

what the  
f\*#k do  
you do  
that for?

"anti-advertising activist"

kyle magee

explains himself

1<sup>st</sup> edition.

printed on the land of the Kulin Nation, sovereignty never ceded, theft and genocide never conceded — respect and apologies to victims and survivors, past and present.

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some billboards i painted blank — 6 on street level and a big one over the top, corner of flemington road and harker street, north melbourne. this was sometime during 2005–2006, i can't remember how many times i painted over these billboards, maybe 5? i was such a stupid purist i never took photos, and i only have a few photos from this early period thanks to my friends. photo: benjamin roberts

## **how this happened**

when i was a 19-year-old university student, in my second year of a science/engineering degree, for the first time i started seriously contemplating where my life was heading.

i questioned the position i was on course to occupy in this global system — whether i could accept this position, and everything that it was based on, and still consider myself a 'good person'.

thinking seriously about all this forced me to confront the horrible injustice and destructive stupidity of the dominant human culture on planet earth — and the more i learned, or forced myself to fully comprehend, the more troubled i became.

so i deferred from university for a year and bought a round-the-world plane ticket, using the cover of a gap year to take some time to think.

further reflection and experience only confirmed that my tyrannical conscience would not allow me to be in any way complicit with a global system that is destroying our habitat and millions of innocent lives — nothing i could do within the present system could get me off the hook (as hard as i tried to wriggle off), because nothing

presented a serious challenge to the root of our problems, it was all just treating symptoms.

it had become logically inescapable that if i was to have any respect for myself, i would have to live my life in complete opposition to the root causes of global injustice and destruction — i just had to figure out what that meant exactly.

to me it was clear that all our major problems<sup>1</sup> are caused, and/or denied solution, through the illegitimate power of global for-profit interests.

it was also obvious to me that if we were serious about tackling the illegitimate power that for-profit interests wield in our so-called democracies, the for-profit media-advertising system<sup>2</sup> was the first thing that had to go.

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1 global injustice (poverty, starvation, no medical access); environmental destruction; climate change; continuous armed conflict; violent discriminatory oppression and murder; economic exploitation; indigenous dispossession; etc. etc. (list far from exhaustive and in no particular order).

2 “for-profit media-advertising system” is the name i have given to the system that includes all for-profit advertising (i.e. the advertising of any profit-driven organisation) and all for-profit media companies funded by this advertising. i think it's important to view the system as a whole: the media funded by advertising is *not separate* from advertising — it is tailored primarily for the sale of advertising and is ideologically aligned with the broad common interests of for-profit organisations. it's hardly surprising that this system has no name, and can't be easily referred to as the distinct and interlocking system that it is. we have to identify, name and understand a system before we can oppose it — the for-profit media-advertising system that controls our public discourse certainly isn't going to

we can't realistically expect our democracies to be able to free themselves from for-profit supremacy while we continue to allow for-profit media companies (funded by for-profit advertising) to control our mainstream public discourse, and thereby manipulate our political agenda and constantly attempt to influence our perceptions.

to me the media system of a representative democracy is as important an institution as the parliament, the judiciary and the public service (including police) — its integrity is vital, and any conflicts of interest intolerable.

we wouldn't allow direct for-profit control over the parliament, the judiciary, or the public service — yet we seem to think it's acceptable that our media be owned and run by for-profit companies, funded and punctuated by a deluge of for-profit advertising.

to have the media system of a supposed democracy owned, funded and controlled by the richest and most illegitimately powerful interests in society, is too outrageously anti-democratic for words — this situation should never have been allowed to exist, and we should put up with it no longer.

forcing the decline of the for-profit media-advertising system would allow and require us to establish a

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help us do that.

mainstream media system that's actually suitable for a democracy: one principled, publicly accountable, well-resourced and credible — one funded in a way that would give it the best chance at democratic integrity.

conveniently there is a simple and direct way to stand against this for-profit media-advertising system — outdoor for-profit advertisements (billboards) present the perfect practical and symbolic target for physical intervention.

so i decided i should spend my life protesting against for-profit advertising in public space — in this way i could stand directly for what i see as the obvious first step in the democratisation of global politics: the complete abolition of for-profit advertising from our public media-space<sup>3</sup>.

abolishing for-profit advertising from our public media-space would be positive in itself, immediately alleviating all the harmful direct effects of advertising — but just as importantly, it would also cut the main funding source of the for-profit media companies that dominate our mainstream, clearing the way for the democratic media systems we desperately need.

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3 by the term "public media-space" i mean the combination of public space and media (print, television, radio, digital (internet/phones)) which makes up our public political landscape.

outlawing the public dissemination of for-profit advertising would mean we would not be exposed to advertising unless we gave our direct and bribe-free consent to see it — so only when we deliberately sought advertising would we see it, and for many of us, i imagine this would be never, unless we wanted a laugh.

the global political supremacy of profit-driven interests can seem unbreakable, but i believe the for-profit media-advertising system is both its greatest strength & its greatest weakness — it's the point we should attack:

- for-profit advertising in public space is vulnerable to mass intervention worldwide — this political action clearly identifies the problem, acts directly against it, and creates the point of conflict that will bring this deliberately suppressed issue to light.
- the for-profit media-advertising system is completely indefensible in terms of democracy: either for-profit interests are allowed to dominate and control our media system, or we can have democracy — a committed social movement cannot fail to ultimately win this argument.
- a successful movement for the abolition of the for-profit media-advertising system would see power rapidly shift away from for-profit interests — this victory would give us all good reason to drop our political cynicism and become engaged political actors, opening our democratic process to enable the major changes we need in the next few decades.

the idea of carrying out this action (even though i knew it would be met with confusion, derision, a life of punishment etc.) caused me to feel immense relief — finally i'd found a way to live that satisfied my conscience, and that was the main thing, because my life was pretty much unbearable on the wrong side of that savage thing.

so not long after my return to australia, i graduated myself from university ('dropped out'), bought a paint roller and proceeded to baffle the shit out of everybody by blanking out some billboards (in the middle of the day, wearing high-vis workers' gear).

it was over ten years ago that i painted my first billboard, and I won't stop until the damaging industry of for-profit advertising does.

so far i've been convicted over 30 times and jailed on 6 separate occasions for a total of about 6 months.

i keep a blog of the ongoing protest, including videos of actions, at: [www.democraticmediaplease.net](http://www.democraticmediaplease.net)

over time i've scaled down my activities from painting over large billboards to covering small street-level advertising panels with black posters that are easily washed off — i also now include a white a4 poster with

text (placed on top of the black sheets) that tries to explain the protest simply<sup>4</sup>.

even with this new postering approach (which is cleaned off by the regular cleaners at no additional cost to the advertising company, and leaves no lasting damage whatsoever) i'm still being handcuffed and sent to jail — i'm sure the method of protest i use will change, so watch my website for developments.

over the last 10 years of my "anti-advertising activism" — which i prefer to call my professional advocacy for democratic media systems — i've received many of the same questions, comments and criticisms, so i've decided the most engaging way to answer all these questions in a piece of writing would be to address them directly.

this introduction is just to give you a general idea of what i'm doing, why i'm doing it, and how i got to this point — i'm sure much of what i've said here has raised further questions, and hopefully these questions will be answered in the body of this booklet.

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4 just one example of the ever-changing a4 protest poster is on the next page — i always find them frustratingly inadequate: they have to be so brief and reductive on media issues few people even consider, and coupled with the ambitious objective, the whole thing is easily written off as ludicrous by people born and raised in a culture saturated with advertising.

for-profit advertising is psychologically and politically damaging — we can and should abolish it from our media & public spaces.

our mainstream media is dominated by for-profit companies (funded by advertising) that distort and corrupt our politics.

if we want real democracy, we need a media system with integrity that will serve all equally, not one that is owned, funded and run by the rich minority.

this advertising panel was covered in protest against the for-profit media-advertising system.

for more info: [democraticmediaplease.net](http://democraticmediaplease.net)

the questions/criticisms are listed in no particular order, and it's written so you can jump to whichever answer(s) you want first — consequently there's a bit of repetition if you read the whole thing, but after hearing so much bullshit repeated ad nauseam by our for-profit overlords, i feel slightly more comfortable repeating myself in response.

