrity, and visibility in the public sphere, they have shifted tactics yet again to introduce a model of activism that is easily reproducible. In training others to be Yes Men, the group is given even greater leverage to choose projects it cares about, and it frees them to open new pockets of activity for individuals, groups, and organizations that may already have a vision for social change, but that lack the means of executing that vision. This final case study, then, shows an activist group in transition trying to bring its vision of mass citizen engagement to fruition through a series of informal lectures, workshops, and meetings with community stakeholders (Occupy Wall Street, Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network). Their presence in Canada has already produced a number of actions—from the C.R.I.M.E. hoaxes perpetrated by Montreal-based activists seeking Haiti reconstruction reparations from the French

government to the youth vote mobs that shook university campuses during the 2011 Federal Election. Indeed the Yes Lab story serves as the perfect narrative arc for thinking about the deeper political motivations behind their hoaxing (and hoaxing in general). As the Yes Men make clear, they stage politically progressive hoaxes to demonstrate just how easy it can be to hijack a dominant media outlet and to bring important issues to a wider public. The goal, they argue, has always been to inspire citizens to expose wrongdoing and to stimulate broader public debate on matters of great importance to everyday people.

Conclusion

The concluding chapter makes a strong case for a deeper engagement with the wild and unpredictable culture of hoaxing. With the rise of Web 2.0 and social media, hoaxes will only continue to capture the popular imagination and will only further complicate our collective relationship to truth. While the Yes Men may provide a progressive template for media hoaxing, many media hoaxes embody destructive properties that can be harmful to a broad range of actors. As such, I advocate for greater media literacy and critical thinking skills on the part of everyday citizens and media consumers. As the Yes Men's hoaxes make explicit, hoaxes can be unpredictable, unruly, hilarious, wildly imaginative—not to mention strange. This book will challenge readers to question existing structures of leadership and governance, but most importantly, this work will inspire readers to reflect more seriously on the shifting nature of twenty-first information dissemination and consumption.

Length and delivery

- The estimated word count is 75,000 words;
- The manuscript is complete and I am ready to respond to any editorial suggestions the reviewers may have.

Permissions

Short bits and pieces of the manuscript are culled from previously published academic journal articles and book chapters. If securing permissions for these sections are too onerous, I am willing to re-write these sections entirely.

Pedagogical features

The book could include a teacher guide for inclusion in high school classrooms, a glossary of terms, and a compendium of important hoaxes and hoaxers.

Market and readership

The market for a book of this kind is very promising. The target demographic is necessarily broad: the book can be integrated in both high school and first-year undergraduate courses. The book could be widely adopted in a variety of courses in the following disciplines: Communication, Cultural Studies, Drama/Performance, English/Literary Studies, Journalism, Media Studies, Philosophy, Political Science, Propaganda Studies, Public Relations, and Sociology. More specifically, the book

could be integrated in courses on Mass Media, Internet Politics, Media Activism, Alternative Media, Introduction to PR and Journalism, Political Satire/Humour, Film and Documentary, Cultural Studies, Social Justice, and so on. Given the book's emphasis on North American examples, the primary markets for this book are American and Canadian undergraduate students. Based on the book's emphasis on the rapidly changing structures of contemporary media environments, the text will draw the attention of a diverse general readership: students, journalists, activists, artists, academics, marketers, the urban intelligentsia, comedians, cultural taste-makers, social justice advocates, media professionals—not to mention the multinational corporations and governments targeted by the Yes Men!

International markets

In terms of publication strategies, I would be more than willing to play an active role in the elaboration of any publication strategies for the book. As a keen observer of social media trends and practices, and as a careful observer of technological change, I may have some insight into how to market the book. Here are some initial suggestions:

- Present a TED Talk as a tie-in to the book (this is a particularly successful strategy for first-time authors)
- Offer web-only tie-ins (serial instalments of the book, leading up to publication)
- Publish interview snippets with the Yes Men
- Forge a partnership with [RSA Animate](#) (translating the larger themes and ideas of the book into comics)
- Release YouTube trailers/teasers
- Create a hoaxing library on the book's official site
- Sustain an active Twitter presence
- Present public lectures/symposia/presentations
- Publish book-related podcasts
- Offer various media interviews
- Tailor the book for university course adoption
- Craft a teacher's guide

