

« Civil disobedience is the inherent right of a citizen. He dare not give it up without ceasing to be a man. » Gandhi

Advertising Invasion: Let's disobey!

Through non-violent protest with the Collectif des déboulonneurs (Debunkers collective)

This collective born in Paris in 2005 has since spread across France with groups in Rouen, Lyon, Montpellier, Lille, Le Mans, le Gard... We invite interested people in other towns to become active along the lines suggested in this flyer. The collective intends to unbolt and debunk advertising, remove it from its pedestal and destroy its prestige. Not to eliminate it, but to put it at its place, so that it becomes an instrument of information, serving all human activities.

Objective: 50x70cm

To implement a new law limiting the size of advertising posters to the size applicable to clubs and societies in Paris: 50x70 cm (around 20 x 27 inches) ; to limit the total billboard size to 2m² with a reasonable degree of urban density depending on a town's population size. Achieving this objective will constitute a first inroad into the advertising system.

Method: Daubing

Meetings for collective disobedience (daubing actions), throughout France at the same time every 4th friday of the month, or the following Saturday or Sunday. The following upcoming dates have already been agreed: ...

Before...

After... the advertisers' passing.

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The damage done by the advertising system

Advertising, legitimate as an activity of spreading information, has turned into an ever-expanding system of harassment using more and more encroaching and invasive means. To trap individuals, advertisers ignore all ethical principles and do not hesitate to flout the law (about one third of all billboards are illegally set up). Under the cover of the freedom of expression it imposes on the whole of society its anti-social ideology (competition, domination, accumulation).

- a) The advertising system monopolises ever more public space: roads, public transport, cinema, sport stadiums, museums, universities, schools – it is a parasite of cultural activities and sporting events. Non-democratically, it favours the strongest advertisers.
- b) Media financed by advertising are condemned to compete for ratings, lose their editorial independence and cannot allow themselves to criticise the advertisers if they do not wish to be cut off from their source of financing. As a result, the industries that are responsible for most advertising (the agri-food industry, car manufacturers, nuclear energy, petrochemicals, supermarket chains, cosmetics and travel and tourism) are untouchable in the media.
- c) The advertising system sacrifices human health and the environment in the name of business. It hides products' health-related consequences (bad food, obesity, anorexia) and makes a joke of the precautionary principle (nuclear energy, chemicals, genetically modified crops, mobile phones).

d) It encourages over-consumption, waste, pollution and often excuses irresponsible and individualistic behaviour. By fuelling envy and frustration it is a cause of excessive consumer credit, delinquency and even violence for the least privileged in society.

e) It unclothes women, men and children like a procurer, propagates artificial and uniform models and fosters the cult of physical perfection and eternal youth. Especially among people with special needs, the ill and elderly, this leads to a feeling of being rejected.

f) It reduces our existence to acts of consumption, festivities to business operations, imagery and ideas to selling points.

g) The consumers pay for advertising (on average around 500 euros per year and person) since the costs of advertising is passed on to them in form of higher product prices like a hidden tax.

Spot on the Billboards

In terms of advertising, billboards constitute the greatest and oldest aggression and one that no one can avoid. We are free to watch or not to watch TV, to listen or not to listen to the radio, to buy or not to buy a newspaper, but not to move freely without being confronted with a never-ending show of images and slogans. This visual debauchery impairs our view and our perception of traffic signals. It dirties our living space, reduces our freedom of thought and limits our capacity to dream. The confiscation of public space and its commercial exploitation are all the more inadmissible as the landscapes are by law considered “public goods of the nation” and the rules concerning advertising are part of the 5th chapter of the French “Code de l'environnement”, entitled: “Prevention of pollution, risk and nuisance”.

Regarding billboards, the advertising system enters our daily lives in the most obvious fashion. By attacking billboard advertising using non-violent direct action, we are making a first inroad into the advertising system and responding to its aggression. All the more as advertising posters are in easy reach !

Stop the Gigantism - Let's change the law

Whether it is the 4x3 metre billboards or the huge 600m² building site canvasses, excess and gigantism rules today. However, no rule lasts forever and tomorrow – if we really want it – could see the return to more harmony.

Have you already felt assaulted by a poster sized 50x70cm? What if we imposed this format on all advertising posters? Utopian? Not really: in Paris the municipality already imposes this limit as a maximum for political adverts and for clubs and societies. Why should this sensible principle not apply to all posters, commercial or not, throughout France? Underground as well as over the ground? At the same time, an end could be put to vicious energy-devouring billboards using lighting, animation or even sound and smells. An all this whilst respecting a sensible level of density, for example limiting the size of billboards (the total surface on which individual posters are fixed) to a maximum of 2m² whilst determining their number as a function of the number of inhabitants in the community. Utopian? Not that much: For political advertising, the law already stipulates such rules.

Adopting these measures would lead to:

A break for eyes and mind; a more egalitarian visibility of advertisers; economies of energy and resources (paper, ink, plastic, electricity). Finally, two supposed advantages of advertising billboards should be addressed: the “soul” it brings to streets in towns and villages, and the

“information” it provides our poor disorientated spirits. Do our urban and rural landscapes really need 12m2 to be “animated” and does information worthy of this name really require so much space to force itself into our brains?