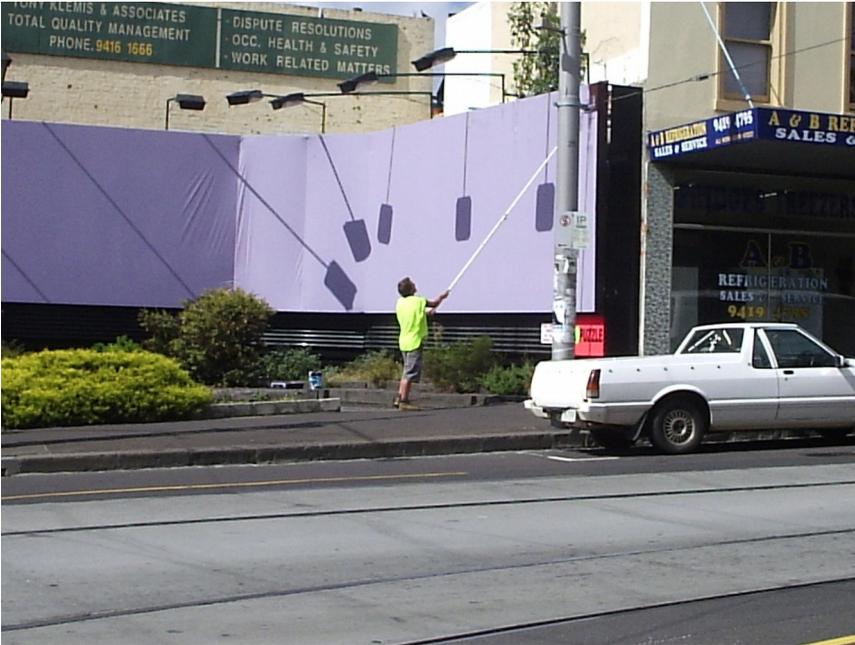
if you still have questions/criticisms that aren't answered here, email me and i'll answer them personally:  
kyle@democraticmediaplease.net  
and i might also include the answer in later editions.

any messages of support, complex ambivalence, respectful disagreement, or outright abuse (this is always amusing) can also be sent to the above email address.

yolo,

kyle magee a.d.m.s.(p)  
(advocate for democratic media systems (professional))

melbourne,  
australia,  
september 2016.



an action shot of me painting blank another favourite billboard — corner of smith and gertrude street, fitzroy, sometime 2005–2006. again i don't know how many times i painted over this one, but it was enough for me to eventually refer to this place as the 'jail portal', as i was taken directly to jail from here a number of times. that utility vehicle next to me was my work ute, until my parents repossessed it in protest against my career choice (fair enough i guess, i respect direct action) — overall they've done amazingly well under the stress of having me as a child (love you mum and dad, xo).  
photo: michael virgona

## **a note on style**

i just write how i want to write — i'm trying to express myself after all, not a set of grammatical expectations.

i don't use caps (just 'coz), and i use structure and punctuation in a way that works for me — the substance of what i'm saying is the only important thing.

i also 'swear' and joke sometimes, just like people do — i think the demand that all valid political communication be made in the overly-complex and sleep-inducing jargon of the political classes is a way of depoliticising and disempowering the majority — while also discrediting any plain-speaking that could cut directly to the root of our global problems.

i'm not relying on references either — i believe we only really need to think and reflect critically on our own knowledge and experience to see that our media system is anti-democratic and massively problematic — we don't need references to prove the sky is blue on a clear sunny day: we can all see it if we want to look.

i started writing like this before i realised it would be such a big deal for some people — turns out it's a good first exercise in looking past irrelevant convention, which is necessary to understand what i'm on about ;)

## “what's wrong with advertising?”

this is an enormous question<sup>5</sup> — there are so many things, from so many perspectives, that are wrong with advertising that it is hard to know where to start, or how to ever end — i'll just say a few things briefly, but of course this question runs throughout.

i think the direct effects of being bombarded daily with hundreds of advertisements are intuitively understood by most people:

- we are being pushed toward materialistic value sets that measure our worth by the amount of expensive shit we own — these value sets lower our happiness and distract us from each other & the higher values which give us real satisfaction in life.
- at a time when we need to wind back consumption to avoid environmental catastrophe, and to think seriously about global injustice and its historical & structural basis, we are being repeatedly told that the more we mindlessly consume the happier we'll be — if we are

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5 one short(ish) scholarly analysis that tackles this question was carried out by the public interest research centre in britain (with the support of the wwf-uk) entitled: 'think of me as evil? opening the ethical debates in advertising' (you'll find it easily online). it's really good, but it speaks only of the direct negative impacts of advertising, so it doesn't tackle the equally important but generally neglected half of the issue — the for-profit media system that advertising funds. i also wrote about this report in a post on my website (when i was angry):  
<https://democraticmediaplease.net/2013/03/establishment-progressives-edge-toward-insightful-understanding-of-our-political-reality/>

somehow still concerned by the problems of social injustice and environmental degradation, we are told consuming certain products will address these problems for us — consumption is presented as the solution to every problem we could possibly face.

- children, who are yet to develop the strong identities and critical analysis skills that enable any kind of resistance, are directly targeted — and even advertising aimed at adults negatively affects a child's perception of the world and their developing identities.

- we have a ridiculous gender binary pushed down our throats that alienates us from our full, true selves — increasing division between genders and causing immense suffering, especially for those whose gender identities openly defy the false binary.

- our true desires for greater social connection, enhanced freedom, quality leisure time, satisfying sexual relationships etc. are appealed to by the ridiculous claim that some magical product<sup>6</sup> can deliver these things — this diverts attention from the political achievements that can actually satisfy our social desires:

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6 american academic professor sut jhally produced a great lecture/film in 1998 called *advertising and the end of the world*, and amongst other things, it speaks of the 'magic' properties advertising attempts to imbue products with — it even briefly mentions the problem of the for-profit media being funded by advertising: “we've turned our media systems into vehicles for selling products, and you simply cannot understand media content without understanding its relationship to advertising”. available here: <http://thoughtmaybe.com/advertising-and-the-end-of-the-world/> (thoughtmaybe.com has many more great films on similar topics)

equal political power, the end of exploitation, less work, more free time etc.

- we are made to feel inadequate, compared to 'cultural ideals' that are mostly impossible and not necessarily desirable, contributing to a range of mental health problems.

- an effect of constantly being sold something is an inherent distrust of the motives of others ('they only smile so they can rob you'), and we begin to accept we should only look after ourselves just like everyone else is — adding to political cynicism and disengagement.

- we are made to feel irrelevant in our cities, and inferior in a 'culture' that we have no influence over — instead a spectacular lifestyle is presented above us, one that we can never really achieve, but must continuously chase after through an ever-escalating series of purchases.<sup>7</sup>

- it undemocratically grants the greatest and most powerful voice only to the richest entities — those that are both non-human and completely amoral in their single-minded pursuit of profit.

i hate to generalise, but advertising generally reflects the world-view of its creators — rich white men and their sometimes-gender-and-race-diverse acolytes —

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7 this phenomenon was identified in 1960's france by guy debord, a member of the situationist international, and was published widely, including in his book *the society of the spectacle* — although i thought his analysis was insightful i can't recommend the book because i found it impossible not to put down — lost in translation?

consequently we end up with an overwhelming mass of image-based consumerist-propaganda that normalises and reinforces all the problematic attitudes (sexist, racist, homophobic, ableist, classist, transphobic, list goes on...) that it should be our priority to overcome.

the advertising industry costs over a trillion dollars a year globally — this isn't just a shameful waste, it's a huge community expenditure that actively damages individuals, our societies and our environment — we should be spending this money fixing the world instead of fucking it further.

but what I think is the worst effect of advertising doesn't seem to occur to as many people, and certainly doesn't get as much public criticism: advertising funds the for-profit companies that make up our mainstream media — installing for-profit media companies (representing their for-profit sponsors) as the grand arbiters of our popular culture, public discourse and political agenda.

this has enabled for-profit interests to manipulate our public consciousness and the political process of 'our democracy' for generations, having deep impacts across our society, all to the advantage of 'neo-liberal' globalised capitalism.

the effect of these manipulations over generations

becomes invisible and self-perpetuating — for example it is in the interests of globalised capitalism that the 'economic system' appears as a completely natural and unproblematic order of things, so for generations this is how it has been repeatedly presented, and as a result most intelligent 'educated' people of the 'developed democracies' actively participate in a collective ignorance/denial of the centuries of violent imperialism and colonialism that have constructed the current 'economic system' of continuing exploitation.

