

FLASH MOBS AS CRITICAL INTERVENTIONS:

**A MEETING POINT BETWEEN MEDIA,
PERFORMANCE, POLITICS AND ACTIVISM**

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Introduction

You are invited to take part in MOB, the project that creates an inexplicable mob of people in New York City for ten minutes or less. Please forward this to other people you know who might like to join. –Bill Wasik (And then there is this 2009, p. 5)

The ephemerality continues...

In 2003, as a result of his “boredom”, Bill Wasik decided to gather an audience for a show, to present no show at all (Wasik, 2009, p. 19). Wasik decided to “create a nanostory of his own” (Wasik, 2009, p.5). He sent an email to sixty-three friends and acquaintances, which began the formation of a new social phenomenon. The event was organized through Internet, social media, and word of mouth. In order to organize the people, Wasik distributed the information on the timing and how to act in the gathering on the Internet via emails (Wasik, 2009, p.6). The event was planned to last seven minutes, and afterwards the participants had to disperse; and no one was allowed to remain at the site afterwards (Wasik, 2009, p. 6). The meeting had been planned to take place at Claire’s Accessories in Manhattan but the attempt was not successful, as the police at the door would not let anyone in the store. In any case, the mob was able to attract attention. In Wasik’s words, “despite the police [...the] single email had generated enough steam to power a respectable spectacle” (2009, p. 20).

This event was not a one-time happening. Soon later, Wasik planned and organized another similar gathering through Internet in two weeks, to be realized in the Macy’s rugs department (Wasik, 2009, p. 21). During this second event, Wasik gathered two hundred people who walked around and informed the clerks that they all lived together in a Long Island City commune and were looking for a “love rug” (Wasik, 2009). This second event also became big on the Internet and was in the news on an online technology-news site (Wasik, 2006).

After these happenings, the events were spread on the Internet and social media, and the media called them flash mobs (Wasik, 2011). The name flash mob was a variation of smart mob (Wasik, 2006, 2009; Brejzek, 2010; Nicholson, 2005). Smart mobs were first defined by Rheingold (2002) as gatherings organized by artists to bring attention to their work or to a social - political issue (Wasik, 2009, p. 57; Goldschmidt & Solecki, 2011). In the *Oxford Dictionary* (2004), a “flash mob” is defined as “a large public gathering at which people perform an unusual or seemingly random act and then disperse, typically organized by means of the Internet or social media”. Bill Wasik, as the first organizer of a flash mob defined them as “a public gathering of complete strangers, organized via the Internet or mobile phone, who perform a pointless act and then disperse again” (Wasik, 2006). Various flash mobs followed in this Internet phenomenon, and the initial organizer,

Wasik, and others multiplied it (Wasik, 2009, p. 22). The flash mobs were reported by blogs and this steady information flow online helped spread this new phenomenon around the world (Wasik, 2006).

Wasik states that his initial motivation was to make a criticism of the event culture of the 21st century and an experiment to create “a metaphor for the hollow hipster culture” (Wasik, 2006, p. 56). The event aimed to be a criticism for the scenesterism¹ that existed in the New York culture. In his book, *And Then There's This* (2009) he writes that he had initiated the organization of a social mob for making a social inquiry and social experiment (Wasik, 2009, p.20). Wasik wanted this social experiment to be cynical, as a statement against scenester gatherings in New York, where everyone wants to be in the scene, the art community, and “are looking for the next big thing” (Wasik, 2009, p. 20). As a critique to this situation, instead of creating the next big thing, Wasik (2009) stated that in the mob people who came would see only themselves. The aims of the flash mobs were not clearly stated by Wasik. Rather, the flash mobs were a general criticism realized through “deviant” but non-violent acts in a particular social space, like on the streets, in a shop, or in train stations.

In the more contemporary happenings, we see that the criticism of flash mobs was not limited to cultural phenomena like scenesterism. Flash mobs started to make statements about political issues, and they started to be performed with political motivations and in politically loaded settings. They were influenced by the spirit of protest that has been going on in the world since the Arabic Spring (2010) and the Occupy Wall Street (2011) protests. The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed a large number of protests (Walter, 2012). Through the development and spread of Internet, in addition to influences from art theatre and dance, activism and protests have started using new methods of organization and actualization. Many of the previous flash mobs have used Internet and mobile technologies as tools to spread information and facilitate the organization of events and gatherings (Castells, 2012). Flash mobs, as an event of the last decade, are used as tactics for political protest and a symbol of resistance (Boyd 2010, p. 46). As tactics, they are critical and they pursue various interpretations of space.

Flash mobs later on:

This thesis is about flash mobs and clarifying how flash mobs can be critical acts in physical, social, and political space. I argue that flash mobs have the potential of being used as political and critical tools (in space); and we see the use of flash mobs as expressive tools in the contemporary social movements and protests.

The novelty of this thesis will be presenting flash mobs, as a meeting point between performance studies, media studies, and political sociology, and further as an event that has a critical perspective towards power and towards the public place. In making this connection, I am inspired by Brejzek (2010), a scholar of space and scenography, who positions flash mobs in between event culture, political and

¹Scenester:(according to dictionary.com) is a person who is part of an artistic or social "scene"; also, a person who tries to fit into a "scene" or blindly follow the trends and dress code of that scene , especially musical

artistic activism (p. 119). I will be analyzing flash mobs as an intersection point between these three perspectives because I will present how these three approaches can give directions for further research on the topic and initiate an interdisciplinary and systematic approach to looking at this multidimensional phenomenon.

Opinions differ about flash mobs and their categorization as critical acts. The critical potential of flash mobs and their positioning as a-political or political events has been argued throughout the literature. Goldstein (2003) states that flash mobs have initially emerged as a form of performance art that is not political. Iles (2004) considers flash mobs to be gatherings for no end other than consumptive display. On the other hand, when we look at the more recent literature on flash mobs, we see that they are being positioned at the point where culture and art meets politics and people (Brejzek, 2010; Mitchell & Boyd, 2012, p. 46). In other words, flash mobs can be seen as a cultural happening, an artistic creation, or a political formation in the streets or other specified location. We can see this characteristic of the flash mobs from the first flash mob of Bill Wasik on.

Brejzek (2010) states that flash mobs are “an orchestrated spatial figure of resistance” (p. 109), and an urban intervention. According to Brejzek (2010), flash mobs are critical in the urban space and they are a criticism against the type of society that is highlighted in the *Society of the Spectacle* by Guy Debord. This “society of the spectacle” social life, which was once lived, has now been replaced by mere representation (Debord, 1967). In other words, according to Brejzek and Wasik, flash mobs criticize society by creating a “pointless” act. In other words, the pointlessness of the event is the point.

On the other hand, according to Boyd (2012) flash mobs function as tactics (p. 46). As tactics they suddenly, ephemerally, and unpredictably intervene in the place of the other (Boyd, 2012). Boyd’s definition of tactics as “intervening in the place of the other” was taken from De Certeau’s definition in his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). Furthermore Boyd (2012) emphasized flash mobs’ utility as a creative mode of protest that can also be used under authoritarian regimes, in order to delay government or police intervention by putting the opponent in a decision dilemma (p. 46-47). Boyd (2012) added that as tactics, flash mobs created symbolic and communicative actions and/or concrete ones (p. 154).

Further, power will be a relevant concept to all of the theoretical chapters and to the existence of flash mobs in public, political, performative, and social space. Mainly, in presenting the critical potential of flash mobs, different forms of power (namely spatial power, oppositional power, communication power) will be analyzed. I will argue that Flash mobs create / apply innovative ways of dealing with power in public space. In order to clarify the innovative methods the flash mobs use to deal with power, I will use three theories from the fields of: Media and information society, political theory and resistance and finally philosophy (theory of the practices of everyday life) de Certeau to point out how flash mobs are critical and innovative in dealing with power mechanisms by “intervening in the place of the other”. I assert that the Internet, networks, tactical nature of flash mobs, and sharing illegible metis among the participants play a role in making flash mobs a critical spatial figure of resistance. I agree with Boyd and Mitchell (2012) who claim that flash mobs are a

creative form of protest (p. 46). The creative nature of these gatherings gives them a critical potential and makes them political. Flash mobs are ephemeral, temporal (Brejzek, 2010).

In analyzing the political potential of flash mobs, my research asks the questions: What is the critical potential of flash mobs? How can we define what makes flash mobs critical happenings with three theories from three different fields? In the following pages, I will point out the critical potential of flash mobs as an alternative way of acting in public space (and in private space). In other words, I will demonstrate how flash mobs have become an alternative way of making politics that is innovative and critical towards the current order of the social and political space. I will approach flash mobs from three different approaches that are important in explaining the political, critical, and innovative potential of flash mobs in urban space, society, and political space:

The first is their networked, technological nature of organization and the flow of information. I will analyze the networked nature and how it makes the flash mobs critical and innovative through the use of Manuel Castells' analysis of networks and networked social movements.

Secondly, I will look at how flash mobs emerge from the societal practices that remain illegible to the state and how they form symbols of resistance in public space. In pointing out how the meanings and symbols emerge in flash mobs, I will look at James C. Scott (1985) and his anthropological study of peasant resistance in Malaysia, and use his analysis of resistance as a perspective to explain the practices that make up the flash mobs as resistance. Further, as I will be analyzing the emergence of the critical and political meanings from what is illegible in flash mobs, I will refer to Scott's analysis of state vision and social engineering projects in high modernism, and how this vision overlooks the resistance that is in the daily life practices.

Thirdly, departing from Brejzek's definition of flash mobs as "a spatial figure of resistance", I will look at how flash mobs can be spatial practices. In investigating the critical and innovative potential of flash mobs, I will use Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday life and his definition of tactics, while looking at the flash mob's physical and political intervention of the place of the other (as tactics). Furthermore, It is relevant to point out a differentiation the author makes between the two interrelated concepts, "space" and "place", which will guide us in the future discussions on tactics and strategies. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau (1984) explains, "a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence"; a place is thus "an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (p. 117). He adds, "*the space is a practiced place*"² (de Certeau, 1984, p. 117). In other words, while place is the physical entity; space includes the dynamic choices made among the potentialities of movement and acting. These dynamic choices in the space contribute to the critical potential of flash mob.

² Italics from the author.

I argue that flash mobs have a critical potential, and Brejzek agrees with this fact by stating that flash mobs create a critical dialogue between the people and their environment. The critical dialogue that the flash mobs create, takes place first among the people through the networks, and later between the environment space and the inhabitants (Brejzek, 2010). They bring private practices to the public sphere and make illegible practices legible. In the following pages I will highlight what is critical and political in this dialogue that takes place in flash mobs.

Theoretical map

Castells will help me in positioning the flash mobs as a part of contemporary networked social movements and networked politics, and how this networked nature brings a novelty and critical look to the way the politics are performed and the public space is used. I will start by looking at flash mobs as one of the new critical spatial encounters that is facilitated by Internet and mobile technologies, through connecting them to Castells' theory of communication power and drawing parallels between flash mobs and Castells' analysis of networked social movements and networks. The reason for using Castells and his theory of networks and network social movements is due to flash mobs being a product of the 21st century and the "network society"; Castells' network society and network's influence on power give the perspective from which we can look at flash mobs as critical, political, and networked phenomena. Brejzek (2010) states that new encounters and happenings (flash mobs) in the last decade were characterized by going beyond the spatial, political, and social structures of the space (p. 110). I will present how Castells' theory/concept of communication power is a can be an alternative mechanism that contributes to flash mobs' critical potential over the existing distribution of power in place.

Castells' theory gives us two concepts to focus on while analyzing flash mobs as happenings of the 21th century or the information era. The first one is *power* and the other one is *networks* and *networked social movements*. Through the use of Castells' theory of communication power, I aim to point out how the Internet is a tool that helps flash mobs realizes their critical political potential through communication. Furthermore, I claim that the critical and political potential comes from how the flash mobs relate to power. By means of an analysis of flash mobs via Castells I aim to show how Internet and networks intervene in the power relationships between people and physical space, and also how networks allow the connections and interactions to go beyond local communities in the organizational phase of flash mobs. Through these networks of communication in flash mobs, a group or network of people come together in cyberspace before they form a physical, social, and political body in physical space in the post industrial urban areas. I claim that this physical body shaped during the flash mob is organized and shaped independent from the place and physical distribution of the participants, and networks support this creation of the formation of this alternative physical body.

The second theoretical part will be about resistance as a weapon and resistance practices in daily life. In this chapter I will introduce James C. Scott's

analysis of peasant resistance in a village in Malaysia (Scott, 1985), and I aim to show how similar practices of resistance are used in flash mobs. I will analyze and explain the critical, individual (and daily life) practices that Scott has pointed out that exist in the lives of peasants and how these practices make up the daily life resistance. Furthermore, I will aim to highlight how flash mobs are a performance of resistance that originated from the daily practices of resistance of the participants. Scott's analysis of resistance helps make the connection between flash mobs and the daily life practices of the participants. Seeing this connection is important because it clarifies how flash mobs can be integrated into daily life and disappear in the practices of daily life in the places under authoritarian rule, and how making daily life practices a part of resistance creates advantages in making the protests more sustainable.

Furthermore, in this chapter the concept of *legibility* will be crucial. Scott uses this concept in his book, *Seeing Like a State* (1998) as he explains the modernist social engineering projects and standardization for making the society more legible for the state and more prone to intervention. On the other hand, according to Scott, despite the powerful attempts from the state to make the population more legible, resistance emerges from that what remains illegible. The small-scale, daily life practices are generally the ones that are not legible, even if they use the same physical place with what is legible.

Overall, I will show that Scott helps to clarify how flash mobs are critical because of their emergence from illegible practices and from that, which escapes the vision of the state and control mechanisms. The institutional flow of information about the space and the uses of certain urban spaces do not include alternative individual uses of it. In other words, the alternative uses of space and practices in the space remain illegible. What, according to Scott (1998), the state and the institutions see of its citizens, nature, and space, requires a narrow vision (p. 11). This limited vision and its power cannot completely regulate how people make use of that space. In relation to this argument by Scott, there emerges a group of practices that escape the vision of state or the powerful. Those practices (which are a part of *metis*) and their sharing in online and offline networks make up a part of the information that is required to realize the flash mob.

I claim that flash mobs invite the participants and witnesses of the event to look critically and/or to perform a critical act that goes against the choreographies that are enforced by the gaze, and the legibility maps of the government. Basing my argument on Scott's concept of legibility, I claim that what is not legible in the social space is peoples' different ways of using the social structures and spaces. Individuals and the participants of the flash mobs are the ones who use the space and who have knowledge about its usage through the knowledge they gain in their *metis*. The *metis*, communication of the *metis*, and alternative uses of the virtual space hold the potential for creating a collective resistance, or alternative to the legible.

In the final theoretical part of the thesis, I will bring in de Certeau and his theorization of "the practice of everyday life". I will use the concepts of tactics-strategies from de Certeau and use their relation to time and place in looking at flash mobs. He states the tactics to be able to "intervene in the place of the other" when the circumstances make it possible. The tactics can make use of the place because

they are dependent of the spatial dynamics. On the other hand, tactics need a place and they need to appropriate the place. De Certeau makes an important distinction between tactics and strategies in his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, by stating that tactics are dependent on time while strategies are dependent on place. Flash mobs show a similar characteristic of dependence on time and partial independence of space due to the networked nature of their organization and communication throughout Internet. In flash mobs, the mobile communication and the virtual space provided by the Internet gives the participants and the event a space with no place. Castells (2009) explains this space as defined within the flows of communication (p. 172). According to de Certeau (1984), as tactics they “do not obey the law of the place” (p. 29) and intervene in the space of the other (p. xix). De Certeau’s concept of tactic and its independence of place will be key concepts in explaining flash mobs as critical actions.

My aim for using de Certeau is to call attention to how flash mobs can be tactics in attracting attention to a political or social cause, and how they make statements by intervening in the space. Flash mobs are often criticized for being pointless because they don’t make any political statements. I claim that this does not mean that the flash mobs are not political. I will elaborate how the flash mobs that do not declare a clear political aim can nevertheless be understood as political and critical; I will do so using de Certeau’s elaborations on tactics and their relation to place.

Looking at flash mobs through the theories of Castells, Scott, and de Certeau will first clarify the critical and innovative potential of flash mobs. After that, I will have a close look at four examples of flash mobs in the context of three different social movements. I will demonstrate how the work of these theorists can be useful in understanding the political and critical potential of flash mobs, as they have been used within political contexts and realized with political motivation, and to explain the novel look flash mobs invite people to bring to the public space.

Which flash mobs and why?

As examples of flash mobs, I will be focusing on flash mobs that are used in three different social movements. These different social movements used flash mobs as a way of protesting and attracting attention to a social and political issue. I have chosen these three particular social movements and the flash mobs that are used by them because all three of these movements situated themselves beyond the party politics and sought for critical and innovative methods to make their voices heard. Flash mobs that were performed in these movements became a subject of political discussion, and enabled the public or the protestors to communicate their message. Therefore this common use and consequence of flash mobs suggests that there is a critical potential.

These social movements used flash mobs to make statements and attract attention to a cause. They communicate messages and they create spatial figures of resistance in public and urban space. The messages they create get communicated to a larger public via networks and the Internet. Behind this figure of resistance in space there is a whole chain of communication and formation process, in which the

Internet has a crucial role. These flash mobs invite people to have a critical look towards space and the subtle messages, formed by spatial choreographies, which circulate the city.

The first movement that uses flash mobs as a tool for activism is the Indignados movement. The flash mob that is to be analyzed is organized by a group of artists called flo6x8, for conveying messages and protesting in the context of Indignados movement and the economic crisis in Spain. The flash mob protest was in a Bank in Sevilla, Spain, in 2011. The protesters went into the banks and started doing flamenco as they protested through their lyrics and the use of symbolic objects in the dance. They used performance art music and dance as a tool for protest, and invaded the political space with artistic tools.