And, furthermore, why not create more space dedicated to art and non-profit organisations, clubs and societies?

Civil Disobedience and non-violence:

A choice

(1) Non-violence is neither passivity nor resignation. Rather, it is a morally acceptable political force that has proven its utility. By preferring direct action, by not treating dishonourably others with insult or fists, by ensuring an attitude of respect towards the adversary, non-violent direct action allows public awareness to be raised. The logic of non-violence requires the activists to declare themselves responsible for their actions before courts (for example, when they decided to voluntarily degrade a billboard).

In this context there is no shame attached to being arrested and sentenced for having daubed a billboard. In fact it may be seen as a sign of victory, even if it may imply a prison sentence. The public opinion will not accept that persons be punished if they have committed no act of violence and will be even more mobilised.

(2) The expression “civil disobedience” first appeared as a posthumous title for the work of Henry-David Thoreau, the well-known North American writer who refused to pay his taxes - and went to prison as a result – in protest of the politics of his country that maintained slavery and was fighting an imperialist war against Mexico. This book inspired Tolstoy, Gandhi (liberation of India from British colonial yoke), Martin Luther King (granting civil rights for Black Americans), Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu (fighting apartheid in South Africa), the farmers of Larzac (against the extension of a French military base) and, today, the Faucheurs Volontaires (“Volunteer Mowers” – activists committed to mowing fields of genetically modified crops). Now its time for the “Déboulonneurs” to neutralise advertising and its grip over landscape and minds.

(3) When everything has already been said about an iniquitous law – which for example allows a handful of advertisers to invade the public space, when numerous initiatives have taken place (demonstrations, petitions and debate – in particular, in parliament), when ministers themselves have qualified the current law as a “catastrophe” calling for a revision – but the law is still not changed, it is the citizens’ duty to exert a greater pressure on politicians for as long as the situation lasts. Even if this means breaking the law in collective, symbolic acts.

(4) Civil disobedience does not attempt to show that we could live in a society without laws and rules. It contrasts to other forms of disobedience because those breaking the law do so publicly, announcing their actions openly, taking responsibility for their actions thereby testifying of a higher interests for law and justice.

(5) Faced with the advertisers’ aggression, faced with inaction on the part of the authorities, civil disobedience is a “legitimate response”. The daubing of 4x3m billboards must become seen to be a regular feature in the media. Occurring throughout France the 4th friday of every month our activities must figure big in the news. Let’s daub advertising until our demands are met. We’ll see how far we have to go. Let’s stop talking about the news, let’s make the news.

===== DESSIN DU JUGE =====

You wouldn’t be trying to advertise the anti-advertisers cause with this court case?

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Daubing in Action

Around forty anti-advertising activists and several journalists have a very precise meeting on this particular Friday. The day's event has been meticulously planned for two weeks: some large advertising billboards in the centre of town have been identified, certain volunteers will be daubing and others are organising relations with the press. The following chronology is inspired by past events:

16h50 The crossing has its usual appearance. No sign visible of an imminent gathering.

16h55 The 40 or so activists arrive out of nowhere and discretely converge at the meeting point at 50m from the billboards

16h59 A signal is given that the daubing is about to begin. The daubers walk with determination towards the billboards, accompanied by the others. The journalists surface with their reporting material. Everything must go very quickly now. Every active has a part to play; all roles are important.

17h00 The daubers take out their spraycans and write in some clearly visible words on the posters: "Visual Pollution" "Advertising = Violence". The others stand by to support them with their presence. Neither pedestrians nor traffic are disrupted. Flyers are handed out. In respect of the surroundings, someone from the group picks up discarded flyers. A passing traffic warden witnesses the scene and, surprised, calls his boss.

17h05 The billboards have been daubed. There is no trace of paint anywhere else (pavement, walls). Pictures and video footage continues to be taken. The atmosphere is serene, there is some singing. Passers-by do not feel offended and stop to talk. In case a member of the public were to make a fuss, three activists formed in non-violent conflict resolution could intervene.

17h15 Two police vans arrive rapidly, sirens blaring as if for a bank robbery! And what do the officers see upon leaving their vehicle? Two or three daubed billboards, a group of happy people surrounding a person standing on a chair explaining the reasons for the happening.

17h20 The daubers make themselves known to the police. Each of them presents their ID card: "It is I who daubed this poster; this is an act of civil disobedience against advertising. I assume my responsibility". The police officers look bewildered. The daubers explain that similar events are taking place all over France at the same time, like every month on the 4th Friday (or the following Saturday or Sunday).

17h30 The daubers are driven away under applause. The event is over. The group disbands. The daubers remain at the police station for one or two hours. They have prepared statements for the police and adopt a common strategy, including a reference to the support committee which includes several personalities.

In the evening or the following day: debriefing of the day's events with all participants and preparation of the next month's action. In the following days: press coverage of the daubing.

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Useful notes (in French)
Available by post for €2
- Local Group

- Press
- Judiciary
- Police
- Bibliography (on anti-advertising and civil disobedience)

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Your financial contribution is crucial
Please contribute if you can. Cheque to “Collectif des Déboulonneurs” to be sent to the
aforementioned address.

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