our entire global 'economic system' is a deliberate and gross injustice, stripping the resources and labour from the poorest people, concentrating wealth in the hands of the deprived few — we cannot act to address this issue if we continue to allow it to be publicly suppressed.

this is just one example of the verifiable truths that are effectively deleted from our public political consciousness by the calculated actions of the 'credible' streams of the for-profit media-advertising system — other notable deletions are the ecological limits we are currently recklessly accelerating toward, threatening a devastating collapse of the first truly global civilisation.

to gain a sound collective political consciousness — to actually face reality — advertising, its media, and the false consciousness it supports, need to be abolished.



another smith & gertrude paint job — this was the first place i was arrested, after an advertising company employee giving a tour to potential ad-space buyers drove past and observed me in the act. the ad company rep and the ad-buyer reps all got out of the car and the ad company rep asked me what i was doing. i said “my job” and continued casually working while everyone stood around and watched, the ad company rep said he had called the police, i said that was fine. some of the buyers were helpfully telling me the bits i had missed. one of the buyers declared: “this is the most confusing thing i have ever seen”, no doubt confused that a person could do this and not try to ‘get away with it’. a second ad company guy arrived soon after and angrily demanded to know why i was doing what i was doing, i told him it was a bit of a long story and asked him if he could wait until i was finished. he then knocked my painting pole out of my hands and stamped on it against a ledge. i bent down and picked it up, observing the damage, and said “settle down mate, i think you’ve bent my pole”. at that point he snatched my pole, furiously bent it back and forth until it snapped, threw it at the billboard, and got right up in my face threatening to punch me. the calmer ad rep talked him down saying “it’s not worth it”, then as violence was narrowly avoided, the state violence administrators rolled around the corner to handcuff and take me away. photo: sam wallman

## **“so which ads do you cover over?”**

i cover over any and all advertising for profit-driven companies that projects into our public space — doesn't matter whether it's for banks, phones, alcohol, fashion, entertainment, cars, gambling, airlines, fast food, packaged sugar drinks, whatever...

it is *all for-profit advertising in our public media-space* that i am saying is a damaging, unnecessary and wasteful practice that we would be much better off without.

i'm not taking issue with individual products or advertising campaigns (even when i could), i'm rejecting that for-profit entities have any right to use their huge financial resources to anti-democratically dominate our public spaces and media with their advertising bullshit.

## **“of all the things to be concerned about, why advertising? what about war, poverty etc.? aren't there much more pressing problems we should deal with first?”**

i'm very concerned about all the problems anyone could fairly consider as more urgent than the negative influence of advertising — it is exactly these problems that mean i cannot cooperate with the systems that

continue to create and sustain them.

these problems (poverty, war, environmental destruction) are *symptoms* of a central political problem, and if we can't address that, we'll spend our lives dutifully treating symptoms while failing to challenge the systems that continuously replicate them.

i'm looking for root-cause solutions to our global political, economic and psychological problems — i believe democratisation of our media systems (the abolition of the for-profit media-advertising system) is the cause that will help all causes.

i think the majority of people recognise that a central cause (if not *the* central cause) of global dysfunction/injustice/destruction is that for-profit interests (corporate interests, multinational interests, capitalist interests, 'the business community', rich-greedy-arsehats, whatever you want to call them) have far too much political power in global affairs, all of it illegitimate.

stripping this illegitimate for-profit power is what will enable us to work toward the root-cause solutions of all our major global problems — and the most obvious and entirely necessary way to achieve this is to take control of our media and politics away from the capitalists who

we presently allow to run them.

our media should be a great democratic tool — instead we are allowing it to be used (by the plutocratic enemies of real democracy) as an obstacle to critical understanding and political engagement: a deliberately depoliticising and depressing mess.

for-profit media is designed to keep us ignorant, misinformed, cynical, confused, afraid, hopeless — it presents a world that cannot be made sense of, and wants to misdirect our anger toward anything other than the for-profit supremacy that truly deserves it.

ultimately, for-profit interests want us to become 'smart and realistic' enough to give up on the world and just 'look after ourselves' — then they can sell us products on the false promise that they will solve the social and spiritual poverty of our lives of servitude to material accumulation.

the for-profit media-advertising system presents the greatest single roadblock to advancement toward global justice and democracy — once we smash through it, our democratic systems will become empowering and powerful, and we can build momentum based on a realistic optimism that could do amazing things.

with a democratic media system across the globe, we can start facing reality, form a sane political agenda, and achieve the sort of root-cause solutions that our for-profit overlords will never allow — justice, democracy and sustainability being so notoriously unprofitable.

**“but you're just advertising your point of view!!”**

there's a big difference between for-profit advertising and the political expression of a human being.

advertising is the expression of a sociopathic, non-human, profit-driven entity that cares for nothing except extracting wealth from you — although it will often pretend it cares for the things humans care for, if that helps to get the profits out of the humans.

the political expressions of actual humans on the other hand (while they can also be materially self-interested and otherwise unethical) are what democracy is based on.

we all have a right to freely develop and share our political views, and this right is massively diminished while for-profit advertising is allowed to dominate our public space and fund the for-profit media.

the for-profit media-advertising system privileges the expressions of the rich minority and those that suit the prevalent capitalist agenda, while concealing and discrediting those opinions that question and challenge it (as a silenced majority of compassionate people do).

the fact that many people don't immediately see a difference between for-profit advertising and personal political expression is a symptom of our times — we often accept the neo-liberal myth that people, just like corporations, are profit-maximising machines that do no care for other humans and only seek to manipulate and use them instrumentally, without care, for their own egoistic gratification.

i think we should consciously reject this cynical, cowardly and false view of human psychology — we shouldn't be afraid to admit we care deeply, we should be brave enough to admit if we're hurting, and we definitely shouldn't be ashamed to say we desperately want to see a just and sane global system, one built from a basis of mutual respect and love.

i definitely have something to gain personally from pushing for political change, and it's totally selfish, but it's not the narrowly-defined type of selfishness we usually speak of today — the self is not inherently bad, usually it just wants justice for all.



when i scaled down to painting over street level ads, i decided the best place to protest the laws that protect advertising was right out the front of melbourne's three courts, corner of lonsdale street and william street. 'offending' similar to this was the subject of my human rights appeal to the victorian supreme court in 2012, where 'justice emilios kyrou' said he couldn't protect my expression because: "even persons who commit the most heinous crimes may claim to be exercising their right to freedom of expression in performing the acts that constitute those crimes. a mass murderer may claim to be conveying a political message about immigration policies by killing innocent people and a rapist may claim to be conveying a message about the role of women by sexually assaulting them." this statement is of course totes stoopid, displaying a stunning failure to comprehend basic charter law. 'justice kyrou' has since been promoted to the court of appeal. photo: alex macbeth

**"you're a smart guy, surely you can think of a better way — a legal way — to raise this issue..."**

i have heard this sort of sentence many times, from magistrates, police, psychologists, psychiatrists, and citizens whose motivations baffle me.

it is funny that people say "you're a smart guy", while they simultaneously presume i am stupid enough to have failed to think of the obvious alternatives and to seriously consider the consequences of my chosen course of action.

this statement is usually followed by some *amazing* alternative suggestions of how i could raise this issue — suggestions i have of course thought of, and found entirely unsatisfactory.

many brilliant and credible academics have written well-referenced books about for-profit media corruption and the social, cultural and psychological impacts of advertising and consumerism — many very intelligent people have tried all they can think of within the law to elevate these issues, yet the issues are still completely absent from mainstream politics — there is no good reason for anyone to expect to be able to mount a serious challenge to these issues if they confine

themselves to those same legal approaches.

generally speaking, practically-effective protests are deemed 'illegal' wherever possible — those in illegitimate power don't write laws to be fair, they write laws that ensure they retain their power — so it's hardly surprising that an effective protest against the for-profit media-advertising system, even of the most trivial nature, is readily ruled illegal.

the choice to act in the way i do is of course not the most preferable in terms of the material conditions of my personal life, but because the demands of my conscience<sup>8</sup> are more important to my well-being, i have had to accept that our political system is built to suppress ideas like the one i seek to raise, that all lawful avenues are woefully inadequate, and a life of direct action and conflict with the law is the best of my bad options.

many who understand the importance of the problem of advertising (and who you'd think would have the