The second movement that uses flash mobs is the one in which flash mobs were realized in the context of the Gezi Park Taksim protests in Istanbul Turkey that started on 27 May 2013 and continued growing in the streets for 20 days from 31 May 2013 on, with the sudden and violent intervention of the police in the park on the 31st of May in the early morning. On the 27th of May 2013 in Istanbul, people organized through Internet gathered to protest the government's decision to demolish Taksim Gezi Parki, to build the nth Shopping Mall. Throughout the country people continued to protest on location and tried to resist the police violence. As the authoritarian ruler, Prime Minister Erdogan, continued to increase the violence against the protesters, in order to be able to continue, the protests dissolved into daily life and become less-visibly.

The third social movement that uses flash mobs as a political tool to make statements is Movimento 5 Stelle, or the 5 Star Movement, in Italy that started in 2009. They have used flash mobs as a mode of making statements about certain causes like nuclear energy, to inform people about their movement, and to distribute information about the political and social problems. This is a social and political movement led by the comedian Beppe Grillo, whose performances were characterized by political satire and direct critical statements about the politics and politicians.³ In this movement they have organized gatherings, which were also massive flash mobs, which asked the politicians to dismiss themselves from their political seats. The movement entered the parliament in 2013 and has intervened in the political space with tools from other areas.

I have chosen these flash mobs as examples because they are idiosyncratic performances that present the heterogeneity in the flash mobs. Additionally, all these flash mobs present a performance that interacts with the power in the place / the space and poses a choreography that potentially shifts the dynamics in the space. These messages presented by the flash mobs are able to form new meanings in the public space that introduce new order to the space and the power in the space. The flash mobs that are the subject of this thesis are a part of three different social movements and are examples of new methods of activism and protest in urban space.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beppe_Grillo#Career

Where does this lead us?

Even if the recent studies on flash mobs have focused on the affects of media and Internet usage and the performative side of flash mobs they have not considered them as taking critical actions and symbolizing the power of the people (Brejzek, 2010). Additionally they haven't been argued as new ways of making public statements. This research will try to highlight the political significance and critical potential of these creative actions by analyzing flash mobs, which were used by contemporary social movements, Indignados, Gezi Park Protests, and The 5 Star Movement (M5S).

The analysis and investigation of flash mobs as a form of protest is important because it touches upon an issue and a happening that introduces art as a tool that is political even if it is indirect or passive in terms of making clear/open political statements. Flash mobs become works of art and performance that are created by the public. Via the discussion of flash mobs, I aimed to show how art intervenes in the space of the other, space of politics, the city, and that of the institutions with actions that is not visibly a part of this sphere. It is a topic that has multiple layers and this thesis will try to bring light to the point where flash mobs meet these three fields simultaneously and intervene in the world in order to make a statement or multiple statements.

In the following chapters, I will first introduce what is, to this day, written about flash mobs in the literature. After looking at the literature on flash mobs, I will bring in three different theories: Castells and his theory of networks and networked social movements, Scott's theory of (peasant) resistance and finally, de Certeau and his theory of the practice of everyday life. These theories have not been previously used in the analysis of flash mobs, and they do not discuss flash mobs. I consider these theories to be new ways of looking at flash mobs, and seeing the critical side of their spatial interventions. Through these theories, my research aims to bring light to the creation and actualization of several flash mobs (and social movements) that use the critical potential in challenging the physical space and challenging the politics.

With the theoretical analysis of various flash mobs, I aim to show how the three theories help explain the critical potential of flash mobs and how they can be a mode of activism and protest. Moreover, I aim to highlight why flash mobs are political phenomena and are not only performance art or entertainment in the public space.

Chapter 1: Flash Mobs

In March 2013, in New York over 2,000 people moved backwards through Times Square. They were aiming to make it look like time was going in reverse in the square to unsuspecting tourists and New Yorkers. Participants first gathered in Bryant Park to receive instructions and to synchronize their watches, before heading over to Times Square and blending in with the crowd. At exactly 3:15 PM, participants began moving backwards for five minutes.⁴ A collective called Improv Everywhere organized this event, in which they aimed to cause scenes of surprise, dazzling, chaos, and joy in public places.⁵

In October 2010, the UK government announced massive cuts to public services, and in response, seventy people occupied a Vodafone (mobile phone company) store in London to draw attention to the taxes that the company did not pay, causing the company to close over thirty stores within three days (Mitchell & Boyd, 2012, p. 47). In Egypt people used tactics that would eventually put an end to the rule of President Hosni Mubarak. Organizers called people to initially gather in alleys and other protected spaces for safety, and then they moved in larger numbers into the streets and squares to intervene in public spaces (Mitchell & Boyd, 2012, p. 46). These, situations / performances in the public space are often named (as) flash mobs.

This chapter will attempt to answer the following questions: What are flash mobs? What are the different perspectives on the recurring characteristics of flash mobs? What are the controversies and complexities in these various approaches? What do the different aspects of flash mobs and the different authors' perspectives on them tell us about the political potential of flash mobs?

Flash mobs are claimed to have become a global phenomenon in the 21st century, the age of Internet (Boyd & Mitchell, 2012; Muse, 2010). When we look at what has been written on them, we observe different descriptions and diverse types of flash mobs that are not homogeneous. One reason for this is because flash mobs, like other social phenomena, evolve in relation to the zeitgeist; furthermore, they change depending on the location and the era in which they take place (Rodriguez, 2010). The variation in (the) styles and their increasing quantity makes it harder to collect these phenomena under a general schema or definition for flash mobs. There have been changing opinions on the nature and on the critical potential of flash mobs. One side argues flash mobs to be a critical and political phenomenon and associates them with previous, meaning-loaded events called "smart mobs" brought to the literature by Rheingold (2003), and assigns political meanings to these events. The other side discusses the flash mobs to be purposeless phenomena that are created for the purposes of entertainment (Muse, 2010; Kiltz, 2011).

⁴ <http://improveeverywhere.com/2013/04/01/reverse-times-square/>

⁵ improveeverywhere.com

Thompson (2002) defines a smart mob as “a self-organizing group of people who operate like a swarm of bees or a flock of pigeons”. Smart mobs, according to Rheingold (2002), were “mobile ad hoc social networks” which were “a new social form made possible by the combination of computation, communication, reputation, and location awareness” (p.169). In other words, smart mobs are a group of people (usually who have considerable amount of social capital⁶) who mobilize themselves and their networks for a cause. Mobile technologies and social networks played an important role in the realization of these happenings. Rheingold (2002) claims the organization and statements made by the smart mobs as also rhizomatic⁷ and networked, which means that every individual that participated in the mob was a connection point, and according to Rheingold (2002), each participant was a “node” that enabled the “ad hoc interactions” (p. 172). Similar to smart mobs, flash mobs have a networked nature (Brejzek, 2010; Wasik, 2009 2006; Etling, Faris and Parfley, 2010).

These events are argued to be similar to the flash mobs organized by Wasik (Wasik, 2009; Brejzek, 2010; Muse, 2010; Sorochn 2009). Smart mobs are considered to be one of the predecessors of flash mobs, even if there are inherent differences between the two phenomena (Wasik 2009; Sorochn 2009). Wasik (2006 p. 57), Rheingold (2002) and Goldschmidt (2011) say that “smart mobs”, which were organized by artists in order to bring attention to their work or to a social - political issue. Rheingold (2002) claimed smart mobs to be critical, while also possessing potential and traits. Wasik (2009) claims the critical potential and political purpose of the smart mobs to be inherited by the flash mobs. Furthermore, just as smart mobs, flash mobs are also defined as realized on short notice via email lists and websites (Edmonton Journal, 4 August 2004). What I notice is that the main characteristic, which differentiates smart mobs from flash mobs in their definition is the emphasis on the smart mob’s mobilization for a cause. While flash mobs are usually defined according to their short duration, usage of mobile technologies in organization, the meaning/purpose or meaninglessness of the action, the deviance or strangeness of the action or the participants being mutual strangers or anonymous people. As I navigated through the literature, I have concluded that there is no single or comprehensive definition of flash mobs. Several aspects keep coming back in the literature. Therefore, I have structured the rest of the chapter based on the recurring characteristics of flash mobs and on the ongoing discussions about those characteristics.

⁶ In Pierre Bourdieu’s words, “social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119)

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the term “rhizome” and “rhizomatic” to describe theory and research that allows for multiple, non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data representation and interpretation. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), they oppose it to an arborescent conception of knowledge, which works with dualist categories and binary choices. In this context rhizomatic refers to the creation of the flash mob events by different people in various places, without the existence of an individual that can be considered a leader.

Networks & Organization of the Flash Mobs

Online and offline networks have been argued to play a role in the creation of flash mobs. Flash mobs (as) are described to be networked happenings in the literature (Boyd & Mitchell, 2012, p. 46; Brejzek, 2010). Wasik states that flash mobs use Internet, social media, and mobile technologies for the organization and realization of the mob (2009, 2011). Walker (2011) traces the beginning of the event of the flash mob to the point where the information flow starts online in order to distribute the information about the mob. Hence, flash mobs are discussed as technology driven phenomena of the last decade, the 21st century (Duran, 2007, p.301; Kiltz, 2011; Brejzek, 2010), that are realized in the postindustrial city. The networked characteristic of the flash mobs has been interpreted to have its strengths and weaknesses.

One side claims that networks that participate in the realization of the mob are said to come together for the purpose of realizing the mob (Muse, 2010; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Others (Etling, Faris & Parfley, 2010; Wasik, 2009) claim the participation of previously existing online and offline networks into the mob. Some argued the networked happenings like flash mobs and social action to have revolutionary potential (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Boyd and Mitchell (2012, p. 47) interpreted the ad hoc social networks in flash mobs and the ephemeral visibility of the networks in the public sphere as an important strategy for social action. Walker (2011) emphasized the networked nature to be one of the most important characteristics of flash mobs for their organization; and added that this organization was realized through Internet (email, Facebook, Twitter), and mobile technologies (mobile phones, short messaging). Wasik (2009) emphasized the positive role of offline networks in flash mobs. According to Wasik (2009) the presence of peers and friends from pre-existing social networks, and the face to face sharing of information about flash mobs with these friends and peers increases the likelihood of people in the online network of information to participate and realize the flash mob.

On the other hand, other authors (Etling, Faris & Palfrey, 2010; Kaulingfreks & Warren, 2010) have claimed the “ad hoc networks” of the flash mobs to be ephemeral, not persistent and weakly organized. Etling, Faris, and Palfrey (2010) consider flash mobs’ organization as an organic one that is leaderless, but they see it as a weak way of taking mass action. According to Kaulingfreks & Warren (2010), this leaderless and networked mass action subordinates hierarchical modes of organization. Leaderless mass action is made possible by Internet technologies, and as every participant contributes to the information flow, every participant of the flash mob is argued to become as influential as the other in the formation, planning, and realization of the mob (Kaulingfreks & Warren, 2010). The mobile technologies enable instant communication of the flash mobbers and get organized in order to realize the mob (Walker, 2011, Sorochoan, 2009; Kaulingfreks & Warren, 2010; Muse 2010; Loader, 2008).

When we look at the literature on how the mobs are realized, we see that flash mobs often start with an email or text message sent by one person (Walker, 2011; Wasik 2009; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). On the other hand, in the realization process each participant has a crucial role. It is not possible to organize and realize a flash mob, without each participant being active and spreading the word (Kaulingfreks & Warren, 2010). As the majority of the flash mobbers participate in the organization and in the creation of the mob, it is claimed that the flash mobs are leaderless and have a rhizomatic organization. Brejzek (2010) has written that flash mobs are un-authored and user-generated (p.114); they are non-hierarchical movements. Wasik (2009) and Castells (2012) agree on the fact that these happenings are rhizomatic⁸. Just as the rhizomes, flash mobs are claimed to have heterogeneous, multiple, continuous, and connected participants and organization.

Duration

Flash mobs vary in length but what is common to all of them in different definitions is their transitory nature. They do not remain in the space they appear. In the literature about flash mobs, it has been observed that flash mobbers do a sudden act in the public sphere and then disperse (Kiltz, 2011; Wasik 2009; Muse 2010; Loader 2008; Huning 2008); or they “happen, appear, and disappear within the blink of an eye” (Brejzek, 2012, p. 110). Wasik’s (2009) describes the flash mobs’ presence as “a short lived sensation that attracts incredible attention” (p.6). Brejzek (2010) describes these events as ephemeral, participatory, and temporary in their mode of organization, action, and duration. They make their presence known and disappear just as quickly (Brejzek, 2010, p. 109). Departing from their durational features, several authors have commented on the social influence, and on the political nature of the flash mobs. According to some literature, their duration raises questions about their actual influence on society and politics because the experience of the live event remains limited to the few minutes in which the flash mob is presented (Muse, 2010; Fominaya, 2011; Kahn & Kellner, 2004). Likewise, Brejzek (2010) says that the flash mobs make political acts in the space, but she criticizes flash mobs for having an unclear political agenda in the longer term.

⁸ The rhizome is a concept developed by Gilles Deleuze (1980) in the book, *A Thousand Plateaus*⁸. Deleuze developed this idea of a rhizome as an image of thought departing from the roots of a plant. According to the Oxford English Dictionary Online, a rhizome is “a continuously growing horizontal underground stem which puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals.” According to Fuchs (2012), Deleuze and Guattari see the following principles constitutive of rhizomatic structures: 1) the principle of connection and heterogeneity, 2) the principle of multiplicity, 3) the principle of a signifying rupture, and 4) the principle of cartography and decalcomania (p. 785).

“Let us summarize the principal characteristics of a rhizome: unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature; it brings into play very different regimes of signs, and even non-sign states. The rhizome is reducible to neither the One or the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five etc.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21)

Mobile phones, cameras and various recordings of the mob are argued to change the length of time in which the flash mobs resonate in the virtual space and in public discussions. It is argued that even if the flash mobbers' live action in the public space is short, they get recorded on camera and their distribution online makes this short lived event resonate in the online media and the virtual world (Muse, 2011; Sorochan 2009). This can be claimed to create a potential for expanding the audience, making the flash mob heard, attracting participants and giving the audiences methods to mobilize and create public events.

Use, Purpose and Purposelessness

Flash mobs have been interpreted as events that attract attention and ones that are (being) used for different purposes: According to Duran (2006), flash mobs are unusual but notable events (p. 301). Furthermore, Duran (2006) says this characteristic of flash mobs gives them the power to canalize attention to specific events and issues, while having been used with various purposes. Grant, Bal & Parent (2012) speak about the use of flash mobs as a form of group expression and as a marketing tool in the corporate arena that has been growing in the last years. Mitchell and Boyd (2012), in the book *Beautiful Trouble*, emphasize the collective and activist side of flash mobs and define them as "an unrehearsed, spontaneous, contagious, and dispersed mass action" (p. 46). In other words, Boyd and Mitchell (2012, p. 46) emphasize flash mobs to have a political motivation and define it as a method for activist politics. Huning (2008) claims that by clearly stating their purpose, flash mobs have the potential of becoming critical and political.

Recently, there have been happenings and protests in which activists have used flash mob gatherings and events to accomplish political goals (Mitchell & Boyd, 2012, p. 46; Fominaya 2011). In the contemporary social movements organized with the help of Internet and mobile technology, activists started making clear statements through the use of flash mobs as "tactics" for their social movements and protests (Mitchell & Boyd, 2012, p. 46). Flash mobs have been used as "creative" ways of making statements, in addition to being political and critical. Boyd and Mitchell (2012) claim that the actions included in flash mobs to be expressive, instrumental, and creative artistic practices (p. 46, 232). Brejzek (2010) categorizes flash mobs between event culture, political and artistic activism, and a "physical articulation of a social network" (p. 119).

The instrumentality of flash mobs is in directing attention to a cause. According to Boyd & Mitchell (2012, p.46) flash mobs have become a tool for protest by combining their sudden and ephemeral invasion of space with political statements. Flash mobs are effective when mass protests or group gatherings become dangerous and ineffective under authoritarian regimes (Boyd & Mitchell, 2012, p. 139). The reason for this is because, flash mob choreographies usually constitute everyday practices and actions, which can easily dissolve from mob choreographies to daily choreographies (Wasik, 2009, p. 3). This makes it hard to trace the flash mobbers and capture them by the police. Through the use of everyday actions as a method for creating awareness, the protesters are able to

escape regulation. The flash mobbers can change the spatial dynamics without going against the rules of space, laws, and social pressure.

Different from their definition with a political purpose, flash mobs have also been defined as being realized with the purpose of entertainment and experience. Flash mobs were argued to be “innocent, if mysterious, and tend to bring together loose groupings of surprisingly conventional-looking young adults” (Edmonton Journal, 4 August 2004). Duran (2006) characterizes flash mob participants as anonymous and describes flash mob happenings as “strangers coming together in a public place, to perform an unusual behavior and randomly disperse” (p. 301). Kiltz (2011, p. 6) and Anderson (2012) define the acts of the participants in flash mobs as spontaneous, unexpected, harmless, and pointless. According to Kiltz (2011), people who gather in a public space for flash mobs do incongruous acts and leave after a brief period of time (p. 6); she defined flash mobs as a constructed social experiment that is meant to examine conformity. The organization called *Improvise Everywhere* has defined their purpose as “giving the strangers a story that they can tell for the rest of their lives”⁹

The intentions of creating a flash mob have triggered other controversies and criticisms. According to Muse (2010, p. 10), flash mobs have been criticized for the irrelevance of their intention. For example, Muse (2010) mentions one blogger that has defined the flash mobs as “the power of many, in the pursuit of nothing”.¹⁰ The oddness and the unexpected ways in which the flash mobbers act in the public space create confusion about both the aim and aimlessness of flash mobs. Heaney (2005) describes flash mobs as an event where a large group of people, having received instructions in advance, converges upon a place, do something odd, and leave peaceably within minutes. There have been some statements of the individuals that define flash mobs as pointless phenomena: Marques Carson, 17, a student at Mastery Charter School in South Philadelphia said “I think it's happening because these kids out there have nothing to do. It's happening out of boredom. They want to hang out and have fun, by any means necessary” (Lubrano, 2010).