Competition

In terms of assessing competing books in this area, it should be noted that no one has yet written a standalone book on/about the Yes Men. A recent spate of books have dealt with the politics of new media, online activism, and civic engagement. Among them, Matt Ratto and Megan Boler's edited collection, *DIY Citizenship: Critical Making and Social Media* (2014), Astra Taylor's *The People's Platform: Taking Back Power and Culture in the Digital Age* (2014), Stefania Milan's *Social Movements and Their Technologies: Wiring Social Change* (2013), Kristin Demetrious' *Public Relations, Activism, and Social Change Speaking Up* (2013), Paolo Gerbaudo's *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (2012), Amber Day's *Satire and Dissent: Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (2011), and Stephen Duncombe's *Dream: Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (2007). Each book presents a compelling picture of the unprecedented changes in our contemporary media landscape. Each respective text explores fundamental issues related to the uses of new media and online platforms, the power and potential of new social movements and activist networks, the unpredictable outcomes of civic and political engagement. More than this, each work addresses the current health and vitality of civic and activist projects, both online and off. These aren't competing books, so much as they are texts that readers of this book would find of interest.

One book that warrants special attention is the recently published *Pranksters: Making Mischief in the Modern World* (2014) by Kembrew McLeod. *Pranksters* represents a companion piece of sorts to my work. Just as my study brings the complex work of hoaxing (and hoaxers) to light, McLeod

offers an insightful look at the power of the prankster in American culture. Indeed, the emphasis in each text is to qualify and validate the power of these practices at the current moment—and while there is much overlap in the arguments presented—the subject matter and case studies differ enough not to overlap. Also of note is Gabriella Coleman’s *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Story of Anonymous* (Forthcoming 2014), a book that merges the activist politics of hackers and hoaxers in a work that expresses some of the same social justice concerns that appear in my book. The publication of the above works—and the recent appearance of the McLeod and Coleman texts—suggests that there is a market for *The Yes Men Hoax the World*.

Here’s why I think this book will enjoy great traction/momentum in the run-up to publication:

- The Yes Men have already established themselves as iconic figures on the Internet; their videos have earned anywhere from 5,000 to 500,000 views on YouTube alone;
- Their two award-winning documentaries—*The Yes Men* (2003) and *The Yes Men Fix the World* (2009)—have already achieved cult-like status; their third documentary (*The Yes Men Are Revolting*) recently premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival;
- Their pranks have garnered widespread media attention in major publications across the globe (*NYT*, *Washington Post*, *Wired*, *The Guardian*, *The Economist*, *BBC*, *CBC*, *Globe & Mail*, *Toronto Star*), inspiring continued debate surrounding the ethics of corporate and state institutions. These publications will have a stake in reviewing/publicizing the book;
- Their hoaxes engage issues as diverse as the environment, economics, food and agriculture, corporate responsibility, governance, globalization, news and information, politics, social justice, among others. The diversity of the book’s content will appeal to a broad, general readership;
- The controversies created by the Yes Men are now being replicated by a host of imitators in the public sphere, making their work increasingly relevant to understanding the current climate of media activism and civic participation. It is quite likely that hoaxes will be perpetrated in the run-up to publication, providing opportunities for sound bites and interviews.

Author and Contributor Information

Your details

Ian Reilly, Assistant Professor, Concordia University, Montreal, Quebec

I hold a Ph.D. in Literary Studies from the University of Guelph. My work on the Yes Men has appeared in well regarded academic journals and book collections. I currently teach in the Communication Studies Department at Concordia University. As a media scholar, I’ve been researching and teaching courses in new media, technology, humour, popular culture, and Internet activism since 2008.

i.reilly@concordia.ca

514 241 3887

5174 Avenue du Parc

Montreal, QC

H2V 4G6

Additional information

I have published widely in this area; I have taught several courses on Internet media, contemporary activism, satirical and political discourse; I have discussed my work in print, television, radio, and Internet news media. I would welcome the opportunity to publicize the book widely.