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8 my conscience is a part of my self, so acting to satisfy it is a selfish act. i stress this because i find the dominant narrow conception of selfishness in this society very pessimistic: it assumes that the self is inherently and incurably materialistic and depraved, that it cares nothing for others and must be controlled by something outside of the self — this is obviously complete bullshit, but if we believe it, it's a very effective way of keeping us under control ("i'd be a fool to care about others when no one gives a shit about me, i've just got to look after number one like everyone else").

emotional intelligence to realise it's quite rude to tell people you barely know how they should live their life better) nonetheless seem intent on convincing me i've taken the wrong approach — i've tried to stop taking offence when this happens, and instead see it as a person struggling with themselves to continue to rationalise their own choices.

the judiciary of course speak most confidently (and patronisingly) against my course of action — seemingly oblivious to the centuries of history of political change brought about by social movements deemed 'illegal' at the time.

of course the honourable justices could recognise their part in upholding an unjust system and dismiss the charges<sup>9</sup>, but that would involve taking a personal stand on this issue which would attract strong condemnation from the entire for-profit power structure — faced with a decision between justice and the smoothness of their careers, unfortunately all the honourable justices i have

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9 if you think it's beyond a judicial officer's power to dismiss charges: in a sydney court in 1993, magistrate pat o'shane dismissed charges against four women charged with 'damaging' a sexist underwear billboard depicting a woman being sawn in half. magistrate o'shane also used the opportunity to speak her mind about violent patriarchal society being the real villain. most of the for-profit media preferred to demonise the first indigenous magistrate for her righteous 'anger', but *green left weekly* actually published what she said, which is tear-jerkingly awesome: <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/and-aint-i-woman-pat-oshanes-good-reasons>

appeared before have ruled that their careers should remain nice and silky (while blaming their violent and unjustifiable actions on me: “look what you made me do! your mum's upset!”).

this is the 'justice system' in our 'democracy': no caring elders to listen to valid concerns and good reasons, just jail from a bunch of excuse-makers who accept no moral responsibility for their personal actions — i'd be super stoked to be shown this isn't always the case, but in 10 years experience of 'as your honour pleases', it's all i've seen.

this 'illegal' method of protest, on top of being my only possibly effective option, also achieves the aim of revealing the hypocrisy of our 'justice system' — nobody can defend the for-profit media-advertising system in terms of democracy and justice, that is why none of the judiciary have ever tried.

**“but surely you know you're just going to fail.”**

the only way i could fail would be if i didn't stand for what i think is right.

it's the failure of the entire human species i'm concerned about, and i can't see it as a personal failure of mine if i

try as best i can to prevent that, whatever the outcome.

it seems a big thing that stops people from throwing their lives into 'revolutionary' activity is that they want to be assured of victory before they commit or risk anything — likelihood of ultimate victory is irrelevant to me, i have no peace or place in this system to risk, and i feel compelled to fully oppose what i know is wrong.

millions of people are suffering and dying, and we're destroying the ecosystems that sustain us, only because we are getting bullied and ruled by a bunch of profiteering fuckwits: "better not try to oppose this, the odds are against me and i will most likely fail, and then i'd be a failure" — obviously there are understandable considerations that can lead people to decide against active opposition, but fear of 'being a failure' shouldn't be one of them.



this ad campaign — for 'naughty-punk' corporate apparel — especially pissed me off with its paint-splattered aesthetic appeal to rebellion. it was placed on the same tram shelter that my authentically rebellious use of paint got me held on remand for 72 days. i was never charged for pulling off these stickers that covered entire stops, i even asked the ad company rep in court why this 'damage' wasn't mentioned, but she only mumbled some rubbish — i think maybe it's because they're 'technically' illegal, but i haven't seen these whole-tram-stop ads since. stills: jordan brown

## **“you need a whole movement, you can't do anything by yourself.”**

i totally agree that a broad political movement, especially a global one, would be far more effective at raising this issue than the actions of any individual could be — but saying that, even the greatest social movements begin with, and are made up of, the actions of individuals.

people who make this statement have made the assumption that i'm doing this on my own, but that's not true at all.

firstly, while i'm alone on the charge sheet for my individual actions, i'd be useless (or perhaps dead) without all the moral and practical support i have received and continue to (thanks friends, love youse ;) ).

secondly, my actions come from a long history of similar **illegal** activism, for instance: in australia in the 1970's and 80's the **illegal** social movement buga-up (billboard utilising graffitists against unhealthy promotions) targeted the advertising of unhealthy products such as tobacco and alcohol — this helped build political pressure for legislation passed in 1994 to ban the advertising of tobacco products on billboards (it had been banned from tv and radio since 1976).

the work of buga-up and the eventual total ban on cigarette advertising demonstrates that advertising has been acknowledged to have a considerable effect, that legislation to ban advertising is simple to implement and easy to enforce, and that **illegal, confrontational** social activism is often required to push through political change (changes to the law itself).

currently a movement against for-profit advertising is growing around the world, concerned with the role of advertising in perpetuating the rabid consumerism, ecological carnage and escalating injustice of globalised, unbridled capitalism.

an as-yet-unnamed international alliance of anti-advertising artist/activists (which i was happy to be invited to join) has recently started organising, and the first coordinated global actions will occur in march 2017.

the alliance so far includes déboulonneurs [france] (deboulonneurs.org), public ad campaign [u.s.] (publicadcampaign.com), brandalism [u.k.] (brandalism.org.uk), consume hasta morir [spain] (letra.org), no-ad day [germany](noadday.org), résistance à l'agression publicitaire [france] (antipub.org) and proyecto squatters [brazil] (proyectosquatters.blogspot.com.au), amongst others.

our argument is strong, the research and experts back us up, and we will force change if we throw our lives at this like global justice and our collective survival depend on it (as they surely do).

many people in the 'developed' world have the same concerns, feeling the poverty of living in a society of material abundance and moral bankruptcy — we feel the desperation, but often we just don't know what to do — it's people in this situation that i encourage to seriously consider joining this movement.

i want to see this global movement solidify, continue to expand, lift its ambitions, and ultimately win — my actions contribute all i can to that.

**“but advertising doesn't affect me, and people aren't stupid, why don't you just ignore it like everyone else does?”**

we can all look at an individual advertising campaign and say "oh that doesn't work on me", and maybe that particular campaign doesn't make you buy that particular product — but whether or not every individual advertising campaign works on us is not really the issue — the total effect advertising has on the society it saturates is far more important to analyse.

the fact that every profit-mad company finds advertising to be a good investment<sup>10</sup> should be enough to convince us that advertising is indeed effective — even if the slick and sexy ad for *brand x* can't convince us that *brand x* is objectively best, at least we now know *brand x* is a real player in its market, and that's something.

with every brand in every market promoting its products throughout our public media-space — bombarding us with hundreds of advertising images daily, dominating our public spaces as well as the mainstream media system funded and shaped by advertising — the combined impact on our entire social and political structure is profound.

advertising is the single greatest, most expensive and longest running propaganda campaign in human history — dramatically expanding following world war 2, advertising now costs the world over a trillion dollars annually — if advertising has no other negative consequence, it is definitely wasting a lot of money and a lot of people's effort that could be much better spent.

the exact effect of advertising is hard to demonstrate concretely — but what we do know just by looking at it is

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10 which is fully tax-deductible by the way — meaning zero tax is paid on corporate income that is spent on advertising... so advertising is effectively subsidised by government tax breaks, just like donations to charities are... where's the tabloid outrage about “our tax dollars” here i wonder?

that advertising encourages us to consume more, to have more materialistic values, to be more individualistic (less concerned with others), and to seek out luxurious and opulent indulgences in vain attempts to try and fill the gaping void of meaninglessness and disconnection — these are definitely influences we could do without, and it seems to me to that advertising achieves its aims to large degree.

the for-profit media that advertising funds certainly does nothing to stand in the way of the cultural transformation toward apolitical materialism that advertisers encourage — the for-profit media-advertising system works harmoniously to distract us with shiny/sexy things, inculcate political apathy, and manipulate the political process to the advantage of for-profit organisations.

after many decades of 'democracy', with the for-profit media-advertising system controlling our public media-space, for-profit interests just keep having their way with our democracy, and the rich keep getting richer — the top 1% now own more than the other 99% — that the for-profit media-advertising system plays a key role in this situation is clear, and this affects all of us.

even if we were to set aside the impact advertising has on the society of critically-thinking adults, we can't

ignore the impact it has on children who are yet to develop their critical faculties — banning advertising aimed at children would be a start, but it doesn't go far enough, because advertising aimed at adults also influences children as they develop ideas on how and what they should be in life.

i know how damaging the influence of advertising on children can be from the direct experience of growing up in this advertising culture — so i'm not going to just stand by and let this happen to other kids, including my own child.

i'm personally furious that as a vulnerable and impressionable child i was fed ideas about success, masculinity, and sexuality (to mention just a few) that were both incorrect and psychologically destructive — after being misled and having my development set back, the battle to dislodge these ingrained ideas took years, and i still have to work hard to keep my mind on who and how i really want to be, and what success means to me.

obviously advertising isn't the only force at play in these issues — but as a kid, sucking up everything in an attempt to understand the world and achieve validation, the imagery of advertising is a deeply powerful psychological influence that marks us in the crucial

stages of our development.

what advertising does to our youth is not right, it's child abuse, it's cultural imperialism — at the risk of sounding like an evangelical christian, it's a fucking materialist vortex of anguish, depravity and doom.

if anyone is calling anyone stupid, treating anyone with contempt, it's the companies that invade and colonise our lives with advertising against our will — manipulating our children, completely dominating our political system, and laughing all the way to the bank — while still having the audacity to ask us to be grateful for what 'they fund'<sup>11</sup> with profits they fleeced from our communities, and never paid any tax on.