Flash mobs and social deviance

The institutions and authorities that try to regulate and control the public space usually consider flash mobs pointless and deviant; from the pediatric, educational, public management, and governmental perspectives flash mobs are a deviant kind of behavior and this deviance needs regulation and control. The flash mobs are seen as a social threat (Goldschmit, 2011, p. 167; Anderson, 2011, p. 29). Schreiber (2012) considers flash mobs a crime, similar to youngsters breaking into places and robbing candies and drinks (p. 37). These acts that are considered to be crimes deviate from the legitimate ways of acting in the privatized public spaces. In Larry Niven’s science-fiction novel, *Flash Crowd* (1973), he describes a flash mob like happening via teleportation. Iles (2004), states that flash mobs have acquired their name from the title of this novel. Niven (1973) describes flash crowds as a social

⁹ *Improv Everywhere*, “FAQ”

¹⁰ Tom (moderator), “Disperse Now,” *Flashhack* blog, flashhack.blogspot.com, October 3, 2003 (accessed March 5, 2010)

consequence of having cheap and unlimited teleportation. He said that as people see something interesting via teleportation, they go to check it out and exploit the happening in the blink of an eye. Niven (1973, Chapter 9) defines these acts of flash crowd as crimes; "The next thing anyone knows, every man, woman, and child in the country has decided that he wants to see the red tide at Hermosa Beach..." (Chapter 10). In other words, the flash crowds of Niven were mass social phenomena, which were considered to be deviant happenings and, thus, flash mobs are associated with breaking the norms and regulations.

Flash mobs' unexpected and sudden way of staging have created a necessity for control and new legislation among the lawmakers, educators, and the academic discourse in the area of public management. It has been argued that flash mobs and their participants require surveillance and control, as they are deviant and threatening, which may cause social, political, and economic damage to the public spaces and people (Anderson, 2012; Schreiber, 2012). According to Goldschmidt (2011, p. 167), flash mobs are spontaneous uprisings, which occur when adolescents broadcast impromptu events via online social networks or mobile devices. On the other hand, Kiltz (2011) points out that the flash mob incidents across the United States force (the) police and public officials to curtail crimes (p. 7). Friesen (2011) also defines flash mobs as new, emerging, and evolving social phenomena that have recently been associated with youth violence.

Performativity and Urban Public Space

The flash mobs are a public performance and the city is the stage that hosts the performance (Muse, 2010). They appropriate the public space for a while to present their show. Brejzek (2010) agrees with Muse by claiming that the city is used as a "schenographic performative space", and flash mob schenographies can perform an "orchestrated spatial figure of resistance" (Brejzek 2010, p.109). Brejzek (2010) defines flash mobs as spatial figures of resistance, and states that flash mobs and flash mobbers appropriate the city and public space as a schenographic performative space (p. 109). Therefore, the public space is where the critical potential of flash mobs is revealed and actualized. According to Huning (2008), flash mobs are new types of public intervention in public spaces (p. 196). Brejzek (2010) agrees with the interventionist character of the flash mobs and adds that in today's social space, flash mobs constitute an "urban intervention" based on the non-hierarchical grammar of the virtual communities (Brejzek, 2010, p. 120). Boyd and Mitchel (2012) highlight the performative side of flash mobs in the public space while explaining these phenomena. They say that flash mobs have emerged as "a form of participatory performance art", in which people use social media (internet, email, blogs, mobile phones, twitter) to organize "a meeting in a public location to perform a playful activity" (p. 46).

As previously stated, this participatory public performance art is ephemeral. According to Tofts (2005), flash mobbing and its ephemerality give an idea of how people appropriate new technology and use it as means to social ends. Further, Brejzek (2010) claims that in flash mobs, "the virtual social network that exists with or without a place in the eternally mobile modern metropolis is transgressed and put

into a temporary physical body” (p. 117). Wasik (2009) agrees with Brejzek on the physical presence of flash mobs, and states that flash mobs are a new virtual phenomenon and a physicalization of a virtual culture (p. 5). Brejzek (2010) claims this to be “stillness”; a counter action or non-action opposed to the mobility required to keep up with the consumerist city. Consequently, as flash mobs take place in the public space, they interact with the space and with the other people or institutions that frequent, or make up part of the space.

Flash mobs in the public space appear suddenly, forming a spatial figure (Brejzek 2010). Muse (2010) defines flash mobs as surprise performances, emphasizing the suddenness of the event. Brejzek (2010) claims that the flash mob invites a different view on the urban space, quoting Debord’s (1967) expression “the universe of rented spaces” to define the urban space (p. 119). The suddenness and ephemerality of the flash mobs according to Brejzek (2010) and Muse (2010) gives a critical look to the place, its regulation, and its use by the people, and the critical look gives flash mobs the potential to play with the spatial dynamics of a place. The place that is intervened stages a flash mob that is spontaneous and temporary (Hunning, 2008, p.194). A Flash mob is a situation that appears and disappears in a place that is “rented” from the urban public space (Brejzek, 2010).

According to Hunning (2008), flash mobs are less dependent on physical place, but more on time (timing of the event) and virtual space because they are organized through virtual networks. In the first step, they organize and construct situations through communication networks among participants. During the (first step) organization phase of flash mobs, the participants are given detailed information about the location, time, and the action that has to be taken (Wasik, 2009; Brejzek, 2010; Boyd & Mitchel, 2012). In the second step, the flash mobbers physically intervene in the specified place based on the information gathered during the communication stage (Hunning, 2008, p.194).

On the other hand, flash mobs have been referred to as quite dependent on physical space because the performance takes place in the public space and flash mobs communicate their messages, and create symbols in the urban physical space (Kaulingfreks & Warren, 2010). A Flash mob’s critical potential can be immediately visible in physical places because they shift the dynamics and flow of the space during the performance of the mob. Flash mobs have been associated with the performances of the Situationist International. Brejzek (2010) claims that flash mobs are making “constructions of situations” (Debord, 1958). She, furthermore, states that these happenings are similar to the urban laboratories of the Situationist International (Brejzek, 2010, p. 119-120). Walker (2011) claims that flash mobs have the anarchic spirit of the Situationist performances (p. 3).

According to Brejzek (2010, p. 110) flash mobs intervene in a public place to realize the constructed situations, independent of that place. During these constructed situations, even if the participants don’t know one another outside the virtual networks, they are still connected and play an active role through online networks and their participation in the information flow about the mobs.

However, it is impossible to ignore flash mobs’ dependence on the virtual spaces that facilitate their organization, communication of symbols and the

movements that are to be presented in the public space, for the resonation of the recorded mob among the people (Etling, Paris & Parfley, 2010; Muse, 2010). The communication, enabled by Internet and mobile technologies, allows the sharing of information in a free public space and prepares the participants for the intervention (Iles, 2004), thus enabling them to act and to move in unison (Brejzek, 2010, p. 119). Additionally this communication flow, contributes to the networked nature of the flash mobs. Social networks, which include friends, colleagues, and acquaintances that normally share a common social network, create an off-line flow of information about the flash mobs. Furthermore, as the mobs are documented by videos and photographs, these documents serve as tools for attracting future flash mobbers by inspiring and informing them on the how to create a mob (Muse, 2010).

Participants

The connections between the participants of the flash mobs remain controversial. According to Muse (2011), the flash mobs are realized by “a horde of strangers” (p. 10). The presence of virtual or non-virtual social networks that are highlighted by Wasik (2009), Walker (2011), Boyd & Mitchell (2012) challenges the description of the flash mob crowd as “complete strangers” by Duran (2006) and Sorochoan (2009). Brejzek (2010) stated that even if the participants did not know one another, they would still share common friends and acquaintances (p. 114). Nevertheless, the participants of the flash mobs are usually defined as anonymous. I conclude from the literature that, instead of defining or grouping the people who participate in the mob by spreading the word about and distributing the documents about the mob, flash mobs and the flash mobbers highlight the cause.

The (virtual) connection between flash mob participants can be explained by looking at how Wasik (2003, 2006 & 2009) explains the organization of one of the first flash mobs. For example, Wasik (2006, 2009) says that he had started the information flow of the first flash mob by forwarding an email he sent to himself from the address, themobproject@yahoo.com. To increase the legitimacy of the flash mob among the network of people he emailed, he first sent the email to himself and then forwarded it to others from his own email address (Wasik, 2006, 2009). Wasik increased the credibility and viability of the flash mob because he was forwarding the email, thus suggesting that he was an acquaintance of the receivers of this email of the flash mob (2009). On the other hand, even if the participants are anonymous, they can remain connected to one another (Souza e Silva, 2006). Furthermore, online social networks are known to be creating friendships and acquaintance between people (Souza e Silva, 2006). The online and previous social networks connect the participants of the flash mobs through the people and the organizers who function as nodes (Souza e Silva, 2006).

As Wasik has pointed out, the flash mobs were a critique of the scenestrictism of the New Yorkers, and he created an event in which the participants would do both, create the show and see it. Beginning with the creation of the mob, we see that the participants also become the spectators of the mob (Wasik 2009; Muse, 2010; Kaulingfreks & Warren 2011). Muse (2010, p. 15), points out that flash mobs pose a challenge to a unified concept of audience that flash mob. He claims that the

audience consists of surprised bystanders, participators of the mob and those who watch it online (Muse, 2010). As mentioned before, flash mobs were reproducing the scenester culture by combining public performance. What further gave them political potential was through connecting the acts and the statements of the flash mob with the zeitgeist and the ongoing social issues of the specific time and place.

Flash mobs as political phenomena

From the aspects that have been highlighted earlier in this chapter, it is possible to make three conclusions about the political potential of the flash mob: First of all, flash mobs are visible in both, the public and the virtual space, and attract attention. Secondly, flash mobs have people (masses of varying sizes) involved in the mob; they are not restricted to a particular group of people. Finally, they disturb the daily flow of actions, where their presence creates a disturbance or a rupture in the choreographies of the public space and in the normality of the space.

Flash mobs attract attention to the space with the symbols they portray in space or with the way that the people move in the space. Their suddenness creates a shocking effect in the space. This shock makes a change in the space even if it is temporary. Even if this temporary and ephemeral characteristic limits the visibility and the political potential of the flash mobs to the live event, the recordings and documents about the mob enable it mob to be heard and to grow its influence. Flash mobs have an aim in creating a performance in the public space, be it meaningless or meaningful, political or recreational. The flash mobbers seldom highlight their identities and often do not make clear and direct statements about the issue. They attract attention to the points they make in an indirect manner, and the framing and the discussions in the Internet and social media contribute to the resonation of the mob and its meaning. The anonymity in the flash mob facilitates the participation of people, and makes the mob attractive for people to join.

Moreover, flash mobs have a political potential that can be realized because they have people included it in their action, and the people come there for a reason. Those people who participate in the organization and the realization of the mob can mobilize themselves, their resources and people who are connected to them in the network. The participants of the mob and the people who know about the flash mob grow in numbers. Just as it is the case with the smart mob, the participants can potentially mobilize their social capital to make a change in the social order, or to make a change in a cause, or in its most obvious form, they can become political by intervening in the public space.

Finally, as highlighted before by several authors, the flash mobs make a sudden intervention in the space. In this unexpected intervention, flash mobbers display choreographies that are different than the ones already observed in that public space. The actions that the flash mobbers perform do not always belong in the location where the flash mob is realized. Flash mobs often deviate from the normal way of being in a social space. Overall, the public space and the visibility the space gives the flash mobs make the happenings heard and seen. In addition to the

public space, the circulation of the images and videos in the virtual space can create a platform for discussing the flash mobs and the issues they bring to the public space, in addition to directing the topics that are eventually discussed.

The steps to be taken in the next chapters

The theories that will be discussed in the next chapter will clarify how (the) flash mobs contribute to the public and the political space with their criticism. I will be arguing that flash mobs can be political tools and that they use characteristics of spontaneity, leaderless structure, rhizomatic nature, networked organization, ephemerality, use of public space, and their achieved political strength. I will be discussing how flash mobs can be an activist strategy that goes beyond the political discourses that are allowed by the politics of space and identity, and questions power relations between the various regulations in space, and the people.

In the next three sections, I will be discussing three theoretical perspectives, which contribute to the discussion about flash mobs as an activist method for communicating political messages and informing people. In explaining the flash mobs as a new method for conveying activists' political statements that are most influential and practical, Castells' work on networks and networked social movements will clarify the use of Internet, mobile technologies; the rhizomatic nature, leaderless structure, and their interventions in the place of the other. Furthermore, De Certeau's theory of the practice of everyday life will explain the ephemeral, anonymous, leaderless, and rhizomatic nature of flash mob events and how this makes them a critical way of conducting activist politics in the streets. As (for) the third theoretical approach, finding similarities between Scott's explanations of peasant resistance in relation to modernist state projects will explain how flash mobs are an example of bottom-up resistance. I mainly argue that flash mobs have the potential of being used as political and critical tools (in space). The theories in the next three chapters bring new perspectives to the flash mobs' critical potential and demonstrate how in recent times there has been a trend in (the) contemporary social movements and protests to use flash mobs as tools to communicate messages. In addition, I will connect the networked, leaderless, rhizomatic, and ephemeral characteristics of flash mobs with Scott's theory in explaining how flash mob resistance can be formed and maintained.

Chapter 2: Castells: Networks and Communication Power

Castells defines the current time as the Internet Age in *Networks of Hope and Outrage* (Fuchs, 2012, p. 776). In the Internet age, the post-industrial city is facing new encounters and new happenings that go beyond the spatial, political, and social structures of space and place. The Internet is creating new social networks (Castells, 2009, p. 19) and new communicative structures that prepare the free flow of communication in the virtual sphere. Networked happenings and organizations in the Internet age emerge via the relative autonomy and the autonomous zone provided by the Internet and networks (Castells, 2012). I will argue that: As, flash mobs, are one of the happenings of the Internet age, taking place in urban settings Castells' theory of networks and communication power allows for an understanding of the critical potential of flash mobs, in terms of networks that shift the dynamics of power in urban space. I will show how Castells' approach to networks and the networked society allows for an understanding of flash mobs as networked happenings that deal with political and spatial power. Besides, I will show how Castells theory can aid in understanding how flash mobs mediate in new meanings that are created in the networks; and how they use the urban space in staging these meanings. Castells' concept of "communication power" and his explanation of "meaning making" will be analyzed as a method of seizing power. Finally, Castells' (2009, 2012) discussion of the "autonomy" of communication and flow of information given by the internet in mobile networks will be the other point of discussion, in explaining how this autonomy gives flash mobs power in space. The critical characteristics of Internet and networks, according to Castells (2009), are the autonomy they give to the individual in communication, in spreading information, and in creating meaning. These characteristics will be used to explain the critical potential of flash mobs as political and spatial happenings.

I will be focusing in particular on Castells' use of the concepts of power, communication, networks, and a networked society. I will demonstrate how these concepts are relevant to understanding the critical potential of flash mobs and how this is concerns the ways in which flash mobs come up with innovative ways of dealing with power in public space and in the city through the communication that takes place in the networks of the network society.

Concepts

1. Power

Power is the first concept of Castells' theory of communication (Kroon, Loaner & Mayeda, 2013). Castells (2009) defines power as "the relational capacity

that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interests, and values" (p. 10). In Castells theory, power is connected to space. The concept of space, as derived from Foucault (e.g., 1975; 1979; 2008) is understood as a fundamental basis for the exercise of power. Foucault (1986) states "the anxiety of our era to do fundamentally with space"; he defines the space he is speaking about (space) to be a "heterogeneous space" that makes us "live inside a set of relations that delineates sites that are irreducible to one another and absolutely not superimposable on another" (p. 23). In other words, he uses the term heterotopia to describe spaces that have more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than what immediately meets the eye. These are spaces of *otherness*, which are neither here nor there, and that are simultaneously physical and mental, such as the space of a phone call or the moment when you see yourself in the mirror. Foucault (1986) gives the ship as an illustration for a heterotopia: "a boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself that is closed in on itself" (p. 27). According to Saldanha (2008) heterotopias are countersites, standing in an ambivalent, though mostly oppositional to society's mainstream" (p. 2081). The virtual space that is the Internet is such a heterotopic space, a place without a place that uses communication power as a form of power that challenges the physical / geographical distributions and divisions of space.

Communication power, according to Castells (2009), is a new source of power typical of the information era and resulting from technology and from the tools of the Internet. The role of communication power in Castells' theory is further elaborated by others: According to Munch (2012, p. 181), with his theory of the power of communication, "Castells shows us how communication in and between networks creates the possibilities of power" in analyzing the communication power. Power has the ability to challenge and change. New possibilities of power can challenge and change the structures established by previous forms of power. Castells (2009) further argues that there is an increasing centrality of communication power in the performance and the operations of all dimensions of power in the current era.

In his, *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012), Castells states the power relationships to be constitutive of society; furthermore he continues by saying that this is because "those who have power construct the institutions of society according to their values and interests" (p. 5), via their relationships to other people and other power holders. In the information era, relationships of communication power constitute the society. Internet increases the visibility of the alternative holders of power globally (Zook & Graham, 2007, p. 247). This means that, the Internet has created a more democratic political environment (Castells, 2012). He claims the technology of Internet to embody the culture of freedom (2001, 2012). In the network society, alternative groups of power become visible in the virtual space and in addition to those that are dominant in the public space and in the physical space.

This approach is argued to overlook the governmental practices of labeling, punishing and control that take place in the virtual world –as the platform for communication. As a result of the record keeping and monitoring behavior which are

the defining features and the information era, and according to Hope (2005), silent, continuous and automatic monitoring of individual's everyday life through communications technology has resulted in an increase in classification systems and social sorting of information (p. 361). Hope adds that surveillance is now done in discreet ways, without letting the individuals becoming aware that they are being monitored. This surveillance is curbing down the autonomy of the virtual space. Therefore, and even though alternative groups become visible in the virtual public sphere with the help of Internet, their visibility and freedom gets monitored by those who find the power and the means to regulate the communication flow.