Sample material

In *The Yes Men: The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization* (published in 2004), two anti-globalization pranksters retell their travels across the globe, in which they meet with lawyers, managers, engineers, corporate stakeholders, and policymakers. In these meetings they address issues such as global capitalism, corporate wealth, genetically-modified food, hunger and starvation, globalization, and workers' rights—from the perspective of their employer, the World Trade Organization (WTO). Of course, the Yes Men have never been formally employed by the WTO, but they did canvas the globe on their behalf, serving as plausible WTO spokesmen in a variety of contexts—mostly as presenters at international conferences. As they themselves confess, impersonating the WTO was undeniably hilarious: they wore futuristic golden-coloured suits that boasted equally golden phalluses; they presented outlandish CGI-themed Powerpoint presentations that were completely incompatible with audience expectations; they simulated partnerships with McDonald's that sought to repackage human waste as hamburgers to be sold to Third World countries; they proposed the selling of American democracy through a system that would pair American citizens with corporate stakeholders in an online auction ("The price of a vote in California seemed to hover around \$1—a bargain"); finally, they would even go so far as to dissolve the WTO, thus eliminating their own "jobs" within the organization!

As far as the Yes Men were concerned, they were merely pushing the corporate logic of global markets to illogical extremes, highlighting the dangers of living in what they ironically describe as an "era of enlightened profit-seeking." The fact that these (then) unknown activists would incur such great risks to make a larger point about the deep systemic failures of a powerful entity like the WTO makes explicit the strength of their convictions and the resolve with which they carry out their work. On the face of it, it is patently ridiculous that they have been able to pull off so many high profile hoaxes. For over fifteen years, they have made outrageous statements, told extravagant lies, and generated juicy front-page headlines. And they continue to do so, all the while training and supporting the actions of groups wishing to reproduce the style, substance, and impact of their special brand of hoaxing. Their actions have become so ingrained in discussions of hoaxing that when media hoaxes now circulate, the Yes Men often serve as the first point of reference; their work has become an anchor point for commentators looking to describe the style, politik, or tactic of various hoaxing phenomena. They have become, in other words, cornerstones of any discussion pertaining to media hoaxing today.

What is immediately apparent to first-time audiences of the Yes Men is that fun, humour, and absurdity serve an essential role in virtually all of their actions. Strip the Yes Men of these three core elements and you might very well feel like you're on the receiving end of a preachy, moralizing, intellectual, left-of-centre, Marxist critique of global capitalism run amok! These branches of critique are well-known and warrant the kind of engaged discussion and debate that Marx initiated in 19th century Europe, but the larger critique of capitalism is all-too-often conveyed in sober and sombre tones, making it both less appealing and more challenging to engage in everyday life. When we introduce irony, parody, satire—not to mention quirky, oddball, and absurdist elements—into the mix, our willingness to listen to and engage with these critiques is heightened. When, for example, the likes of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert tackle decidedly unsexy policy issues such as the regulation of financial institutions or the oversight of the Internet economy, they do so with all the flair, panache, and gusto one might expect from stand-up comedians. What makes their work so relatable is how seamlessly they are each able to move from

political matters to popular culture, piercing the veil of seriousness so often attributed to current affairs with the keen eye of the comedic and satirical observer.

These instances of popular media and entertainment have now become the standard, bringing geopolitics and global affairs into the warm embrace of satirists and comedians looking to mine the boundless fits of human and institutional folly that characterize our era. The relay between sharp satirical commentary and deft critical analysis of cultural, political, and economic spheres of culture has proven an important hallmark of popular culture since the turn of the new century. Making humour central to the ways in which audiences encounter and (endeavour to) understand current events and contemporary phenomena is at the very heart of how interested parties wish to explain their stake in the world today. For the Yes Men, humour is *the* primary vehicle for making it into the news and of collaborating with journalists. Humour is also the necessary ingredient to bring disaffected, apathetic, or ignorant groups and individuals into the fold; it is the proverbial dangling carrot, the sugar-coated pill needed to get people to care about issues they may not otherwise have the time, interest, or attention needed to get on side. As their documentaries make clear from the outset, their wicked humour, biting satire, and the eruptions of laughter that ensue all serve as a powerful hook or incentive to keep people tuned in and turned on to some of their more pointed critiques of the misdeeds and misbehaviours of the targets they ridicule.

With laughter and humour foregrounding many of the pranks and hoaxes they create, the Yes Men prepare the way for a different kind of political engagement on the part of audiences—one that neither (de)limits politics to the realm of serious discourse nor uses conventional rhetorical modes of communication to make its point. By using laughter and humour as a weapon, those sympathetic to the more serious-minded Marxist and political-economic critiques of capitalism are better able to illustrate the shortcomings and maniacal underpinnings of globalization as it currently stands. And figures like Stephen Colbert, Jon Stewart, and the Yes Men (to name but a few) excel in this regard.