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11 for example apparently 'they fund' our transport infrastructure (building and maintaining bus/tram stop shelters, etc.), but really the financial benefit to the public is marginal if it exists at all (advertising companies make a lot of money, while lowering the costs of the transport companies marginally, but that is more likely to increase the profits of the transport company than lower your ticket price), the social and political cost is devastating, and ultimately we as a community pay for it all anyway through all the products we buy from companies that advertise (like a hidden tax). they also claim to fund our media, our cultural events etc. — but again, any financial benefit to the public is vastly outweighed by the negatives, and the money we receive was taken from us in the first place.



i've been trying to explain to them for years, some of them kinda get it, but they don't *really* get it, you know?

stills: stephanie michalef & victoria police

**“we might not consent to advertising in public space, but when we choose to watch tv or read a magazine etc. we have consented.”**

the argument that we have consented to advertising every time we choose to consume media that contains advertising is disturbingly widespread — i call it the 'weak consent argument' (i'm not calling it the 'terribly weak consent argument' in the interests of fair and balanced reporting).

unsurprisingly the 'weak consent argument' is deployed and promoted by the advertising and for-profit media industries — but what is frustrating to me is that it has become so ubiquitous that even some people who detest advertising strangely accept it.

a lot of people who oppose public space advertising point out that there is not even a weak consent argument to be made in the case of outdoor advertising — when we walk down the street we haven't even been offered and accepted some kind of media bribe before we've been slapped with advertising — that while we are free to turn off our tv or radio, or put down the newspaper, we can't turn off billboard advertising.

while there is some truth to this argument, i don't like that these 'anti-advertising campaigners' tend to imply

(and believe) that if we have chosen to consume media with advertising in it, we have chosen to consume advertising — that if we don't want to be exposed to advertising in our media, then it is our responsibility to go to the tremendous effort of isolating ourselves from all media that contains advertising.

we are always bribed into exposure to advertising — we generally don't like ads, would prefer not to see them, but are stuck with them because they are jammed inside or between the things we actually want to see — if there is a way around exposure to advertising, we generally take that, proving that we never consented, never wanted advertising, and didn't choose it when we chose to consume something else.

almost everything in our culture presently contains advertising — it shouldn't be our duty to cut ourselves off from our entire culture just because we quite fairly don't want to be exposed to advertising against our will — we should have enough respect for ourselves to value our own right to refuse consent, to say 'no' and have that 'no' respected.

if it is supposed to be our duty to avoid advertising in media, then why should we not also be asked to leave the city if we want to avoid billboard advertising? we know cities have laws that allow billboards, yet we want

the things city life has to offer us, so we choose to live in the city — isn't this just the same kind of weak consent argument as the “you watched tv therefore you deserve to be advertised at” argument? — “don't like billboards? fuck off to the mountains then!!”

these are our cities, our media systems, our democracies, and our cultures — we can and should decide to outlaw the anti-democratic domination of all elements of our collective public lives — placing advertising behind a firewall that only our direct and bribe-free consent can open.

**“so you want state-controlled media? like china has? and you think that would be better?”**

in the self-aggrandising 'developed democracies' we tend to scoff at the idea of state-controlled media in foreign lands as such an obvious propaganda machine, yet we ignore or dismiss that the media in our supposed democracies is controlled by multinational for-profit interests — just as clearly a propaganda machine for those who truly hold power in '1st world democracies' & global politics.

what i think we need is neither a state-controlled media

nor a for-profit-controlled media — we need a democratic media system: one funded and/or subsidised with public money and constitutionally mandated to carry out its democratic function with equal accountability to all citizens.

i want a media that is mandated to scrutinise the living shit out of government, 'business' and anything and everything that's in the public interest — including the operation of the democratic media system itself.

the parliament, the judiciary, the public service (including the police) are all publicly funded — this is to ensure they know who they work for, and that their funding doesn't compromise their integrity, but also because there is really no other way to fund them: these services are just the operating cost of democracy.

i think we need to demand the same level of integrity from our media as we do from the parliament, judiciary, and public service.

our media is arguably the most important democratic service, as it is what connects all other elements (the parliament, judiciary, and public service) together with the public and holds everything to account — a strong media is what can deliver a fully transparent and accountable democratic system, where corruption is

quickly exposed and rooted out.

we need a broad democratic media system split into several independent and competitive entities that can raise each others standards and keep each other in check — in the absence of for-profit media, this new democratic mainstream media system would rapidly rehabilitate our politics.

this sort of media system will at least give us a chance of surviving ourselves and moving toward real global justice — but the only way we are going to get a media system like this is if we demand & institute it ourselves.

## **“what about the public broadcasters we already have?”**

they're not even close to enough — as a minority in the media system, public broadcasters can only expand the political conversation slightly from the narrow pro-ultra-capitalist path set by the for-profit majority.

in australia we see the public broadcaster (the abc) constantly threatened with funding cuts by governments — all for the alleged "left-wing bias" of periodically using critical analysis and not being as blindly pro-capitalist/neo-liberal as the rest of the capitalist media.



two more smith and gertrude paint jobs from earlier in the piece — after a while i stopped painting over them neatly and completely, so it was more obvious that they'd been painted over. photos: sam wallman

while for-profit companies dominate our mainstream media, for-profit ideology will dominate our politics — it's as simple as that — there is no democratic basis for the continued existence and supremacy of the for-profit media-advertising system.

only a broad and principled democratic media system — that operates without the interfering and overwhelming propaganda of for-profit media and advertising — can allow a clear and critical view of the present global political and economic reality.

## **“why do you get caught? why don't you try to get away with it?”**

physically removing/obscuring for-profit advertising is an essential part of what i'm doing, but it's not the most important part.

the most important part is that i'm publicly and openly refusing to live passively alongside the for-profit media-advertising system — so that if the 'justice system' wants to defend this logically indefensible system, they'll have to take my 'freedom'<sup>12</sup>.

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12 i put 'freedom' in scare quotes because my freedom from incarceration isn't really freedom at all, it's only the freedom to wander around all devastated like the sad boi i am — i actually feel more freedom in resistance, even though that means putting up with a lot of punishing bullshit with cops, judges, jail, prison guards, other prisoners etc.

i wouldn't be doing this unless i was willing to take responsibility and challenge the punitive system that defends by force an undemocratic and destructive media system.

i know i'm not doing anything wrong — so i have no reason to run or hide.

we know the state (our state apparently) can be a violent, unreasoning bully — but i don't think that means we should just give in and not stand publicly for our beliefs.

i think that by challenging our supposedly democratic state in a calm and rational way — forcing it to use physical violence instead of making its violence invisible by caving to the threat — we fully expose its hypocrisy and start to break the spell of its domination.

we do not have to accept this system just because of the threat of state violence — and we shouldn't — as soon as we don't, that's when things can start changing.