2. Networks

Communication, in Castells' theory, takes place within networks and power relationships shift within the networks (2009). Castells (2009) claims power relationships to be constructed in human minds through communication processes. This brings the analysis to the second important concept in Castells discussion of the network society, namely *networks*. The networks that are discussed in Castells' theory are independent of a geographical location (*Communication Power*, 2009). Further, they are formed as a result of the connectedness that is created by the Internet. Networks embed the communication in the society: between the individuals, social groups and institutions.

Castells (2004) defines networks as "the primary unit of social organization" (p. 19); and as "the organizing form of life" (2009, p. 221). Castells (2008) stresses that networks are old forms of social organization; they are now empowered by new communication technologies, so that they become able to simultaneously cope with flexible decentralization, and with focused decision-making. According to Castells (2009), networks are sources of power. Castells (2009) claims that over time, 'networks' have become 'the most efficient organizational forms' due to the increasing power of communication in the Information Society and as a result of 'three major features of networks, which benefited from the new technological environment: flexibility, scalability, and survivability' (p. 23). Flexibility is the ability to adapt to changing environments and to retain the networks' goals while changing their components, sometimes bypassing, while scalability is the ability to expand or shrink in size with little disruption. Finally, survivability is the ability of networks, to withstand attacks to their nodes and codes because the codes of the network are contained in multiple nodes that can reproduce the instructions and find new ways to perform. These three characteristics make networks critical and powerful.

According to Castells (2009, 2012), networks deal with power. Pickard (2011) states that, "according to Castells, networks are constantly reconfiguring around new issues and shifting coalitions" (p. 55). Therefore, it can be concluded that networks are dynamic structures that create different forms of power in every coalition. These dynamic structures and shifting coalitions can be seen in the network society. The kind of power that is relevant here is the power of meaning

making and communication power. Networks are functional in the organization and implementation of this power. The networked organization is used in different fields of social organization that is assumed to create a chain of interactions that goes beyond geographical distribution of people. Its influence can be seen in society, politics, and social movements.

In addition to networks, the *network society* is a key term, which, in Castells' view, comprises 'the social structure that characterizes society in the early twenty-first century' (p. 3). Castells (2004) defines the network society as "a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies" (p. 3). This social structure in the network society is constructed around (but not determined by) the digital networks of communication (Castells, 2009, p. 4). Castells claims that offline networks play a bigger role in the determination of social relationships, in his book *Networks of Hope and Outrage* (2011).

Fuchs (2012) develops the concept of networks from Castells and uses the term network in two different meanings (p. 776): The first meaning is "the social networks of activists" (Fuchs, 2012, p. 776) and the people who participate in the networked social movements. The second one is "the role of the Internet as a global network of computer networks in social movements" (Fuchs, 2012, p.776). The Internet and networks have been argued to have emancipatory influences on people and activism, in addition to their potential for facilitating governmental control on subjects that use them (Christensen, 2011).

Fuchs (2012) and Barassi (2013) criticize Castells for having a "techno-optimistic" point of view that emphasizes the positive influences of the Internet, social media, and mobile technologies on democracy and citizenship. According to Barassi (2013), these networked forms of communication have often become the material support of new types of political imagination and association, but they also have their limitations. Contrary to the optimism of Castells, Gladwell (2010) argues that activists in revolutions and rebellions risk their lives and risk becoming victims of violence conducted by the police or by the people that their protest is directed at. Therefore, networks, the Internet and networked communication bring new regulations and challenges to (the) democracy, along with its contribution to the visibility of new voices in the public space.

3.Autonomy

According to Loaner (2012), "traditionally, modes of mass communication were entirely under state control" (Krohn, Loaner & Mayeda, 2013, paragraph 8). Nonetheless, Castells (2012, p. 28-29) claims that networks and the Internet liberate the communication and news producing mechanisms from this control. Castells (2009, 2012) states that the Internet is an autonomous space of communication. According to Castells (2009, 2012), one of the emancipatory characteristics of the Internet is the relative autonomy it gives to its users in communication and in taking

action. Barassi (2013) claims that Castells' argument in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012) about networked happenings and social movements in the 21st century is based on the assumption that, on the Internet, individuals have a degree of communicative autonomy and that individual participation is the premise upon which all other political acts are based.

Castells (2012) defines autonomy as "the capacity of a social actor [or a group of social actors] to become a subject by defining its action around projects constructed independently of the institutions of society, according to the values and interests of the social actor" (p. 230-231). Castells (2012) adds "networking allows individuals to build their autonomy with likeminded people in the networks of their choice" (p. 231). According to Castells (2012), online networks are inclusive structures. He claims the mobile networks and Internet to be "a web of communication that includes everything and everybody" (p. 231) and that provide widespread social networking. Those that are connected are free to self-construct their own networks and groups according to their mindset and goals (Castells, 2012, p. 232). Castells (2012) claims that "autonomy can only be insured by the capacity to organize in the free space of communication networks but at the same time can only be exercised as a transformative force by challenging the disciplinary institutional order by reclaiming the space of the city for its citizens" (Castells, 2012, p. 234). In other words, the citizens are able to reclaim public spaces with their own statements that are shared on the Internet.

According to Castells (2012) just as social life, the social movements and social action is becoming hybrid. The autonomous space of communication, according to Castells (2012), creates a *hybrid* zone for communication in social movements, with the combination of the actual and the virtual. Even if the networks partly liberate the communication from control through Internet, social movements and protests still need to have physical interventions, because according to Castells (2012), even if social movements were "born on the Internet, diffused by the Internet, and maintained its presence on the Internet" they need to physicalize themselves in a "material form of existence" through "the *occupation of public space*". Castells (2012) states "social movements become a movement by occupying the urban space" (p. 222). The need for occupation of urban space is another reason why (the) social movements and activist performances remain hybrid and the regulations in virtual and physical space bring challenges to the autonomy.

4. Mass Self-Communication, Meaning Creation and Sharing

Communication is a process that occurs between the individuals in the networks. Castells (2009) argues that networks, Internet, and media technologies are changing the methods of communication in the world. Castells (2009) defines the communication trend in the 21st century as "mass-self communication" (p. 135). He argues that the Internet facilitates a new type of "mass communication of the

self”¹¹ that is directly related to the development of social and political autonomy (Castells, 2009, p. 53-71; 2012, p. 7). He claims mass-self communication to multiply and diversify the entry points in the communication process (p. 135). Castells (2009) names the concept *mass self-communication* as a consequence of the mobile technologies and the Internet on communication. As communication can be a one to one level, thanks to the virtual networks distributing the information simultaneously to all the other nodes in the network, it can be from one (person) to many. Mass self-communication is possible through mobile technologies, the Internet, and networks (Castells, 2009). In theorizing communication in the Internet era, Castells develops the argument of Zygmund Bauman in *The Individualized Society* (2001) and Ulrich Beck & Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim in *Individualization* (2002), who say that a major trait of contemporary society is individualization; Castells argues that through individualization, autonomy becomes possible. Mass self-communication is a mechanism that gives relative autonomy to the individual, and makes his voice heard. According to Castells (2009), communication is a type of power that is gaining importance in the Information society.

According to Castells (2009, 2012), meaning making is an act that is realized during the communication process and is an important source of power. Castells (2009) claims “communication happens by activating the minds to share meaning” (p. 136). Individuals have active roles in meaning making, as they receive stimuli and messages from outside. Meaning making according to Castells (2009, 2012) is a multidirectional process. Castells (2009) argues that individuals are autonomous in selecting and forming the messages they receive. Castells argues that in networked social action, meaning making starts in the virtual space and is carried to the physical, urban space. Meaning is a possible end result of the communication process.

“...communicative subjects are not isolated entities; rather, they interact among themselves by forming networks of communication that produce shared meaning. We have shifted from mass communication addressed to an audience to an active audience carving out its meaning by contrasting its experience with the one-directional flows of information it receives. Thus, we observe the rise of the interactive production of meaning. This is what I call the creative audience, the source of the remix culture that characterizes the world of mass self-communication.” (Castells, 2009, p. 132).

The individuals are interacting with the signifiers that communicate multiple meanings and messages and add their own messages and sub codes to the meaning (Eco, 1994). Castells (2009) states, “social actors and individual citizens around the world are using the new capacity of communication networking to advance their projects, to defend their interests, and to assert their values” (p. 57). In other words, communication gives the individuals and the events organized by the individuals a critical power in relation to the non-virtual / physical space. By participating in mass-self communication, the individuals communicate their own meanings to the others

¹¹ Explained by Castells as “a growing number of people, and particularly young people, affirm their autonomy vis-à-vis the institutions of society and the traditional forms of communication, including the mass media” (2009, p. 129)

(Castells, 2012). Humans create meanings with their natural and social environment, by networking their neural networks, and then they share meaning through face-to-face and networked online and offline communication (Castells, 2012, p. 6). According to Castells, networks are critical and influential in social movements and in collective action because they create meanings interactively (2012, p. 5-6). Later, if those meanings are connected to other meanings, they can create social change and critically influence the social space and social order. According to Castells, "Revolutions would be connected to economic, political, military, ideological and cultural contradictions of power" (2012, 79; see also p. 12), "but they could only form if there are the emotions of hope and outrage and these emotions are communicated to others on a large-scale" (2012, p. 14). Therefore, it can be concluded that (the) networked communication should address emotions in order to be critical.

Castells (2004) argues that Internet and mobile technologies are changing the social structures and the "definitions of the material foundations of our existence in space and time" (p. 36). Virtual space gives the networks a platform to discuss hypothetical ideas, structures, and happenings, and to imagine situations and happenings, while the classical types of mass media (newspapers, TV, and radio), serves people with already established facts and opinions. The opinions, ideologies, slogans, aims, and political or social orientations are discussed and decided in these platforms among the networked individuals and organizations. Mass communication and meaning creation become an interactive process (Castells, 2009; 2012).

This change is triggered by new technologies of communication and by the Internet. The increase in the speed of communication and changing definitions of time and space has implications on the organization and on the realization of protests and social movements (Castells, 2012). Barassi (2013) states that Castells' analysis of the movements highlights the role that Internet technologies played in the rapid mobilization of people and in the coordination of action. This has its influences on all the networked phenomena. Barassi adds that data and examples used by Castells also suggest that the social movements and new technologies are making constant negotiation with one another and that this relationship is "defined by a complex dialectics between transformation and continuity, between the technical and the social, and between old and new political repertoires of political action and media activism" (Krohn, Loaner & Mayeda, 2013).

In social networks, and networked social action, according to Castells (2012), mobile and virtual communication creates the grounds for urban intervention. The social action gains a hybrid nature with the new technologies. The networked social movements that use flash mobs as a mode of social action utilize online tools and occupy physical urban space. Castells (2012) argues that the physical occupation of urban space in social movements and networked activism is crucial for three reasons.

1. "It creates community and allows participants to overcome fear, a fundamental threshold to solidify social movements";
2. "It emphasizes the symbolic nature of the specific space that is being occupied";
3. "It creates a Habermasian public

space for deliberation and sovereign assemblies” (Castells, 2012; Krohn, Loaner & Mayeda, 2013).

The meaning making and the creation of a virtual platform for discussion is a process that can be seen in the networks that create the flash mobs. It creates a community out of the participants by informing them about a particular meaning (even if the participants participated in the network while not knowing each other). Through the meanings that are created in the network, flash mobs intervene in the space with symbols that highlight and raise questions about the symbolic meaning of the place or the symbols that are present in a place. They integrate the meanings that exist in the space into the mob during the event and disperse after a short while. After the flash mobbers disperse and the happening is over, the public space can go back to its original flow, but the questions raised and the symbols introduced to the place can float around in the minds of the individuals who experienced the mob as “audience”. This can lead them to contemplate about what happened. Meanings that are introduced to the space do not easily disappear unless there are new meanings introduced that manipulate the ones that are introduced by flash mobs. Every meaning or symbol that is in the space can cause another meaning that would challenge the previous ones. Additionally, the spontaneity of the flash mobs can trigger emotions in the bystanders and can be critical in the way those bystanders and the flash mobbers themselves see that place. Even if the flash mobs depend on virtual space, they occupy urban space and create meanings in the urban space. Flash mobs have a political potential because the meanings that are created become visible in urban space.

Discussion on Flash Mobs and Castells

How do I see a possibility for connecting what aspects of Castells to what aspects of flash mobs, why this theory is useful in understanding the critical potential of flash mobs?

As this research looks at flash mobs as a networked activist performance, Castells’ analysis of networks and communication power can be used as explanatory for how the networked flash mobs create an alternative power mechanism to the one that is present in the (public) space, the place for the mob. Castell’s discussion on autonomy helps to clarify how the communication that takes place before the flash mob is relatively independent from the place and the structures in the place. Furthermore, Castells’ discussion of the act of meaning making is explanatory of the creation of meanings and symbols with which the flash mobbers intervene in the place and for the resonation of the meaning in the society / networks. Finally, I suggest Castell’s concept of meaning making and mass self-communication to see how the critical meanings flash mobs introduce to the space interact with the space and the people.

Power, Communication, Meaning Making and Flash Mobs:

Castells (2009): *"Communication is a source of power... Communication happens in the creation of meanings."*

Castells (2012): *"Power of networked social movements and protests is in the meaning making process."*

Castells claims the ruling source of power and mechanism of power to be communication power in the Internet age. I propose to position (the) communication power, as an alternative to the power embedded in the space that can present a counter power that is critical and challenging. Flash mobs are able to embody an alternative to the power and the structure in the political, public, and urban space through their physical presence that originates from the virtual communication. Participants can be considered as embodying the communication power formed in the information flow. From the discussion of Castell's theories and concepts, I conclude that the communication power and the power of networks can challenge the power embedded in the space with the messages, symbols, and the unwritten rules of how to use the particular space communicated through networks. Furthermore, flash mobs are performances that make public intervention emerge from online and offline communication. The embodied communication power by the flash mobbers performs the meaning in the public space and unites different numbers of people through communication in both virtual space and in public space. The communication brings messages that emerge from individuals that are dispersed and that do not share the same geographical place. Therefore, it is potentially challenging to the meanings and power embossed in the place.

At the time of the event, flash mobs are visible to the spectators / witnesses in the same space, but by using the possibility of communication that is given by the Internet and networks, flash mobs make themselves visible to a greater audience. They gather, synchronize themselves and perform. This can be potentially challenging for order in the space in which the mob takes place. Flash mobs can bring together and present a group of individuals that are unified through communication flows (ideologies and thoughts), rather than being united by the place. Flash mobs represent the power of communication embodied in the space, the *spatial figure of resistance*. Meaning making can create symbols that represent the power of communication and helps to challenge the meanings embedded in space that circulate info and sense. It can make communication power concrete and gives tools to communicate ideas.

A challenge to the critical potential of communication power (in the virtual space) and a requirement for the criticism of the flash mobs to be influential is the necessity for a public intervention in social movements. In this way, they can symbolically present their existence in the public space and the public discussions. Thus, the meanings created in the virtual space have to get adapted to the urban spatial structures during the performance of flash mobs. Flash mobs face people's reactions and governmental regulations in the physical space. So what is performed and perceived by the various audiences online and offline risks not being identical to what was thought of in the first place.

Network & Flash mobs:

Castells (2009): *"Networks are the primary unit of organization in the society."*

According to Castells (2009, 2012), new forms of networked social organization that are emerging in the society influence the events that take place in the public place. When networks become the *primary unit of organization*, they give access to information and facilitate the participation of people from different geographical places into the happenings like flash mobs. Moreover, and with their organizational potential, networks that play a role in the flash mob have the possibility to mobilize social capital of the various individuals that are connected to the network and generate economic, political and other types of capital that is required to reach certain ends. It is possible for them to use various types of capital to supply the needs in realizing the flash mob. Via their networks, the actors in the mob can take the networked organization one step further in order to make the flash mob part of a social movement.

On the other hand, the people who participate in the mob remain limited to those who have access to the online networks that take place in the organization of the flash mob, as well as those that live close to the area in which the flash mobs take place. Consequently, the critical look that the flash mob can bring to the place includes a limited group of people.

Autonomy, mass self communication and flash mobs:

Castells (2009): *"Internet as an autonomous space of communication"*.

Castells (2009): *As the communication can be one to one, thanks to the virtual networks distributing the information simultaneously to all the other nodes in the network, it can be from one to many.*

Thanks to the autonomous space given by the Internet, the statements the participants can set potential goals that are not bound to the goals of the society, public space, or the city. Therefore, the situations or flash mobs (they) created in public space have the potential to be socially and politically critical, and embody different meanings and statements than those that are in the physical/offline space. Nonetheless, even if the flash mobs are events that are born as products of the relative autonomy and the possibility of communication given by the Internet, when they are put in action in the physical space, they face the counter power the urban physical structures apply to them. Mass self-communication is important in sharing social meanings, informing people about the mob, attracting individuals, and reproducing meanings as the news and documents of the flash mobs are communicated to people.

Through the autonomy in the virtual space, (the) flash mob participants can share thoughts and experiences that are socially deviant or not possible to share in (the) face-to-face conversations. The "autonomous" virtual space gives the individuals a platform and digital tools to create their own visual symbols and slogans and to share them with a bigger public via social media. However, the

possibility for (the) individual voices to be heard remains bounded to the online platforms that are available for the individuals to express themselves. The virtual space gives the possibility to share experiences, feelings and political causes beyond (the) geographical location; but, the hypothetical ideas that are expressed by the flash mob eventually get adjusted to the physical location. As the ideas become physical, they become subjected to the rules and regulations in the physical space.

Furthermore, flash mobs' long term effects can potentially trigger processes that are able to initiate organized social action that can asymmetrically influence the decisions of the social actors in the urban space and in the public space. The disruption they create via the choreographies is able to show the weaknesses of the power structures in the space.

We see that Castell's explanation of networks and of their role in communication are explanatory of the critical political nature of flash mobs to create new meanings in the public space, which is the space of politics. Castells' explanation of the autonomy, the hybrid nature of the action that sheds light to the mobs' spontaneity, and intervention in the public space via the virtual and without being dependent on the public space, connect anonymous participants, and enable a leaderless and rhizomatic social movement and social action. This analysis first leads us to inspect other characteristics of flash mobs in relation to the people, their practices, and the legibility of those practices. Secondly, in the fourth chapter the analysis will be done in relation to the intervention of place as a tactic or a means towards a goal.

Chapter 3: James Scott's Daily Life Resistance, Legibility

Where there is power, there is resistance. — Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality 1: An Introduction*

Where there is resistance, there is power. - Lila Abu – Lughod (1990, p. 42)

I have so far looked at the critical potential of the flash mobs through Castell's concept of communication power and how it creates an alternative form of power to the power that is embedded in public/physical space. I emphasized the relative autonomy and power given to the flash mobs by networks and the Internet, and meaning creation as a tool for making statements, creating symbols of communication power, and being critical to the meanings that are already in the space.

What is the aim of the chapter?

In this chapter I analyze the flash mob's potential for resistance, departing from James Scott's theory of peasant resistance. I will be looking at the points, which I consider to have structural similarities between flash mobs and James Scott's analysis of ordinary everyday peasant resistance. Scott wrote his book, *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), as a result of his ethnographical study of the peasants in Sedaka, Malaysia. I will start by explaining Scott's analysis and interpretation of the resistance practices of the peasants and observing how they become visible and critical towards the landlords. Connecting Brejzek's (2010) definition of flash mobs as an "orchestrated spatial figure of resistance" (p. 109) and Scott's theory about (the) peasant resistance, I suggest that flash mobs are able to become a method of everyday resistance by integrating illegible practices of resistance to everyday life routines and everyday life locations. Since Scott's ethnographic study is very much context specific, I will be using his theories and analysis solely on a conceptual level, and without generalizing the peculiarities of his analysis to other contexts. The key concepts in this chapter will be: resistance, legibility.

In the following pages I will present how Scott discusses resistance in (the) daily life. Furthermore, I will show how Scott uses the concept of legibility in explaining the governments' efforts of gathering information on their subjects and monitoring them, and what the consequences of making the society and the land legible are. Finally I will proceed to discussing how the emergence and critical potential of flash mobs can be clarified with Scott's concepts of resistance and legibility (of Scott).

Concepts: Resistance and Legibility

WHAT IS RESISTANCE ACCORDING TO SCOTT?

Looking at the resistance practices of peasants that are analyzed by Scott is the initial step that will direct the analysis towards power struggles. Scott introduced resistance as a concept in 1985, in his book *Weapons of the Weak*, which he wrote at the end of an anthropological study about the peasants of Sedaka, Malaysia (Vinhagen & Johansson, 2013). In the book, Scott (1985) discusses resistance in the form of peasant labor. Scott (1985) defines the type resistance in his analysis to be a weapon for powerless groups like factory workers and peasants. According to Buttel (1987), the primary focus of Scott's analysis in this book is on non-rebellious and non-revolutionary forms of peasant resistance and on what Scott (1985) calls "the tenacity of self-preservation" (p. 350). In his study, Scott discusses the influences of the Green Revolution¹² on the Sedaka peasants (Buttel, 1987), how it caused discontent among the peasant workers, and how it led to practices of resistance. Scott's book, according to Buttel (1987), views ideological domination and class struggle in the Left-Weberian¹³ tradition (p. 302). According to Vinhagen and Johansson (2013), everyday resistance relates to how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power (p. 2). The everyday resistance among peasants in Scott's (1985) study consists of "petty acts" (p.36), which makes up the performance of resistance and keep it going. Furthermore, Scott (1985) exemplifies everyday peasant resistance as "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (p. 29). Vinhagen and Johansson (2013), who refer to Scott in mapping the concept of resistance in the academia, define *resistance* as an oppositional act that is situated in certain time space and relations (p. 1).

According to Scott (1985),

Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines. Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own. There is rarely any dramatic confrontation, any moment that is particularly newsworthy (p.36).

¹² Green Revolution refers to a series of research, development, and technology transfer initiatives, occurring between the 1940s and the late 1970s, which increased agriculture production worldwide, particularly in the developing world, beginning most markedly in the late 1960s.

¹³ Left-Weberian tradition explains resistance and social action as emerging from social discontent (Constable, 1980).

Just as it is mentioned above, the everyday acts of resistance are made up from individual acts, which are not always visible or recognizable as resistance in the first instance. The acts of resistance remain random and dispersed, in addition to being constant and continuous. Scott (1985, p. 29) calls the peasant forms of resistance as “Brechtian forms of class struggle” (1985, p. 29). The characteristics for these types of resistance are that:

They require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms. To understand these commonplace forms of resistance is to understand what much of the peasantry does “between revolts” to defend its interests as best it can (Scott 1985, p. 29).

According to Mason (2003), what Scott calls “Brechtian forms of class struggle” is a contested practice of resistance. Mason (2003) states the reason for this to be the absence of unison in the actions Scott analyzes. In this way they are difficult to categorize as similar or having common oppositional aims. Mason (2003) argues against defining Brechtian forms of class struggle of resistance and says that the oppositional practices should have political implications, common values, and aims, in addition to taking action in an organized and collective way, in order to be qualified as resistance. Scott categorizes everyday resistance (“Brechtian form of class struggle”) as a weapon of political struggle (p. 154). The instant visibility of political implications and its aims is not a priority for the act to be oppositional; the implications become visible to the watchers throughout the process of resistance.

According to Douglas Kellner and Walter Benjamin (1998), Brechtian forms of *epic theatre* show the workings of societal process and human behavior (how and why people behaved in a certain way in the society under certain societal conditions), instead of creating an *illusion of reality*. Benjamin (1998) adds that this is a method for not reproducing the ideology and allowing the spectator to reflect on why these events happened and how change would be possible.

Scott’s investigation of “Brechtian forms of class struggle” lacks a clear explanation of why everyday resistance is Brechtian. My understanding of Scott’s association of everyday peasant resistance with Brechtian theater is that just like the Brechtian form of epic theater, everyday resistance, the peasants go on performing their labor in the field by not collaborating with the landlords. As the landlords are the authority that monitors and controls peasant labor, this form of resistance leaves those who are monitoring face to face with the damage the non-collaborating peasant labor gives to them. Plus, this type of situation forces the landlords to look for ways to make changes in the social order (their relationships with the peasants).

Finally, what can be concluded from Scott’s analysis is that everyday resistance is not recognizable as oppositional because it avoids symbols visible to the monitoring gaze from above and because it avoids coordinated action. In order to recognize these acts as critical, one needs to be aware of the routine or the social relationships/hierarchies that exist between the groups (peasants & landlord, among the peasants). The illegible practices of peasant resistance are embedded in the work process and social order, and they react against these two. Besides, and according to Scott (1985), “the nature of resistance is greatly influenced by the existing forms of labor control and by beliefs about the probability and severity of

retaliation” (p. 34). The resistance that Scott calls everyday life resistance and the practices that take place on the individual level or in the public space / work place are perceived differently from diverse positions in the society (1998).

WHAT DOES RESISTANCE DO / HOW DOES IT INFLUENCE?

According to Scott (1985), everyday resistance curbs down institutional power (p.32). He states, “what everyday forms of resistance share with the more dramatic public confrontations is of course that they are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes” (p.32), but they don’t directly oppose. Buttel develops Scott’s claim (1987) by saying that the peasants engage in innumerable anonymous and invisible acts of ideological and material resistance against the rich farmers (p. 302). The peasants oppose the landlords without making the resistance symbolically visible. As the daily life resistance remains subtle and anonymous, and as it emerges from illegible practices, the participation of every individual in the resistance practices becomes equally important. Scott highlights the peasant resistance:

“Seen in the light of a supportive subculture and the knowledge that the risk to any single resister is generally reduced to the extent that the whole community is involved, it becomes plausible to speak of a social movement. Curiously, however, this is a social movement with no formal organization, no formal leaders, no manifestoes, no dues, no name, and no banner. By virtue of their institutional invisibility, activities on anything less than a massive scale are, if they are noticed at all, rarely accorded any social significance” (1985, p. 35).

In this quote Scott speaks about the practices that are invisible institutionally. These resistant practices are not recorded; therefore their position in relation to the power holders is not realized. The next sections will explain how Scott interprets the *vision* of the power holders, how the population’s practices interact or react to this vision/gaze, and, finally, what it means for the practices to be visible or non-visible.

Legibility

Scott’s concept of resistance has important connections with his other concept investigated in his book, *Seeing Like A State* (1998), which he calls *legibility*. Scott, in the book, *Seeing Like a State*, shows the perspective/vision of the state on the practices in the agricultural lands, how this perspective orients the state to make the land legible and the use of this legibility as a source of power on the people who use the land. According to Scott (1998), the state regulates and tries to make legible the use of the space. Furthermore, Scott emphasizes that the regulation of the land and the people is based on an imaginary design of space and society. The implications of the state imposing an imaginary design and regulating what is happening in the land are far from neutral. According to DeLong (1999), in his study Scott highlights the various forms of damage that have been done in the 20th century by centrally planned social-engineering projects and what Scott (1998) calls “high modernism”.

What is Legibility?

The concept of legibility according to Scott (1998) refers to "...a state's attempt to make society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion". Scott (1998) considers legibility to be a central problem in statecraft (p. 2). According to Scott (1998), "the premodern state was, in many crucial respects, partially blind; it knew precious little about its subjects, their wealth, their landholdings and yields, their location, their very identity. It lacked anything like a detailed "map" of its terrain and its people" (p. 2). Scott (1998) maintains that the premodern state lacked standardized measurement that would serve them for translating what they knew into a standardized synoptic view, in other words to a map (p. 2). Furthermore, and according to Scott (1998), "blindness" of the state made it hard for the state to make interventions into the land, when it was found necessary (p. 2).

How does state create legibility? How does legibility influence the people and the state?

As we have seen in the definition, legibility was achieved through an operation done by the state in the twentieth century through centrally planned social-engineering projects (Scott, 1998). These projects provided knowledge and understanding to the state, rendering the state more powerful. According to Scott, the social engineering projects are "purely local, customary practices [...which] achieve a level of precision and clarity" and the information that was legible suited to the needs of knowledgeable locals" (Scott, 2010). In other words, creating legibility was creating a tool that would serve the state to control and to manipulate. Scott points out that this process of creating legibility was a top-down approach that structured the society according to the hypothetical constructions of those in power, and those who have technical knowledge about the society that is relatively detached from daily life practices of the population.

The clearest analogy of Scott (1998) that explains the imposed social designs and limitations of these designs is the practice of *mapping*. Scott states that all the simplifications that have been investigated in his book, *Seeing Like a State*, have the character of maps. This analogy means "they are designed to summarize precisely those aspects of a complex world that are of immediate interest to the map-maker and to ignore the rest" (p. 87). According to Scott (1998), the map abstracts and summarizes the land according to a purpose (p. 87).

The abstractions serve the modern state and its institutions that use the information for trying to understand the society and to gain knowledge about it (Scott, 1998). The abstract top-down view of the state or of those who are in the upper levels of the social ladder, according to Scott (1998), is a result of certain political and societal projects of the state. Scott claims that with this information (legibility), the government could impose order and control and categorize the practices of the population (Scott, 1998). Scott (1998) adds that the modern state arranged the property regime according to the legibility of the land and the society.

The property regime was simplified and uniform, “more legible and hence manipulable from above and from the center” (p. 2). Scott (1998) exemplified the imposed structures and practices in order to achieve legibility as: Creating standards of measurement, national language, creating definitive and legally recorded property lines, assigning surnames, and centralized traffic patterns (p. 53-83).

According to Scott (1998), many of the most tragic episodes of state development in the nineteenth and the twentieth century were triggered by three elements: Aspiration to the administrative ordering of the nature and society; unrestrained use of power of the modern state in order to reach social designs; and a weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans (p. 88). Overall, the ordering of nature and society rather than it happening in an organic way, was realized with the help of violence applied by the state. As the state gathered more and more information about its population and land, it could make intervention into the land and the people based on its own interest.

According to Scott, when the legibility is created the state is able to view the places and practices from the top and impose many rules and regulations on people and on their practices in order to monitor the people and place them in the land (in the country). The same thing happens on a smaller scale among the landlords and the peasants. The agricultural land can be categorized, as a form of privatized-public space in which there is economic, social interaction and social relationships among the peasants or among peasants and the landlord. Since the landlords are the higher authority in the land, they try to monitor the peasants’ practices in the land according to the landlord’s interest. Both governmental practices of the state and the monitoring practices of the landlords trigger reactions and responses from the subjects, which is the people or the peasant workers. The reactions can be constructive as well as destructive for those in power. They can be recognizable or non recognizable in the public space and challenge the state’s power based on vision and legibility.

Illegibility and its consequences

Scott (1998) claims that imposed structures of legibility in the modern statecraft had a disparity of aims with the local customs, and they were simplified “abridged maps” (p.3). They were based on knowledge, which was not accessible to the population, and that was derived from knowledge that is based on standardized measures, numbers, and statistics. As a result, the imposed documentation and categorization of the land had incongruences with the practices of the society in the land. The practices, places and structures that were made legible, excluded certain types of practical knowledge and practices that are a part of daily life. Disparities were the result of the imposed in a top-down manner, and the narrow vision of the state or those in charge (1998, p. 11). According to Scott (1998), these imposed structures were creating definitions to which the population fit or were forced to fit. Such was also the case in the practice of mapping the land, the authorities that tried to make the land legible were imposing a design for land, roads and regions (Scott, 1998). All these imposed designs left some practices and old structures illegible.

Scott (1998) claims that these illegible practices and places are the origins of resistance in society (p. 61). Due to the illegibility of certain lands and of the population, the state is not able to intervene in certain places or monitor the practices of the population. According to Scott (1998), “an illegible society, then, is a hindrance to any effective intervention by the state, whether the purpose of that intervention is plunder or public welfare” (p. 78). I argue that this is because the illegible parts of (the) society are able to create counter power mechanisms that challenge the governmental power. On the other hand, as soon as the illegible acts become practiced in the form of resistance, they risk becoming legible and public, falling under the gaze and regulations of the government, and thus becoming vulnerable to intervention.

From the discussion of Scott’s theories of legibility and resistance, I conclude that this susceptibility of the legible opposition to state intervention creates a need to constantly share, politicize and create new practices that are contrary. The solution could be to create a cyclical process of opposition: As the resistance practices faces intervention by the state, the defiant practices can get modified and continue to resist. In this way it would be possible to make the resistance sustainable in the longer term.

Flash mobs, resistance and illegibility

Just as it was the case in Castells’ theory of networks, in Scott’s theory of legibility, place re-emerges as a source of power. Different experiences of (the) place gives different types of power to those who experience (use) the place and to those who have a top-down vision of the location and practices that are going on in that location. While the top-down view brings an encompassing type of knowledge about the practices that are going on in the space, daily life practices produce knowledge that is based on the experience of the place and the acts that are done in it. In the following paragraphs, I indicate some connection points that can be made between Scott’s explanation of the origins of resistance as emerging from the illegible, and the emergence of flash mobs in contemporary protests and activist performances in public space:

Scott discusses resistance to be emerging from daily life practices that are dispersed, anonymous and illegible.

1. (The) flash mobs can be defined as a form of daily life resistance in Scott’s terms: As the resistance in modern legible states emerged from the daily life practices that remained outside of the legible structures, the resistance in twenty-first-century society emerges outside the legibility of the urban physical public space and the mass media, as we see in the networked happenings that are political and oppositional. The resistances in the network society emerge in the virtual space and in the private space that hosts the less legible or the illegible practices and discussions. The Internet and social media in the network society create a form of virtual public space, which allows public discussion among the people who have

access to that space to share the social discontent and emotions that trigger social action of symbolic public performances, flash mobs, which are public interventions. (The) flash mobs can be considered as daily life resistance because anonymous individuals oppose to different contexts can repeat flash mobs in different places and times, integrating them into their daily choreographies. Flash mobs use daily life movements and symbols from daily life in bringing a critical look to public space. The flash mob's participants get informed about the choreographies online, and individually, and this contributes to the illegible nature of the mob in the organization process.

Scott (1998) says legibility of the land facilitates state's interventions in the land and in the society.

2. What flash mobs make in the space is also defined as public interventions (Muse 2011; Brejzek 2010). Scott's claim explains how the public interventions made by any group become possible. The main requirement for intervention to the land is legibility. Flash mobs' public interventions are made thanks to the space being legible to the flash mobbers. The flash mobbers read and get informed about the space not from abstracted maps or statistical information, but by experiencing the space from the bottom, as the users of the space. Therefore, they create the choreographies from a different point of spatial legibility, and a distinct type of knowledge created from that legibility. Flash mobbers' knowledge is based on being the wanderers of the space. I conclude that their knowledge that is based on experience is potentially critical and can bring new dynamics to the space.

According to Scott (1985), daily life resistance is dispersed and anonymous.

3. Looking at Scott's statement of everyday resistance helps to see the potential of resistance and the criticism in the casual looking choreographies of flash mobs. The symbols that are formed in the flash mobs usually indirectly oppose the established power mechanisms in the space. They decontextualize certain public or private practices and perform them in different public places. They make different acts visible in alternative contexts and go against the usual symbols and choreographies in the space. The casual look of the resistance, its anonymity and the dispersed nature of the resistance acts render the oppositional practices sustainable and protected from intervention and maintainable for a longer period.

4. The casualness and accessibility of the practices can attract people to participate in the mob and make the action widely accepted and harder to disallow. In this anonymity, and with the integration of daily life practices, flash mobs include masses and enable the flash mobbers to grow in numbers and grow in anonymity. The daily life nature of the choreographies can make the flash mobs attractive to masses because the movements are-in many instances-understandable by people and visible to them. Additionally, the virtual discussion of the feelings, opinions, experiences and public symbols and the sharing of the recordings and documents

about the mob on the Internet enables the symbols to be deconstructed and reconstructed in the public. This communicates the political cause to the people, seeking for new supporters for the cause.