**“why don't you do bigger ones? do heaps of them?”**

i want the act of intervening against advertising to be as trivial as possible — as it's my intention to proudly claim

responsibility ('get caught') and be honest about my intention to continue to act in this way, causing a whole lot of 'permanent damage'<sup>13</sup> would only make it easier for the judiciary to falsely justify their punishment.

the protest has to be practically-effective, not only symbolic, but just effective enough to be beyond what the advertising companies and punitive system can easily ignore — this is so i can be satisfied i'm acting meaningfully on my beliefs, and also to create the conflict that can drive conversation on this issue.

the real thing i am being punished for is making a meaningful stance, signaling my intention to continue, and declining to accept the state's violent threats as a cogent reason to alter my behaviour — the 'damage bill' is only a convenient beside-the-point justification that i'll always try to minimise.

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13 i think it's ridiculous to consider intervening against the socially destructive practice of advertising as 'permanent damage', even if it involves the permanent decommissioning of advertising company 'assets' — charging someone for disabling advertising is like charging someone who just defused a bomb for the damage they caused while snipping wires.



another couple of failed attempts to convert police to a life of radical democratic activism (sad face) — luckily i don't give up easily. stills: jordan brown

## **"why don't you write something clever? or replace it with meaningful art?"**

my actions are deliberately stripped as much as possible of skill, imagination, artistic merit, aesthetic values, or any other thing that people might find impressive (except of course the ideas behind the action and my commitment to it).

i want what i am doing to be all about the idea behind it, so i choose the simplest, easiest and most direct way possible to express this underlying meaning, without distracting or extraneous appeals — this means i'll only get support from those who truly understand, and also makes it a mode of resistance that is very accessible to anyone who feels the same.

i'm not at all interested in grabbing attention through some overly spectacular or otherwise impressive method of protest, because any attention or 'support' gained that way misses the point.

if someone would be impressed if i abseiled down a building and used my awesome computer-hacking skills to display the dankest freshboi of an anti-advertising meme on an enormous electronic billboard, before making a brazen getaway on a stolen police hoverboard (arrogantly vaping through my patchwork balaclava as i

rode away), it most likely wouldn't be the message they'd be impressed by — and the next minute they'd just as likely be spellbound by a quadruple-backflipping, canyon-jumping motorbike rider that says a sugary, caffeinated beverage made them do it.

i totally support 'culture jamming' and 'ad-takeovers' that covertly turn for-profit messages against themselves or replace them with artistic and comedic counter-messages — i love that shit (and the people who do that shit), it's just not my style.

i don't want the soundness of the democratic ideology i stand for to be judged by the number of hours i'm willing to pour into witty retorts to advertising — i also don't want to engage on the level of the superficial persuasive methods of advertising, as i think they have no place in an insightful & critical political culture.

## **“but how could you possibly legislate to abolish advertising?”**

the legislation to abolish advertising from our entire public media-space would be simple to write and easy to enforce — for-profit organisations are easy to track down and are particularly sensitive to financial disincentives — companies simply won't advertise if they, and their media operatives, are immediately hit

with huge financial penalties.

there's a recent example of effective advertising bans in this country: the complete ban of cigarette advertising through all mediums.

other examples are sao paulo in brazil banning most forms of billboard advertising in public space (although it's sneaking back already), and grenoble in france making the long-term plan to terminate contracts for outdoor advertisers across their city.

in the case of cigarette advertising, our systems intervened to mitigate the health risks posed to the public by their promotion — in a time of hyper-consumerism, climate-change, and escalating injustice, we have far greater reasons (health, environment, psychology, democracy, social justice etc.) to abolish the practice of consumer advertising entirely.

of course, when we are talking about banning *all kinds of mass advertising for a profit-driven entity* across our entire public media-space — which will require a financial restructuring of our media systems and other things previously funded by advertising — the simple legislation banning advertising would need to be implemented alongside other democratic funding policies, and these will require a lot of thought.

the implementation of democratic funding models might not be completely smooth and problem free, but not much worth doing is — we can certainly do it, and it's certainly worth doing.

i think the easiest way to legislate against unsolicited mass advertising would be by having a legal requirement for direct and bribe-free consent for any exposure to for-profit advertising — and children of course, being under the age of consent, should never receive advertising.

advertising would then not be allowed in public spaces and would not be permitted through our mass media systems — advertising may well still be produced, and will probably thrash around trying to draw attention to itself, attempting to further blur the lines of content and advertising to draw people in...

but regardless of what advertisers try, the important thing is that a clear line will be drawn between what is advertising and its bullshit media/entertainment, and what is the credible democratic media system (and liberated cultural production) that we have created as we've pushed advertising to the margins.

i think going into details beyond this is unnecessary at this point, the details can be decided on through public

discussion as this issue picks up support.

hopefully over the course of this public discussion about advertising, public sentiment will get to the point that any company that produces elaborate advertising campaigns will only see them backfire for them, and ultimately companies will instead choose to focus on improving their products or services.

to expedite the death of advertising, we could also legislate to remove the current tax-exemption for advertising expenditure — no point publicly subsidising advertising when it doesn't even pay for the disservice of the for-profit media.

with legislation banning unsolicited advertising, the bullshit of profit-driven companies will fade from our everyday lives — ways for local businesses to inform the public of their products and services in non-invasive ways will be developed, and ethical not-for-profit companies of all sizes can then start eating away into the market share of the for-profits, until the days of the for-profit company are numbered.



**“well if we abolish advertising, cutting the funding of the for-profit media, how would we fund our media system? what's the alternative?”**

there can be no doubt we can afford a democratic media system — we already pay for the disservice of the for-profit media-advertising system that we suffer now, and our new media system would be much cheaper for not having to waste so many resources and so much 'creativity' on the cultural poison of advertising.

there are many different possible models for funding a media system of democratic integrity — and the resultant political system, which would favour the public interest over servicing the interests of the ultra-rich, will no doubt leave us with a lot more money for everything into the future.

rather than offering complete, pre-packaged solutions, my actions are simply intended to draw attention and conversation to one extremely important and sorely neglected fact:

*our global democratic systems — whose biggest weakness is the overt, illegitimate & corrupting influence of for-profit interests — have media*

*systems that are owned, operated and funded by these very same for-profit interests.*

this is a huge problem we desperately need to address.

i think if we can openly and publicly recognise this fact in our mainstream political discourse as *the* major problem for modern democracy, doing something about it is the easy bit.

media scholars, journalists and other experienced analysts would be best placed to offer insight and ideas for truly democratic media systems, both in terms of structure and funding model — when a social movement creates some serious political pressure for a democratic media system, academics will then be able to spend the time and resources on the subject that the current political climate does not allow.

different nations would no doubt try different systems (tailored to their particular circumstances), and we'd all be able to learn from our collective experience.

some people seem to think i shouldn't say anything against the for-profit media-advertising system unless i can provide a completed, and completely foolproof, blueprint for the democratisation of media systems across the globe — as if you need to know absolutely

everything about everything to criticise anything — i find that rather silly and quite annoying.

as an actual democrat i've got no interest in trying to dictate exactly how a democratic media system should work, it's definitely something we'll need to figure out together — i've got some ideas like everybody else, but really i'm just doing what i think is necessary to get this important conversation started as soon as possible.

**“but advertising funds many things, not just our media, if we abolish advertising how will we fund things?”**

advertising doesn't fund anything, ***we fund it*** — every time we purchase from a company that advertises, the cost of the advertising is included in the price we pay — if we were to ban advertising, the money usually squandered on it would be available for other things.

the money currently invested terribly in destructive advertising represents only a small percentage of the money that is fleeced from our communities every year by for-profit companies — if we were to appropriately tax the for-profit companies presently funnelling wealth upward (as an interim measure), we can have everything that advertising (ridiculously) claims to fund, but it will not be bent against democracy and toward the for-profit

interest, it will instead serve us — 'the people'.

the idea that we should be thankful to the 'advertising sponsors' of our culture is absurd — pretty much everywhere we go and everything we do is colonised by noxious advertising that we pay for, which attempts to manipulate us and our defenceless children while we go about our lives and try to enjoy our spare time — and we're expected to be grateful for this!?!

if we want to watch a football game, we can't do that without seeing ads on the players, ads on the field, ads on the stadium, ads on the big screen and ads on the tv broadcast — there is no choice, and no escape apart from turning our backs on our own culture.

the gambling and alcohol advertising around sporting events in australia is the clearest example of the antisocial logic of corporate advertising — as lives are destroyed by alcohol abuse and gambling addiction, we give voice to the companies that profit from these practices to promote these practices, just to get a small portion of those funds back, then we as a community have to bear the burden of these problems while the advertisers skip away with millions.

i think we should find the proliferation of for-profit advertising as insulting as it is, and refuse to put up with

it — the scaremongering about a funding crisis without advertising is only a matter of restructuring.

people who talk about the benefits of advertising sponsorship ignore that advertising is a very inefficient way to fund anything, with many negative side-effects — for example with television advertising, much of the gross advertising expenditure is on the formulation and production of the advertising campaigns themselves, with only a portion actually funding the tv station — then the tv station is beholden to advertising revenue and consequently corrupted by the agenda of the advertisers it relies on.

the funding of culture would only be better without advertising — with democratic funding models in place of advertising our culture would feel it was really driven by us, belonged to us, as it should, and it would not be interrupted and corrupted by the insidious effects of advertising.