Parallels with other authors

As mentioned above, Scott's theory of legibility looks at the extraction of power from the space via reading the space (legibility) and the formation of a counter-power in the parts that remain illegible. His discussion makes clear the power embedded in space, which I argued to be opposed by Castell's communication power. Scott points out the strengths and weaknesses of knowledge of the state based on geographical place and vision of that place.

Another association that could be made between Scott and other authors is on the discussion of daily life resistance. According to Boyd and Mitchell (2012), in authoritarian states, any kind of unusual act is vulnerable to massive reaction from the government. In times like this when organized public protests become inefficient and dangerous, it is possible for daily life resistance or of flash mobs as daily life resistance to enter into the scene as alternative modes of protest. Therefore, the daily small actions and happenings are also used as a way to slow down the state/police reaction and to decrease the violence. Creating daily life resistance choreographies in the space makes flash mob choreographies and the symbols stronger because daily life choreographies are harder to be spotted as oppositional. They can appear and disappear in the space into non-oppositional choreographies. Flash mobs can be done by groups that are in the same geographical place, or they can be conducted as individual performances.

In the situations where legibility increases the possibility of intervention, flash mob choreographies should keep emerging cyclically in order to be persistent and potentially influential. As the choreographies are spotted as political actions in public space or as the news and symbols of a flash mob start circulating in the mass media or social media, it becomes legible by the authorities and institutions that are being opposed. In this way, the performance reaches the aim and makes the oppositional symbols and statements heard. This can be the initiator of a negotiation between different parties, including between the government and its citizens. Alternatively, in authoritarian governments or in contexts where political opposition is defined as a crime or a deviant act, the government can intervene to stop the realization of oppositional choreographies or the circulation of the symbols of resistance. The government can accuse the actors of the flash mob and "punish" the resistance and deviance. Hence, for the resistance to continue in the public space, the flash mobbers should continue creating new symbols and forming alternative choreographies that emerge from what still remains illegible.

Concluding remarks

This chapter aimed to look at potential contributions of Scott's analysis of daily life resistance and the concept of legibility to understand the critical potential

of flash mobs. As I looked at the flash mobs through Scott's perspective, I concluded that one of the reasons why flash mobs do not make direct oppositional "political" acts visible was in order to create confusion and to delay government intervention. This has both, positive and negative sides. It is positive because it protects the mob from violent intervention, and it is negative because the political function of the flash mobs remains questionable. The performers of resistance remain anonymous. Flash mobs intervene in the public space. On one hand this gives the flash mobs a certain type of communication power because their physical presence in the space makes the event known to others. On the other hand, flash mobs' presence in the public space makes them legible and weaker towards a possible intervention by the government. Flash mobs criticize the existing ideology in the social and political life with an approach that is partly "outside", but with one that is still connected to the political space. This renders the political orientation of the flash mobs and the social movements that use flash mobs less legible, even if not illegible. Furthermore, illegibility at the stage of flash mobs' formation renders them inclusive of different political points of view and makes it meta-political, as it can connect people for specific causes that benefit every individual.

Scott's analysis of daily life resistance helped me see flash mobs as everyday forms of resistance that pursue changes in everyday practices. From the discussion of Scott and flash mobs, I conclude that flash mobs are potential propellers of a process. This process initiates with changes in the practices of everyday life. It can create an example performance on how to oppose via the practices of everyday life. If this attracts greater numbers of people to participate in the mob and in daily life resistance, it can turn into a large-scale organized movement that can bargain with the institutions and people in power. The long-term continuation of resistance / every life resistance and (the) flash mobs can create a community that is powerful and organized enough to confront the groups and institutions in power. This can progress towards a change in the attitude of those in power towards those in the lower levels of the social ladder.

Chapter 4: de Certeau, Place, Space, Agency, Choices and Tactics

...it is always good to remind ourselves that we mustn't take people for fools (p. 176). – Michel de Certeau , *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984)

Flash mobs have been defined by Brejzek (2010) as spatial practices that take place in urban areas; and Brejzek states that flash mobs create a spatial figure of resistance. Departing from these spatial characteristics of flash mobs, this chapter argues: First of all that the flash mobs display a critical performance that demonstrates choices based on agency in the use of the public space; secondly, that flash mobs function like tactics that can shift power dynamics, and attract attention to a situation or a cause in the social and political sphere. Departing from these spatial characteristics of flash mobs, this chapter shows how de Certeau's book *The Practice of Everyday Life*¹⁴ (1984) helps in understanding how flash mobs can be understood as spatial figures of resistance because of how they display a critical performance that demonstrates choices based on agency in the use of public space and secondly, that flash mobs function like tactics that can shift power mechanisms, and attract attention to a situation or a cause in the social and political space. I will show that de Certeau's theory of practice is very much relevant to flash mobs because flash mobs are happenings that take place in the daily life locations that host daily life practices. I will start by giving a general overview of what de Certeau's theory of practice of everyday life is and how it is positioned among the other theories that look at everyday life. Afterwards, I will proceed to explaining what de Certeau's discussion of agency is and how de Certeau claims that agency can be seen by looking at the (individual) choices made in structured and monitored environments. Later, I proceed to the two other concepts of strategies and tactics, and how, according to de Certeau, these two concepts are related and how they differ.

How are de Certeau's theory and his book "The Practice of Everyday Life" positioned in relation to the other theories of practice?

Michel de Certeau's theory has a distinct position among the theories of everyday life. According to Certeau, everyday life is repetitive, unconscious and made up of procedures (1984, p. 43). De Certeau questions whether there is any space for individual choices in this routine. Then, de Certeau examines the ways in which people individualize mass culture, altering things: From utilitarian objects,

¹⁴ Originally the book is called *L'Invention du quotidien, I. Arts de faire* (1980), and it has been translated to English by Steven Rendall, in 1984.

street plans, and rituals to laws and language, in order to make them their own. According to Ahearne (2010), “the work analyzes active practices of appropriation” (2010, p. 2). On the other hand, according to Gross (1985), de Certeau’s book is an analysis of the oppositional practices of everyday life (p. 79). Bogue (1986) claims that *power* is de Certeau’s main focus in the book (p. 368). In general, De Certeau (1984) says the aim in his book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) to be 'to make explicit the systems of operational combinations (*les combinaisons d'opérations*) which also compose a "culture"’.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau attempts to outline the way individuals unconsciously navigate everything from city streets to literary texts. What comes out of his analysis is that, while navigating in the space, the practices that are present in the unconscious interact with the outer world, the physical space, and the public sphere. Although this is related to the work of other theorists such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, who also focus on everyday practices and the power mechanisms embedded in them, de Certeau’s work also stands apart from them. Unlike Foucault and Bourdieu, who highlight and analyze power structures and practices that maintain (the) power, de Certeau’s theorization of everyday life focuses on differences and subversions in the practices that seem to exist in the system of power.

In the book, *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault explains the history of the modern penal system. He analyses ‘the apparatus exercising power’ and focused on the mechanisms that have sapped the strength of these institutions and on the production and maintenance of power. In this book, Foucault presents punishment as a practice that maintained power and order. Furthermore, Foucault came up with the concept of “panopticism”, referring to the institutional building designed by Jeremy Bentham. The design was a large tower overlooking a space so that anything going on in that space can be seen by the eye of the tower. From the ground, the tower could be seen from anywhere. Like this, surveillance becomes pervasive. This was the structure that was the basis at Foucault’s theory of surveillance. Departing from Foucault’s theory of discipline, de Certeau states that he looked for ways in which society resists the system of control and discipline, and being reduced to mere subjects of the microphysics of power (p. xiv). In other words, the question de Certeau tries to answer is; how do people manipulate the mechanisms of discipline or conform to it, so they can escape from it? In this manipulation, there seem to be two processes: “Consumption” and “production”, which are important in explaining how this resistance is practiced.

When we look at Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of practice, we see that he has attempted to outline an objective 'system' which underlies the transmission and actualization of practice(s) and perceptions (Godelek, 2012). According to Eickelman (1979), Bourdieu's theory of practice deals primarily with the reproduction and transmission of systems of meaning, and how these are shaped by the configurations of power and economic relations among groups and classes in different societies. Bourdieu uses the concept of *habitus* to refer to this system, which can be understood as a structure of the mind characterized by a set of acquired schemata,

sensibilities, dispositions, and taste.¹⁵ Therefore, Bourdieu's work focused specifically on the formation and operation of dominant forms of practice within the field of cultural production. Bourdieu and De Certeau represent different perspectives on the same phenomenon, though they share common ground in terms of the *habitus*. Taking Bourdieu and Foucault's work one step further, Michel de Certeau emphasized the subversive practice(s) or tactics employed by the weak and the subordinated to contest monitoring order in everyday life. De Certeau's theory is a theory of non-conformity.

Departing from the *habitus* of Bourdieu and the panoptical structure that maintains power, de Certeau's theory of practice emphasizes "agency" in the practices of everyday life. In other words, de Certeau's approach highlights the possibility of resistance to the rule instead of how ruling mechanisms are created and maintained. Most importantly, and in contrast to Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu's top-down approach that highlights control in how society operates, de Certeau highlights the agency and the individual as an elementary unit of the society (Gallagher, 2010). In other words, he studies the culture from bottom-up (Godelek, 2012). These two are the key points that will lead us throughout the chapter.

DE CERTEAU'S CONCEPTS

Agency and choices

Michel de Certeau's book, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), examines agency in cultural practices. The daily life practices analyzed in this book reveal the elements of individual initiative and autonomy in such practices. According to Langer (1988), De Certeau's theory rejects total domination (p. 122) and highlights the freedom and the agency that exist in any kind of dominant structure. According to Sacasas, "Michel de Certeau presents an account of individual agency which seeks to nuance Foucault's exposition of the disciplinary society" (Sullivan, 2011).¹⁶ According to Ahearne (1995), de Certeau sought to find an opening in the social fabric (p. 147). This opening is the agency that strives towards social change. By the discussion of agency, the theory of de Certeau highlights the opposition/resistance and the creativity that is seen in the oppositional practices in the space.

Furthermore, without denying the existence and significance of "disciplinary technology" (that regulates subjects) and the "microphysics of power," de Certeau himself states that he wanted to:

Bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and make-shift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline.' Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline [...] (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiv-xv).

¹⁵ Scott, John & Marshall, Gordon (eds) *A Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

¹⁶ <http://thefrailestthing.com/2011/03/07/we-mustnt-take-people-for-fools-de-certeau-on-reading-as-resistance/>

The “clandestine” practices that are discussed by de Certeau (1984) display particular choices that are made in imposed structures (in the urban space). In other words, there is some element of creativity in the individual agency according to de Certeau. The existence of creativity is supported by Ahearne (2010), who says that de Certeau’s work brings into focus “dispersed and often invisible forms of creative operation” (p. 2). My understanding is that these creative choices introduce the possibility for making changes firstly in everyday life, via their oppositional nature, which can inspire making changes in other domains of life.

The agency of the dominated groups that live in the ruled environments is not easily visible by the power holders who are looking at them. Further, this lack of visibility may create the illusion that the power structures are fully controlling those who are being dominated. Supporting the existence of agency in the dominated groups, de Certeau (1984) points out that the fact that these people have a dominated status does not mean that they are passive or docile. Gross (1985) refers to de Certeau’s (1984), claim which says that even if the powerless (the vast majority) inhabit frames and structures they did not create and cannot hope to abolish in a single lifetime (p. 79), they are able to undermine these frames by means of a whole range of tactics that they constantly put into operation. Tactics inhabit contemporary life with resistances, “manipulative movements”, “conscious maladaptations”, and intentional avoidances that de-legitimize the dominant structures (Gross, 1985). These acts of opposition help to weaken the influence and power of the state, and produce actions that reinterpret the imposed power mechanisms. However, de Certeau brings to light the models of action particular to users whose status is the dominated element in society are named as “consumers” (p. xi-xii).

What turn the dominated consumers into producers are the manipulative movements that are mentioned by de Certeau (1984). Bogue (1986) exemplifies these manipulative movements by saying that “the reader [is] negotiating another’s text, the pedestrian [is] traversing the panoptic city, the shopper/cook [is] selecting and preparing the market’s goods, the renter [is] inhabiting the landlord’s apartment, the viewer [is] manipulating the network’s images” (p. 367). As indicated in the words of Bogue (1986), the *consumption* de Certeau (1984) speaks about includes an interaction. It is a two-sided process between the reader and text, pedestrian and the city, shopper and the market goods or the viewer and the networked images, rather than a unilateral process where the person adheres to the given rules and regulations.

De Certeau highlights the existence of agency and creativity in the consumption process by saying [...] that consumption is a form of production, a *poiesis*¹⁷ or way of making, albeit one that leaves no record of its activity” (Bogue, 1986, p. 368). As indicated by de Certeau, people are not consuming what is given to them. Instead, they are reproducing what they encounter during the everyday life. My interpretation of what de Certeau says is that the production that is going on in

¹⁷ Poiesis: is etymologically derived from the ancient term ποιέω, which means “to make”. Italics from the author.

space is an ephemeral/temporary one; it is not permanent in the place, yet it is influential for the space (or the dynamics in the place). The surrounding structures orient the subjects and lead them to consume what is built in the space. On the other hand, the subjects / people make choices in the space that orients them, agreeing or disagreeing with the given orientations; we perceive that people/subjects use their agency in all spatial practices during everyday life.

To a rationalized, expansionist and at the same time centralized, clamorous and spectacular production corresponds to another production, called 'consumption'. The latter is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its *ways of using* the products imposed by a dominant economic order (p. xiii).

Consequently, the production that takes place during consumption does not start from a blank canvas. In other words, production does not create something that didn't exist before. Rather, it uses the produced objects and set structures in a personalized way. It reinterprets the order and the constructions that make up the order.

Walking and reproduction of space

For de Certeau (1984), reproduction of the space happens while using the place. In his book, he gives Manhattan, New York as an example of a physical space in which a production or a reinterpretation takes place through the act of walking (p. 91). As a contrary perspective to that of a walker, de Certeau describes the totalizing view when someone looks down from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center. This totalizing view has similarities to the one in the Panopticism of Foucault, or that of an abstracted city map¹⁸, but what happens beyond the totalizing view in the individual daily practice is a different story. De Certeau (1984) states that the ordinary citizens of a city actually live "below the thresholds at which visibility begins" (p. 93); consequently they do not always encounter the regulations that being visible bring to them.

It can be suggested that the walking subjects don't always encounter the norms that are set by the authority that sees. This proposition can be supported by de Certeau's discussion of walking as a spatial practice that goes beyond visibility (p. 91), which is potentially critical because it is able to reproduce the space while also consuming it. According to de Certeau (1984), subjects/people make choices while walking in the space that are not visible to the lookers from above. This implies that the person who wanders around in the structures of Manhattan can go beyond the map thanks to the choices that he or she makes. According to de Certeau (1984), the choices and the practices that are looked down on continue to produce and reproduce (create and re-create) the space. While producing and reinterpreting the space, these practices stay in the boundaries and the rules of the place, and they prevent the disruptions in the choreography of walking that may be caused by these rules in the space. In my understanding of de Certeau, they do it by not

¹⁸ See Scott's discussion of legibility.

encountering/crossing the rules, structures and limits of the space, therefore by not becoming visible to them. Therefore, I conclude that spatial practices, in this case walking, reinterpret the space and the possibilities in the space without becoming visible in the space. With this in-visibility, walking as a practice does not validate the rules by not encountering them. It creates alternative choreographies inside.

In de Certeau's words the process is described as follows:

The long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be: it is neither foreign to them (it can take place only within them) nor in conformity with them (it does not receive its identity from them) (p.101).

The walker "makes a selection" from the range of possibilities organized by the spatial order (de Certeau, 1984, p. 99). According to de Certeau (1985), this selection is a resistance to and reinterpretation of the imposed order, and it is the way in which the walkers live the city and transform it. Walkers choose directions, the speed for walking, and the time to walk in the space. The selection, according to de Certeau (1984), is the reinterpretation of the place. This reinterpretation is not alien to the space, but it creates an opposition from within. An oppositional culture of practice can emerge that is critical and partly resistant to the gaze that looks down and dictates the practice of walking. On the other hand, a criticism to the oppositional nature of the spatial choices during walking is the fact that the frame is already defined. Therefore, the critical potential of the walker's reinterpretation of the space and the choices while walking remains questionable.

Before proceeding to the other concepts in De Certeau's book, it is relevant to point out a differentiation the author makes between the two interrelated concepts, "space" and "place" because all of the production, consumption and action is happening in a physical place and in the space. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau (1984) explains, "a place is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence"; a place is thus "an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (p. 117). He adds, "*the space is a practiced place*"¹⁹ (de Certeau, 1984, p. 117). Space is thus filled with movement and exists where there are "vectors of direction", "velocities" and "time variables" (de Certeau 1984, p. 117). Lavrinec (2011) states that space for de Certeau is constituted through practices. Therefore, according to de Certeau (1984), while place is the physical entity, space includes the dynamic choices made among the potentialities of movement and acting and is more open to change. The place and the space are two concepts that are very important in understanding de Certeau's discussion and differentiation of the other two concepts: Tactics and strategies.

Tactics and Strategies

The other concepts that are relevant to the critical potential of de Certeau's theory are "tactics" and "strategies". Michel de Certeau highlights differences in the ways of

¹⁹ Italics from the author.

operation between the 'strong' and the 'weak' in his discussion of the differences between *strategies* and *tactics*. In other words, these two concepts are relevant when looking at the power dynamics in the spatial practices and the critical potential of those practices. Each concept displays a different relation to the space and to the place.