**“but it's their private property! you can't interfere with property that is not yours!”**

advertising is not 'private property', it just hides behind private property laws as its projections invade public space it neither owns, nor has any right to.

when i cover over ads, all i'm doing is making the so-called 'private property' *properly private* — if the advertising company still wants to enjoy their 'private property' (after i've prevented its private message from being indecently exposed in public space), then they can come down with their key, take their advertising poster out of its display case, go home and enjoy the shit out of their 'private property' in their own private homes.

the 'private property' of for-profit advertising was never intended for private use and enjoyment by its owners — it was intended to undemocratically dominate public space, its sole intention to be 'used' by the unconsenting public as they go about their lives in public space.

advertising companies are selling advertisers access to public space — public space which is not theirs to sell, and shouldn't be sold at all — that's why i feel fully justified in intervening as a political protest.

i don't mess with private property if it isn't corrupting our democracy and psychologically damaging our society — so don't worry, your house and other personal effects are safe, as is all your property that is not for-profit advertising.

## **“how will people know what they want without advertising?”**

we know what we need without being told — we are not all going to starve without ads for junk food, and we won't all die of exposure from sleeping naked in the rain if ads for housing, bedding and clothing disappear.

right now we all need to be thinking hard about what it is we actually *need*, and whether our *wants* can be rationalised, or if they're actually any good for us overall — the last thing we need to spend money on as a society is an onslaught of consumerist propaganda attempting to circumvent this process.

## **“surely businesses have the right to make people aware of their products and services?”**

businesses should definitely be allowed the ability to make information about their products and services available — however this is a very different thing to modern advertising, which has no real information, invades and degrades our public media-space, and has huge psychological and political costs on top of its massively wasteful financial costs.

new non-invasive methods can be devised for

businesses to make actual information available to potential consumers when they require it — these methods won't give an unfair advantage to large companies with huge financial resources as our present advertising system does, enabling stronger competition with the most irresponsible and unethical multinational corporations<sup>14</sup>.

to gain competitive advantage in a world without advertising, businesses would be forced to improve the real qualities of their goods or services — no longer having the option of burning millions of dollars to crank the bullshit machine up to eleven.

as for the 'rights' of businesses: for-profit organisations are not natural persons, they have no human rights, and no legal rights but those we choose to give them for our collective benefit.

preventing for-profit organisations from anti-democratically dominating our public media-space would be in the public interest — and really it's the only way to protect the rights of real natural people.

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14 being opposed to the domination of integrated world capitalism doesn't mean you're an authoritarian state communist (i h8 those drab fascists!), but it is a requirement for any real democrat — exactly how the economies of the future should best operate (what real "free enterprise" is) is not something i can answer — that's something for real democracy to figure out.

for the people of our democracies to have true freedom of expression, to freely define their own culture, develop an enlightened understanding, and set the political agenda as the constituents of a democracy should do — advertising and its for-profit media has to give way to a people's media system.

it's either our actual civil and political rights are protected, or the fictitious 'rights' of non-human profit-driven organisations are allowed to erode them all.



talking to some interested skaters near lincoln square, swanston street, carlton. they were pretty switched on, they totally got it. still: bernadette mcgough

**"but they'll just chuck you in jail, and you can't do/change anything if you're in jail."**

the only reason i'll be in jail will be because i have done/changed something.

even though the temporary physical change to the advertising itself is deliberately trivial, the important change is that i'm now a person who openly and unashamedly acts against the anti-democratic for-profit media-advertising system.

regulating your behaviour to avoid punishment is exactly what those in power want you to do — i don't value being free from incarceration if that means i can't stand for what i think is right.

all legal avenues to mount a serious challenge to the for-profit domination of our culture and political system have been tried, and have ultimately failed — but what hasn't been tried is a sustained and global campaign of civil disobedience against the for-profit media-advertising system.

i believe that opinions are nothing without actions to back them up — we have to stand for our convictions as if millions of lives depend on it (cuz they do), and keep standing for them (until we iz ded).

considering the scale of the murder, injustice and destruction i'm opposed to, if i wasn't doing something beyond what the system can tolerate or ignore (and consequently be facing jail), i couldn't help but think i wasn't doing my job (civil disobedience) properly, that i wasn't being disobedient enough.

## **"you can't honestly think that for-profit advertising can be abolished?"**

i do honestly think for-profit advertising can be abolished — there is every reason to abolish it, and the practice is only allowed by the laws of our society, which we have the power to change.

i think most people can see that our media system is corrupt, that it is not even close to democratic, and that our political process is pretty well controlled by the richest 1% that possess more wealth than the other 99% of us combined.

the response i most often get to the assertion that our media system is corrupt is “yeah, well what can you do?” — and even those that disagree with me don't try to argue the system is fair, just that it is the law.

i'm sure many people would have said change was impossible before the abolition of chattel slavery, before

the end of racial segregation, before women gained the vote, before colonising powers were overthrown by nationalist movements, and before monarchs claiming to rule by divine right were deposed.

those opponents of pursuing change who were able to accept the injustice of the situation would have said: "but very powerful people don't want change, they have all the power, and their continued power depends on crushing opposition, so there's no way you could win!"

those people were defeatist idiots weren't they? do you want to be like them? gutless and wrong? i don't — bunch of self-serving, scared little quitters.

forget that all these historical victories were kind of hollow — that chattel slavery was immediately replaced with economic slavery, that structural racism still kills, that patriarchy still kills, that colonialism was replaced by the neo-colonialist 'economic system', that our leaders today are still saying god told them to order drone strikes on non-combatants and children — we can't deny that some progress has been made, even while new forms of oppression emerge for us to fight against.

fuck this, we can win as soon as we believe we can win, we've got the numbers, i'm all in.

**"but you're talking about dismantling the media systems by which capitalism rules! you're talking about undermining capitalism itself! you can't think that's possible?!"**

of course i am talking about dismantling the for-profit media-advertising system through which capitalism is able to constrain and control our democracies — no true democrat could accept such a system.

we are constantly fed the lie that democracy and unrestrained capitalism go hand in hand, when realistically they're logically opposed — unrestrained capitalism creates and relies on massive global power imbalances and exploitation, which *true global democracy*<sup>15</sup> will always act to correct.

as a global society we basically face this simple choice — in a democracy, our media should:

a) be owned, funded and controlled by a minority of extremely wealthy individuals who already have far too much political power, or

b) be publicly owned, funded and run according to democratic principles to serve all citizens in society equally.

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15 by “true global democracy” i mean equal political power for all people worldwide (yes that's right, *all people worldwide*, even the poorest 'uneducated' ones from the poorest 'underdeveloped' countries).

the real question is not how can i reject our present system — it's how anyone can accept it.

the fact that so many can't even imagine the overthrow of the capitalist media system is a testament to its power — the only thing that makes its overthrow impossible is our defeatist and ill-founded belief that it is impossible.

there is no reason to think the for-profit media-advertising system is unstoppable, and every reason to correctly identify it as the weak point of the supremacy of globalised capitalism.

### **“what do you see yourself doing in 10 years?”**

the answer was the same 10 years ago: in 10 years i'll be continuing to stand opposed to the anti-democratic for-profit media-advertising system (unless of course it has already been abolished, in which case i might be having a beer<sup>16</sup>).

the subtext of this question seems to be that i can't possibly continue to bang my head against a brick wall — i'll lose my 'youthful idealism', get old and worn out,

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16 i've given up alcohol completely until the global for-profit media-advertising system has been abolished, and a truly free and democratic media system takes its place — i've been alcohol-free for over 5 years now, but can't imagine my sobriety lasting longer than another decade or so.

and i'll just want some 'financial security' and something to put my feet up on.

the truth is that this 'head-banging' mode of resistance is the only thing that has given me positive purpose over the last 10 years (enabling me to overcome the worst of my rational depression) — as i've grown up and begun bringing up my daughter, my commitment to this style of 'head-banging' resistance has only strengthened.

if i was to give up on this objective (a democratic media system) and the method i think most likely to make any progress toward it (direct intervention), i'd be giving up on the only hope i have for the future, and i couldn't live without that hope.

i'll always feel compelled to oppose what i know has truly horrific consequences, in spite of any seeming futility<sup>17</sup> — and barring serious trauma and/or mental breakdown, i can't see anything stopping me from making this stand.