Strategies:

According to de Certeau (1984), *strategies* require a place of their own that serves as the basis for generating relations with an external world that is distinct from them. They belong to a dominant and powerful subject of will and power (ex. an institution, organization, corporation, etc.), which has been separated from an environment. A strategy exercises the "power of knowledge", but only on the basis of power as "the precondition of this knowledge" (p. 36): That of establishing a "proper place." In other words, knowledge acquired from a place, from making that place legible and the practices predictable. Furthermore, de Certeau (1984) adds that the power of knowledge is rooted in transforming the "uncertainties in the history" and making them readable (p. 36). Additionally, de Certeau states that a strategy "seeks a conquest of place over time" through the construction of a locus of predictability and visual surveillance" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 36). Strategies render everyday life spaces understandable, controllable and seek to limit the choices that can be made, while also regulating the use of the space. Nonetheless, there still remain unlimited number of possibilities and choices that could be made in that space. According to Scott (1998) there are some choices that remain not visible, to challenge the dynamics of the space, and those choices pose challenges to strategies and to the vision on the place.

Tactics:

On the other hand, according to de Certeau (1984), *tactics* don't have a place of their own and are critical in their use of place. According to Lagner (1998), Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* is an attempt to theorize the tactics and practices by which ordinary people subvert the dominant economic order from within (p. 122), and is similar to what Scott called the everyday life resistance of the peasants.

Tactics for de Certeau are a calculus of force-relationships, which cannot count on a spatial or institutionalized localization (de Bruin, 1999). They operate in the 'place of the other' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). Moreover, a *tactic* is "a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 37). In other words, a tactic is a temporal intervention within the space of the other that disrupts the predictability of what is going to happen and obscures visibility. According to this definition, "tactics" are potentially a tool of opposition and resistance because they present alternative dynamics to the space. Bogue (1986) states that tactics apply instantiate, consist of context-specific knowledge, and are unrepeatable (p. 368). De Certeau (1984) adds that a tactic depends on time and "must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities" (p. 36-37), therefore having a dynamic nature. According to de Certeau, tactics shift dynamics in the space. Furthermore, in de Certeau's theory of place and space, are

two concepts that are directly associated with power. I conclude that tactics are practices that are directly related to power.

In de Certeau's words:

I call a "tactic" [...] a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety without being able to keep it at a distance (1984, p. xix).

Thus, from this paragraph, I conclude that using the place of the other is a crucial characteristic for shifting the mechanisms of power in the space. It is one of the features that give tactics the power to be critical to the place and on the use of space. Tactics, while using the place of the other, are able to abandon the place of the other in an instance. They take over, but they do not appropriate the place and maintain a distance.

According to de Certeau (1984), "the tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong, lends a political dimension to everyday practices" (p. xix). Furthermore, de Certeau (1984) gives an example of an act that is considered a tactic that is called *la perruque*: In this tactic, the worker diverts time away from producing profit for his or her employer and instead uses it for his or her own enjoyment and for activities that are "free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit" (de Certeau, 25). Everyday life, according to de Certeau (1984), is made up of tactics similar to this, and is further described as "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, 'hunter's cunning'..." (p. xix).

A comparison

When we compare strategies and tactics in relation to their sources of power, we see that strategies require mechanisms that will enable them to maintain the place, the control, and the Foucauldian "gaze" in order to make the people practice in the way that the structures demand of them. Thus, visibility is crucial in the control of spatial practices. On the other hand, tactics take place in fissures created in the panoptic gaze, which pretend to be austere, totalizing, and omniscient. This panoptic gaze, in relation to the city, could be conceived quite easily as a map of the city.

Another difference, according to de Certeau (1984), is that tactics have an important connection to time and they are less attached to the place. De Certeau (1984) says that tactics are dependent on time, while strategies are dependent on place. Strategies need a place, a particular organizational endurance and stability. Bogue (1985) quotes de Certeau (1984) in explaining the difference between a tactic and a strategy: A strategy "postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed" (de Certeau, p. 36; Bogue, p. 368). It seeks a conquest of place over time through the construction of a locus of predictability [a pattern] and visual surveillance that transforms "the uncertainties of history into readable spaces" (p. 36). Finally, strategies can be seen as aiming to be long lasting practices that help maintain a mechanism of power, while tactics are

more liable to making a change in the organization of power. Tactics use the momentum and the dynamic spatial practices going on in the place for intervention in the place.

Flash mobs and de Certeau

In the following pages, I will show how the concepts of de Certeau can be related to flash mobs and how this facilitates understanding the critical potential of flash mobs.

Flash mobs and Tactics

As mentioned before in this chapter, de Certeau claims that *tactics* use the space of the other. This, according to de Certeau, indicates to a dynamic nature. Tactics are placeless and do not possess a place. This helps these acts (tactics) to be more dynamic rather than static (maintaining the status quo). Looking at the flash mobs with de Certeau's definition of tactics makes us see the dynamic and tactical nature of flash mobs that is oriented towards making a shift in the space, creating "confusion" or chaos, and challenging the existing status quo in the place, rather than maintaining order. The reason for this is that:

- Flash mobs use places that are supposed to host everyday life choreographies in the public space that are different than flash mob choreographies. In other words, flash mobs do what is unexpected. De Certeau helps us interpret the places flash mobs use as 'place[s] of the other' or as places of alternative spatial power structures. The choreographies of flash mobs bring alternative dynamics into various places and activate certain potentials of spaces. The choreographies that are used in flash mobs such as walking backwards in Times Square, standing still or doing flamenco in a bank offer new ways of using and inhabiting a space that is regulated by the economic system and by money.
- As discussed in chapter two and three, flash mobs create a critical performance without appropriating a place in the creation process of the mob. As discussed before in relation to Castells' concept of power, flash mobs / flash mobbers embody the communication power (occupying the public attention with messages, images and videos). During this communication stage, it becomes clear that an alternative order of the place can be possible. They use the location for a temporary/short period in order to make the counter power visible in the space. In other words, they manipulate the power mechanisms in that place. With de Certeau's understanding of the notion of place, we can now interpret this as flash mobs using the place deliberately to show the possibility of an alternative order of the space.
- Just like tactics, flash mobs are also dependent on time instead of place (de Certeau, 1984, p. xix). This can be seen from an act in the

flash mob organized by Wasik: The flash mobbers synchronized their watches, appear simultaneously on a specific location in a shopping mall (Macy's in Manhattan) on a specific date, which is important for the context and the interpretation of the mob. The synchronization is crucial for the dependence on time. They have to know the movement patterns that take place in the space in order to decide when and how to intervene in the space with an unusual movement pattern. On the other hand, the flash mobs take place when they can attract the attention of a group of people in the space such as when there are people walking around instead of a time of the day where the location (public place) would be empty.

- We can also look at the time dependence of flash mobs as tactics on a macro level: Rather than basing their power in a particular territory or place, flash mobs are dependent on the spirit of the era or in other words the *zeitgeist*. Flash mobs intervene in a particular public space, after a series of events that are connected to a cause (emphasized by flash mobs). These series of events precede the mob and are influenced by the *zeitgeist*. Moreover, the dependence on the *zeitgeist* makes the flash mobs reproducible in different contexts in a certain time period. Flash mobs trigger the creation of other flash mobs (performances) and give people public tools to intervene in the space. The symbols and choreographies with which they intervene in the space challenge the spirit of the time and the specific context in which they take place, but are also adaptable to new locations. De Certeau's discussion of tactics makes us interpret flash mobs dependence on time and virtual world as a tactical characteristic, which makes it possible to shift the dynamics in the space.

Flash mobs and Agency

Secondly, as de Certeau discusses agency, he explains how consumption of space is a way of production. As explained before, according to de Certeau, the production in the space and in imposed structures is made through making choices within the rule that is given. Looking at the flash mobs through this argument on production and agency helps us identify flash mobs as actions that are reinterpreting the (public) space. Lavrinec (2011) names this as an act of "place-making".

- This is because, in creating flash mob choreographies, the participants choose a particular place and a particular time and they use the place differently from the majority of the users of that space. They chose particular movements or sentences. They bring meaning to the space with their choices. They create symbols that are socially meaningful or attract the publics' attention to a situation or a statement and to the place through the choices that are made in the space (of how to use the space).
- There are some features that contribute to the agency and to the power of flash mobs, which help flash mobs (re)produce and change

the space critically while consuming it. Flash mobs intervene in the public and political place with tools and practices that are *outside* the public political space, mainly with tools and practices from the private space. As they come from a different sphere than the public one, spatial choices made by flash mobbers deviate from the choices that are made by the individuals on the street in terms of their intentions. Even if the choices may physically look the same (if the flash mobbers use the public space as regular passersby), the intentions of the participants give political meaning to the flash mobs.

Even if the production that takes place in imposed designs is an indication of people's agency; the practices of place-making may remain limited to the imposed (generally physical) structures in the place. Therefore, the change new creations can bring to the space remains limited. The process may not create radical changes in norms and in the distribution of power in the place even if it challenges spatial hierarchies with the counter power created by meanings and by communication.

Concluding remarks

Discussing de Certeau and the practices of everyday life that take place in the urban context, I conclude that flash mobs are examples of the critical results that come out of the interaction of the individuals and ideas with the space. De Certeau's theory of everyday life, his discussion of agency and his discussion of tactics have guided me to understand the critical and political potential of flash mobs by offering a view on power, space and place.

In the previous chapters I have discussed the place, vision and knowledge as sources of power. Scott's concept of legibility that was related to vision led those who read the space and the peasant's practices to have the power of categorizing people, places and practices. Those people had the power to imagine the structures and impose regulations on the population and on their practices. Nonetheless, there was always some part that remained illegible, and which according to Scott (1998, p. 61), made up the origins of resistance. In this chapter, I have shown how visibility is also an issue in de Certeau and is associated with power and legibility-more precisely with the totalizing vision from the top of the Empire State Building in Manhattan. De Certeau took the discussion on legibility and illegibility one step further and analyzed the practices that were beyond the vision such as everyday life practices and choices.

Vision has been an important source of power in both de Certeau's analysis of everyday life and in Scott's theory of legibility. In both, Scott's and de Certeau's discussions, vision gave the viewers power. Moreover, Scott's theory of everyday life resistance and de Certeau's theory of practice match in their discussion of the practices of everyday life. Scott discusses the oppositional nature of the daily life practices of the peasants. Just as in Scott's daily life resistance, flash mob's tactics are daily practices that try to subvert the dominant order from within (de Certeau

1984, p. 101). In support to Scott, de Certeau's discussion about the clandestine daily life choices that are made in the space is seen as a method of subverting the dominant order from within, through the reinterpretations of the order. Therefore, I conclude that de Certeau's tactics are the ways from which the opposition / resistance emerges.

Thus, the analysis of everyday life practices that are illegible has been useful for understanding the critical potential of flash mobs as emerging from the virtual or from face to face interactions that are not visible in space. The illegible practices becoming public, visible or legible, and they generate a potential for creating alternatives to the public order, the use of space, and to the choices that are made in the space.

Chapter 5: Examples of Flash Mobs

So far I have discussed what has been written about Flash Mobs, what can be learned about the general characteristics of flash mobs from the literature and also I have presented different understandings of the critical potential of flash mobs. Later I have discussed a selection of concepts of three theorists and shown how these can be related to the general characteristics of flash mobs. This chapter will look at four of examples of actual flash mobs to show how the concepts of Castells, Scott and de Certeau help to understand why these flash mobs can be considered critical practices, or not.

In the next pages I will be presenting four flash mobs that have taken place in three different countries and for three different political reasons and different dynamics. The first case is the flash mobs that were taking place during the Indignados movement. There were flamenco flash mobs that were initiated in Sevilla by a group of dancer-activists that called themselves Flo6x8. The second and third cases are two flash mob performances that took place during the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey in order to protest the police's disproportionate use of force and violence to stop the protesters, as well as the Prime Minister Erdogan's extreme authoritarian rule in the country. The fourth case is the flash mobs used by the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S) in Italy to attract attention to social and political problems, and to the government corruption.

Overall, I argue that the concepts of Castell's communication power, networks, autonomy, mass-self communication and meaning making; Scott, everyday life resistance, legibility and illegibility, and de Certeau, agency, choices, reproduction of space & tactics can give a analytical point of view in discussing the critical potential of these flash mobs.

Spanish Case: Indignados / Movimiento 15-M

The bigger picture

In May 2011, a series of protests and demonstrations started in Spain, which has been referred to as the 15-M Movement, Indignados²⁰ Movement. These demonstrations, according to Charnock et al. (2012) have, since 15 May 2011, "re-awakened a popular political consciousness in Spain". According to Robin (2011) Charnock et al. (2012), Vicari (2013) and the demonstrations were caused by social unrest, the European economic crisis, unemployment, welfare cuts, political corruption, and democratic deficit in the country. The protests started on 15 May 2011 with an initial call for protests in 58 Spanish cities, and there were various forums and demonstrations going on. Madrid's iconic central square, La Puerta del

²⁰ Definition of Indignado (Spanish): (*adj*), indignant.

Sol, was the site of a strange convergence of the cyber age and the Middle Ages during the first days of what would soon be labeled (in English) “the Spanish revolution” (Robinson, *The Nation*, 27 June 2011); Indignados intervened in the square to make its physical presence visible. In other words, the protesters used the public space to give themselves visibility and this use of public space is one of the recurring characteristics of the flash mobs. Charnock, Purcell & Rivera Gomez (2012) say that the Indignados was born on the Internet as a leaderless social movement, against the economic cuts and austerity measures, that was demanding some “systemic change” in the financial system and capital accumulation. As it was written in *The Economist* on the 14th of July 2011 “well-mannered anger was the selling point” of the movement.

The movement being born on the Internet, displayed new trends in organizing and in protesting that combined art and politics in the streets with social media and created polycentric activism (Vicari, 2013). As a Part of this Indignados movement, in order to express discontent about the economic crisis and to protest the banks, a group of activist-situationist artists from Sevilla that called themselves “Flo6x8”, started doing flamenco flash mobs. Some called them “indignados de flamenco” or the indignants of flamenco (Vertele, 30/05/2012).

What happens in the flamenco performance in the banks?

In the flamenco flash mob “Bankia, pulmones y branquias (bulerías)”²¹ on the 17th of May 2012, in Sevilla, the happening starts with a man, singing a flamenco song in a bank. The song has lyrics that express the discontent and the economical burdens people have because of the financial system and the crisis. After a few minutes, a flamenco dancer (la niña ninja) enters the scene with the dance, accompanying the singer and the melody. Meanwhile some other people in the bank (who are later understood to be a part of the performance clap and accompany the melody and the dance. Other people and performers in the bank later join the dancer/la niña ninja. The participants sing, dance and some others join the rhythm by clapping throughout the song. At the end of the event performers exit the bank as the performance ends and disappear in the streets.

Why is this a flash mob?

I argue that some of the demonstrations Indignados can be defined as flash mobs that are used for protesting, expressing themselves, and communicating the complaints and problems to the public. The reason for this is because these demonstrations can be explained in relation to some of the recurring characteristics of the flash mobs that are previously discussed in Chapter 1.

The flamenco protests showed *rhizomatic* characteristics appearing and disappearing in different places and different banks. Moreover, Looking at Youtube videos the average duration four minutes, and the flamenco choreographies created sudden disturbances to the daily flow of the choreographies of the bank. They created confusion in the bank with *unexpected* acts. After those four minutes of flamenco performance, the participants exited the bank and dissolved in the daily

²¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJfeUSvRKDA>

choreographies of the streets. This act of disappearing emphasized the *ephemerality* of the performance they did.

Indignados protesters identified themselves as:

We are the unemployed, the poorly remunerated, the subcontracted, the precarious, the young ... we want change and a dignified future. We are fed up with antisocial reforms, those that leave us unemployed, those with which the bankers that have provoked the crisis raise our mortgages or take our homes, those laws that they impose upon us that limit our liberty for the benefit of the powerful. We blame the political economic and economic powers for our precarious situation and we demand a change of direction. - ¡Democracia Real YA! website, 2011

This quote indicates towards *anonymity* of the Indignados protesters and supporters, they define themselves as the majority, ordinary people that are unemployed, subcontracted. This anonymity of the participants, or the definition of the participants as strangers coming together was one of the recurring definitions of flash mobs as well. However even if followers of the Indignados movement were anonymous, the flamenco demonstrations in the banks were led by a group of flamenco artists called Flo6x8. This group described themselves as²²: An activist-artist collective that is performative, situationist and folk. Therefore they were far from *anonymous* even if they identified themselves as “a group of ordinary people who have a number of common concerns and share passion for the art of flamenco”. Furthermore they were *no-strangers that were coming together to perform a certain act and disperse*. They publicize this image of how they understand themselves via online platforms and networks.

The flamenco performers declared their *purpose* online. They stated their main concern to be “the exploitation of life by banks” and the people who remain silent against this exploitation. In other words they use flamenco as a tool that will make their voices heard. This common goal was a political motivation to create the flash mobs. According to Flo6x8 main subject of their criticism was the European Central Bank (ECB), the Bank of Spain and the financial elite of the banks that didn’t protect the market value of the products and allowed inflation. In social media, in Flo6x8 Facebook page, they described their performances as a form of *flamenco expression* against the financial system.

Furthermore, Flo6x8, used the public space, they made *physical interventions in space* to make themselves and their cause visible. Plus the happenings had a networked character that uses social media, Internet and communication technologies in order to organize and inform the participants and the public about the event. All these characteristics have been coming up in the literature of flash mobs and in my understanding these performances fit the prototype of a flash mobs, but they *deviate* from the discussion on flash mobs as *meaningless and purposeless* with the clear declaration of their aims *online*.

²²An interview with FLO6x8: <http://www.contraindicaciones.net/2011/07/entrevista-al-colectivo-flo6x8.html>

The Facebook web site on which some information on the collective can be found: <https://www.facebook.com/Flo6x8Sevilla?fref=ts>

One point in which the flamenco flash mobs *deviate* from the recurring characteristics of the flash mobs is the non-spontaneity of the creation of performance. The flamenco flash mobs are spontaneous and unexpected interventions in the moment of spatial intervention but the creation of the mob is not spontaneous. They are identified with the Indignados protest, the oppositional spirit ruling the country and they emerged after a period of crisis and protesting. The main novelty the flash mobbers bring into the space is using the flamenco as a method for protest or as a mode of expression for the opposition in public space.