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17 even in moments when hope disappears completely (quite regularly), i tell myself to keep going, because eventually the small amount of hope i live off will return, and it does... only to fuck off again... — but the point is, however i feel about the chances of humanity, i know what i have to do if there is to be any chance in the future: keep going and never give up.

## "so you've been doing this for 10 years, what have you achieved?"

this question is often not really a question, more a passive-aggressive insult, but my greatest achievement, and something that can't be denied, is that for 10 years i've continued to protest meaningfully against a system i know to be extremely damaging and corrupt — resisting years of pressure from the legal system, psychology professionals, and society more generally.

the first 10 years taught me a lot, i feel much more contentment now than before i started<sup>18</sup>, and i'm sure i'll only get better at my job over the next 10 years.

i know my actions have reached and influenced many already — they've been written about thoughtfully by academics, slagged-off mindlessly by the for-profit press, short documentaries and comic zines have been made, videos of my actions have been shown locally and internationally at universities and film festivals, i've been invited to speak at universities, and there was even a portrait of me entered in the archibald prize<sup>19</sup>.

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18 still not much contentment at all — but there is some kind of contentment to be had in expressing your discontentment by acting against precisely what you are discontented by.

19 the archibald prize is a “prestigious” australian portrait competition — on the next page is an article that appeared in *the age* newspaper after my portrait was entered by artist and friend cdh.

# Archibald contender a portrait of protest

■ Aisha Dow

On a warm evening last November, Melbourne street artist CDH broke into a Moorabbin bus shelter and started furiously spraying an image onto a Streets ice-cream advertisement.

Soon after he stole away into the night with the defaced billboard, after convincing police officers that he had "permission".

Eight months later it is believed the black and white portrait is sitting in the Art Gallery of NSW as a highly unconventional entry in the Archibald Prize.

The subject is convicted criminal Kyle Magee, who for almost a decade has waged war against public advertising in Melbourne's CBD.

In 2010 Mr Magee was busted using white paint to cover up a bus shelter billboard near the County Court on William Street, a case that ended in an unsuccessful Supreme Court appeal.

Caught wielding a bucket and paintbrush, Mr Magee never denied what he had done. Instead he argued that his protests constituted a lawful freedom of expression of his philosophical opposition to for-profit advertising.

More recently he was charged over a "postering" spree in the CBD in which he used papier mache to cover up advertisements on bus and tram shelters. He left behind notes for prospective investigators. "Atten: Police Persons," he wrote. "To save your detective work, as simple as that may be, this production here is the work of Kyle Magee. I believe you have my number on record, that hasn't changed, so please call up for a friendly chat."

During Mr Magee's protesting

career he has been convicted more than 30 times, spent 157 days in prison and been ordered to pay more than \$150,000 in costs, by his calculations.

CDH, who goes by his street name, said that while his friend was not a typical subject for the Archibald, Mr Magee deserved to take his place next to high-profile Australians.

"The Archibald represents a top-down history of Australia, but I'm interested in the bottom-up - the sub-culture and the things that get ignored," he said.

Mr Magee is set to appear in the County Court next month to appeal against his latest conviction. There also is a judicial review scheduled in the Supreme Court, at which it is understood Mr Magee will represent himself.

The 30-year-old fiercely believes for-profit advertising has a detrimental effect on democracy and is campaigning for a total ban on paid outdoor billboards and signs.

"This is to be my life's work," he said in detailed defence submissions uploaded to his online blog.

"I would have not set out on this path if I didn't believe it is right, and as I continue to believe it is right... there is no reason for me to desist."

CDH is facing his own graffiti-related charges and recently was dubbed a "grandstanding idiot" by Melbourne lord mayor Robert Doyle when he submitted a fake arts grant application to the Melbourne City Council, then ripped up the cheque to create a protest piece.

The finalists from more than 800 entries in this year's Archibald Prize will be announced at midday on Thursday.



Off the wall: Artist CDH's Archibald entry of anti-advertising campaigner Kyle Magee (main), and (inset) examples of his protests.

full slanderous article available here:

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/stolen-bus-shelter-portrait-of-protester-submitted-in-archibald-prize-20140706-zsy1d.html>

funnily enough, *the age* neglected to mention my protest was against all forms of advertising (not just billboard) and also against the for-profit media companies funded by advertising (like their newspaper). they also didn't mention that i refused to talk to them on principle, as i always refuse to speak to the for-profit media. i wasn't surprised the article really didn't do me any favours, i mean what would you expect? after all, it's just a plain statement of the facts that i am a 'convicted criminal' 'waging war' over my 'fierce' beliefs (supported by friends who 'furiously spray' before 'st[ealing] away into the night' with their 'defaced billboard'/'stolen canvas').

of course i'll try to have the largest influence possible, and hopefully as the global movement builds it will receive more and more attention, but the amount of influence my actions will have is kinda irrelevant to the question of whether or not i should carry them out — i will do this because i need to, and whatever influence i have will be much more than if i never did.

**"but your approach will lead you to jail, and you shouldn't have to go to jail, you're not a 'bad person'"**

yeah, maybe I shouldn't have to go to jail, but i'm certain millions of innocents shouldn't have to die every year of the poverty, violent oppression and war endemic of our global system — i'm certain asylum seekers fleeing war shouldn't have to rot indefinitely in australian immigration detention centres, and i'm sure indigenous australians shouldn't represent 26% of prisoners while comprising only 2.5% of the population.

if you're concerned about the minor injustice being done to me, then you should be completely grief-stricken by what's happening to the real victims of global injustice (who are also not 'bad people' but people condemned to horrific lives and deaths just because of who and where they were born).

a privileged white male activist spending brief periods of time eating 3 meals a day in a relatively safe and only mildly-torturous prison should be the least of your concerns — and it's really the least i can do in attempts to address the broader devastation.

maybe you're forgetting that i can't live with this system, i'd be totally suicidal if i thought i had no option to oppose it, and i'm only bumped up to 'tolerably miserable' by living in resistance to it — if you're really concerned about my happiness, or sympathise with my 'plight', then you just need to help me overthrow the for-profit media-advertising system :)

## **"i want to help, what can i do?"**

i'm set on carrying out fully-open interventions, owning up to my actions, and not being intimidated by the punitive system — i'd love others to take up a similar approach, as i think open confrontation is completely justified, will raise the issue fastest, and will be more effective in greater numbers<sup>20</sup>.

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20 in france the group called the déboulonneurs (translated as unscrewers, or debunkers) use a similar open approach to intervention — “getting caught” and running the legal defences of necessity and freedom of expression — they've even won some cases recently. for their manifesto in english, go here: <http://deboulonneurs.org/article348.html> you can also see their actions (“respectable” middle-class middle-aged ladies spraying ads) by typing “deboulonneurs” into a video search engine.

it'd be great to have some 'co-offenders' and not to feel so morally alone... haha — but i think when most people ask if they can help they're asking for a less demanding way to assist, and while i can't deny that i find that a little disappointing, of course i understand.

if you'd like to physically intervene, but don't want to face the charges and consequences, you could remove/delete/alter/replace ads covertly.

there are many ways to intervene against ads of all kinds — working in small groups with friends you know and trust is a smart and fun way to do it.

information about how to access street advertising display cases can be found online, and some of the tools you might need around the globe are available here: <http://www.publicadcampaign.com/PublicAccess/Index.html> and here: <http://strikemag.bigcartel.com/category/ad-space-hacking>

failing any direct participation, a really important and simple thing you can do is spread the word about the global movement against corporate advertising and media, in conversation or by any means available to you — the for-profit media certainly isn't going to promote the cause, and the movement will have minimal impact if few people have ever heard about it.

even just discussing these issues with people in a way that recognises the very real potential for us to change our situation could open people to a possibility that is not really supposed to occur to any of us, and too rarely does — and the more people recognise the possibility, the greater the chance of it happening.

if you have any questions, or want to discuss anything, feel free to email me:  
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