How were the flamenco flash mobs organized?

The flamenco flash mobs were organized online Facebook and the website of Flo6x8 (www.flo6x8.com) and through offline networks of flamenco performers and supporters of the cause. At the initial stage of organization they were communicating messages related to their cause and making flamenco recognized as a tool for protest on the Internet through *networks* that have been discussed in relation to Castells (2009, 2012): In order to organize the flash mobs, Flo6x8 recorded videos of “la niña ninja”²³ doing flamenco and uploaded them on YouTube²⁴ for others to watch, get informed and be inspired to do flamenco dances as a form of protest and to express and inform them about the movements and the songs. This is a method that has been discussed by Castells (2009) as *mass-self communication*. Mass self-communication gave the supporters of the cause and of the indignados movement tools with which they could protest.

How does this flamenco flash mob connect to the previous theoretical discussions? Do the theories help us to see anything about the critical potential of this flash mob?

In one flash mob done by Flo6x8 “the Rumba Rave” done in a bank in Sevilla in early 2011 the performance was initiated and accompanied by a flamenco singer singing a song. The English translation of the flamenco song sang consists of the following lyrics:

“You’ve got a purse / I’ve gotta curse / aye no money / banker,
banker, banker/ You’ve got a purse / I’ve gotta curse/ aye no money / it’s
looking bleak I’ll tell you / banker, banker, banker/ You’ve nowt / I’ve got the
whole lot...

...Better than the maharajah²⁵ / Yatch in Marbella/ and suitcases
stuffed with cash/ the 500 euro notes they just vanish / shame is a thing of
the past / these gentleman with grim gazes / cold hearts and hot pockets /
They are the unspeakable / work was invented by one man...

²³ Spanish for “the ninja girl”.

²⁴ An example of the videos: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iop2b3oq100>
Another example can be found on:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=TQ0x6utk4H8

²⁵ A Sanskrit title for a great king, high king.



Image captured from:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iop2b3oq100>

...7% APR, inflation is... / you've got a purse / I've gotta curse / the Ibex has risen, The Euribor... / You've got the dough / I've got a hole / don't think / work, spend and pay of course/ don't think / just eat, sleep, work ..."²⁶

I discuss that, de Certeau's (1984) idea of *tactics* sheds light on the critical potential / the oppositional nature of flamenco flash mob as a spatial practice is used as a tactic to attract attention to the financial improprieties and economic issues in the country. It can be claimed that these songs and the lyrics create a tactical potential in the flamenco flash mob. This is because lyrics, song and dance are performed in a place for the financial system / for the banking transactions. According to *Oxford Dictionaries*: a bank is "a financial establishment that uses money deposited by customers for investment, pays it out when required, makes loans at interest, and exchanges currency"²⁷. The banks are not the places for artistic-activist choreographies; instead they are the places of the financial institutions.

²⁶ The lyrics were written from the subtitles of the bank flash mob on:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72jYiDLKa1k>

²⁷ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/bank-2>

The bank branches and ATMs generally host social choreographies about money and choreographies for bank transactions. The flamenco uses the place of the financial institution, or the *place of the other*, as a stage to perform their protest/dance. The voice of the singer covers the room and it becomes for the bystanders hard to avoid it. The witnesses of the flash mob in this case the bank personnel and the customers become the audience and the participants of the mob (consumption of space as a way of reproduction).

Further, another reason for the flamenco flash mobs to be interpreted as *tactics* is their *relative independence from the place*. The flamenco flash mob being repeated in various places, various banks is a support for this argument. On the other hand, the context of the bank, the standards in the inner design make the reproduction of the mob easier. The flamenco flash mob uses these standard areas to perform their improvisational yet structured choreographies.

Flo6x8 in their Facebook page declares that they choose the bank branches and ATMs as the *location* flash mobs because they say that those places/institutions and people are the “tip of the iceberg”. They are the visible parts and the symbols of the financial system. During the daily working hours of the bank they enter / intervene in the place / symbolic territory of the financial system. Flo6x8 state that they see banks as institutions, as small shrines of those undisputed moles with respect to which any questioning respond with “too big to fail”.

It can be observed that the flamenco performances need specific contexts, designated places in order to be performed. According to Black (2000), the architecture and architectural spaces are constitutive of symbolic capital and symbolic space. Therefore, bank office / branch in this case is an architectural territory in which the symbolic actions, interactions and transactions of the financial system take place. In my interpretation, in the flash mob the flamenco dancers’ bodies are symbolic and oppositional bodies of resistance encountering with the physical place of the bank. In the flamenco flash mobs it is possible to see a performance that embodies de Certeau’s discussion of *agency through the use of symbols in the bank*. The agency of the flash mobbers can be seen through their reinterpretation and production of the place and the symbols in the place. The Flo6x8 flash mobbers refer to the symbols in the *bank* (place) in which they realize the flash mob: One example of this symbols is their use of coins as symbols of capital and monetary power, pour them on the floor and dance on them. They make meaning, reproduce the space, and give the place and the symbols in the space their own meaning during the performance of the flash mobs.

Furthermore, referring to Castells’ (2012) claim that *humans create meanings* in their natural and social environment the performance of flamenco with oppositional lyrics and attitude can be considered as an act of meaning making. Further, I suggest to see the flamenco flash mobs in the banks as an embodiment of the *communication power* (Castells 2009) that emerges in the discussions and meaning sharing among the Flo6x8 members: The oppositional meanings in flamenco come from the style that emphasizes the “contra” (being against) in term of gestures, using the beat of the music in the contra of historical meaning of

flamenco as a dance that is oppositional to Franco Regime (Mullins, 2010). Yet flamenco as an oppositional tool is some performance that is meaningful contextually, it is a dance from Spain, it speaks to the people and in the flash mobs they give their message as being *contra* to the context, the banks with the bodies, the movements, music and the songs.

Finally, I put forward the claim that practices that the flamenco flash mobbers bring in the banks are critical and perplexing because they are not *legible* by the state as crimes. The flash mob choreographies shift the spatial dynamics by bringing movement, songs and lyrics in to the bank. The oppositional bodies that dance flamenco confronts the bank as a financial body yet the method of protest / expression does not oppose by violently or physically destroying the bank's power or committing a crime. The concept of *legibility* of Scott (1998) helps me understand that the flamenco flash mobs are thought of or they are not a part of any category. The flamenco flash mobs are not legible as the prescribed mode of using the bank. People are not prepared to react to the flash mobs. This mode of expression is critical.

On the other hand, even if the flamenco flash mobs use daily life locations for protesting, it is hard to integrate them into the daily life or define them as *daily life resistance* that has been discussed by Scott (1998) because they require specific elements, locations and movements, in order to perform their performance of resistance.

Overall, the flamenco flash mob is critical in creating symbols, meaning making, and displaying the power of communication of the networks that stage the flash mobs. The mode of expression with the physical presence and an artistic act like dancing and singing is novel and a method that is not easily recognizable as a political act. This not belonging of the act to any category of ruled behavior or criminal behavior, in other words, its illegibility in Scott's (1998) terms brings the critical potential. Finally, the use of the bank (the place) as a stage for the flamenco performance displays the agency of the performers/protesters, furthermore the production of new meanings while consuming the space is another indication of agency in de Certeau's terms. If change is what we mean by critical potential, for change further organization and integration of the mob into the political system, connection of the mob with a political action or initiative is required.

Turkish Case: Gezi Parki Protests

The big picture

On 27 May 2013 in Istanbul, Turkey, a group of protesters gathered in Gezi Park to protest the government's decision to demolish the park in order to build the new shopping mall in the city. This park was one of the few green places left in the big metropolis. According to Czajka & Isyar (2013) the planned construction of the

building were criticized and opposed by architects, urban planner and numerous associations. Czajka and Isyar (2013), point out that the opposing authorities argued that the project would not only destroy one of the few green spaces left in the city, but would also obliterate the public character of Taksim Square, replacing it with the enclosed and inaccessible spaces of a shopping mall and condominiums. Many argued that the project's intended aim was to reduce the human traffic in Taksim so as to depoliticize and desocialize one of the most vibrant areas of Istanbul, and a frequent site of protests and social gatherings (Czajka & Isyar, 2013).

Just as the authorities, a group of environmentalist activists had their oppositional statements and they were protesting in the park to express them. The protest went on in a peaceful way for the first few days until the 31st of May in the early morning. The protests grew because of this disproportionate use of violence by the police and by the general social discontent that resulted from the extremely authoritarian rule of the AKP (Justice and Development Party) –the ruling party– and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (RTE) (Sandikli & Kaya, 2013; Czajka & Isyar 2013). The police intervention with teargas and water cannons continued in an attempt to prevent people from gathering and protesting. Importantly Kuymulu (2013) points out that the protest aims shifted from claims about the park to claims about “civil rights, individual and collective freedoms”, as the police intervention got more violent with the “operation dawn” on the 30th of may 2013 (p. 275).

It can be argued that this shift united people under the basic physiological and safety needs that we see in Maslow's “hierarchy of needs”, explained in his “Theory of Human Motivation”²⁸. During the rule of the AKP, Turkish State's was acting non-ethically and they were intervening in the people's private lives (Erhart 2013; Sözalan 2013). Furthermore, the state was not respecting or allowing people to satisfy the basic needs of “food, safety, shelter, sex” due to low wages and discursively intervening in the private lives by declaring how many children a family should have, anti-abortion laws, and labeling and controlling the women who use birth control or have abortions, and by creating a police state (Sözalan 2013). The government was using medical and religious discourses and making new laws to legitimize the intervention in the population's lives and choices (Erhart 2013; Sözalan 2013). In addition to this, in the recent years, and especially during the time of the Gezi Park protests, the state was not responding to the population's bodily safety and shelter needs; they were not respecting the democratic rights, or right to freedom of speech, of the citizens. They used their This overregulation and interventions by the government in the private lives, combined with the police violence the Gezi Park protesters faced, triggered ongoing protests as the government rejected to negotiate and continuously tried to curb down the protesters by violence. Due to all these reasons, the protests and the needs attracted attention and created a national unity.

Social media, Internet, and networks played the major role in internationally distributing the news and information about the protests, since the mass media did not produce any news about the protest till day six. The protesters used various

²⁸ <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Maslow/motivation.htm>

techniques to attract the attention of people and local and international media. In this social context, since 28 May 2013, as indicated by Kuyumlu (2013), Sandikli & Kaya (2013), Sözalan (2013) and Erhart (2013) people have been organizing (gatherings, demonstrations and) spontaneous interventions in the public space through the use of the Internet. Since, every act of protest encountered a big reaction from the state and the police in order to make the resistance long lasting, the protesters had to change their strategy and continue with more sustainable, smaller scale, and dispersed methods of resistance and demonstrations.

I claim that some of these protests could be defined as flash mobs and in the following pages I will present two happenings, which I suggest to consider as flash mobs.

Pot and Pan orchestra:

What kind of happening was the pot and pan orchestra?

During the Gezi Park protests as the situation on the streets and in politics became more turbulent, people came up with simple and noticeable ways of protesting. Every night people started to make noise with pots and pans in their house windows to attract attention to the political turmoil, the police violence and the reactions of the state and express their discontent. These demonstrations were happening in the houses on the windows or the balconies, at 9 pm every evening.



Is this a flash mob? / Do they have any of the recurring characteristics of flash mobs?

Every evening there were *anonymous* people popping up in the windows and balconies of the houses. These events can be considered to be *rhizomatic* because they could appear on the windows and disappear. Reappear again in different places on different houses. This *anonymity* facilitated their identification them with the raging public.

Secondly, this happening can be defined as a flash mob because the protesters were using *public space*. The way public space was used in these flash mobs was different than what was seen in the flash mobs that make a physical presence in the public space: 1. In the pot and pan banging protest the boundaries between the private and the public space were dissolving; the pot and pan banging protests were one of the innumerable “political” acts that took place at the *intersection* of the public and private space. 2. Instead of invading the public space with a physical (bodily presence), they were intervening with the noise that was created with pots and pans.

Thirdly, they were *ephemeral* performances: As soon as the protesters stopped banging pots and pans on the windows they were disappearing. They were in the public space for a *temporary* period.

Furthermore, instead of using the Internet and mobile technologies for organization they were being organized mostly through the word of mouth, through offline *networks* and very few some announcements online.

Even if the protests were born as a reaction to the Gezi Park happenings, in a very short period, unlike the general previous discussions on flash mobs, these protests were not spontaneous. The reason for this is because people were doing the predefined action of banging pots and pan. This action was predefined in the offline networks, through word of mouth. Furthermore, the protests were repeated every night at the same time for some weeks. This made the protests more predictable and expected.

How were the pot and pan banging protests organized?

The pot and pan banging protests were heard via the word of mouth, or via the presence of the noise around people’s houses at a certain hour every evening. Some people distributed the news online through social media web sites: Facebook, Twitter and through Instagram with #tenceretava (#potpan) hashtags²⁹.

²⁹ A hashtag is a word or an unspaced phrase prefixed with the hash symbol (#). It is a form of metadata tag. Words in messages on microblogging and social networking services such as Facebook, Google Plus, Instagram, Twitter may be tagged by putting “#” before them, either as they appear in a sentence, (e.g. “Protests are going on in Istanbul. #GeziPark”) or appended to it.

The events were hard to document visually since the main method of protesting was through making noise via hitting pots and pans and the protesters were not always physically present in the public space.

How can pot and pan banging flash mobs be understood with the theories?

In relation to Scott:

I argue that during the Gezi Park protests, the demonstrations were happening in different places, public and private. This gave the protesters an advantage / a tool on which they could play with the power mechanisms. The houses that are the places for private life were becoming public and the public was becoming private. I argue that the happening of these protests at the intersections of the public and private was contributing both to the *legibility* and *illegibility* of the protest.

One reason for this is because merging of the public and private made the pot and pan banging flash mobs partly *illegible* and stronger against any kind of *government intervention* that according to Scott was a result of legibility. The reason for this is because the pot and pan-banging act was taking place in the private space (at home), even if it was publicly noticeable. Likewise, as soon as the protesters stopped banging pots and pans or closed the windows of their houses they were disappearing from the public space into the private space, which was an area less *legible*. This made the protest harder to trace and to document and guarded the protests against government and police intervention.

On the other hand, the performance was not totally immune to government intervention, because they were was publicly hearable, therefore *legible*. Scott in his book *Seeing Like a State* (1998), said that as the land and the population became legible by the state the possibility for the state to intervene was increasing. As the protest started to be applied widely among the public, be heard by those who supported or opposed the protests and known more people, the Prime Minister RTE during a public speech, called his supporters / the public to report the neighbors banging pots and pans. In other words RTE brought the action to public recognition by saying that “Disturbing the neighbors by using pots and pan is a crime. I am not saying this, it is the laws that says this. You will be the ones that will carry these to court” (*Radikal*, 19/07/2013)³⁰. In other words, RTE criminalized the action during a public speech and called for the population’s support in making the private space more legible in state’s vision. The public and the anti-government protesters appropriated the flash mob anonymously and it aimed to show general social discontent. In my interpretation, Erdogan’s call for his supporters to report the protesters was an attempt to get rid of the anonymity and associate pot and pan bangers with a specific group, choose a scape goat / an other for the action.

Moreover this protest can be argued to be a part of *resistance in everyday life* as discussed by Scott (1985). The reason for this is the locations in which the protests

³⁰http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/erdogan_tencere_tava_calani_sikayet_edin-1142540

were taking place were the houses of people. Further, the tools of the performance were easily accessible to people and when the flash mob took place was when people were at home in the evening. Fitting with Scott's discussion of everyday life resistance the protests did not take place in unison and were dispersed in the living spaces of people.

Notwithstanding, their potential as everyday life performance of resistance, pot and pan banging flash mob *deviates* from Scott's (1985) definition of *everyday life resistance* in the way it becomes noticeable in public space. In Scott's theory the resistance is explained to be invisible or noticeable in the long-term with the consequences of the people's (peasants') actions, while in the Gezi Park flash mobs visibility was crucial for spreading the word for the happenings.

In relation to de Certeau:

The pot and pan banging performances were methods of calling people to attention. De Certeau helps to interpret these acts as tactics because the flash mobs were using the "place of the other", the public place with the noise they were making on the windows of the houses, but the performance were not dependent on the public place. In this way, they were fitted de Certeau's definition of tactics. The pot and pan banging protests were *ephemeral/temporary*; they were disappearing from public to the private. This is because they were taking place at the border between the public and private it could easily dissolve in space; disappear in the depths of private space. Another point, which makes the pot and pan banging, protests tactical and critical was their relative *independence* of the public space or the *place*. What made the performance possible was the private places/houses and the community that was created in the neighborhoods / in the apartment buildings. The timing of the pot and pan orchestra was more important in the spatial intervention of the flash mob performance because as the participants increased in numbers at the same moment the noise, the intervention, in the public space was becoming louder and stronger.

In relation to Castells:

The online and offline *networks* that were discussed in Castells' theory of networks were present in pot and pan banging protests. People mostly were getting informed via the word of mouth: Meeting their neighbors on the street and receiving the information about the protest in informing the protesters about the timing, the cause and the duration of the pot and pan banging flash mob.

The commonness of *offline communication* is one of the strengths for these flash mobs because this made it difficult to track and document the protests or to intervene, as previously discussed in relation to Scott's concept of *legibility*. On the other hand, the offline communication limits the reach of the news or makes it difficult to communicate the happening through *mass self-communication*. Therefore the spread of information and awareness becomes limited to those who hear the even and to those who have access to social media. In this way the critical potential of the pot and pan banging protest remains limited.

The standing man / Duran adam:

I am no writer, I am no artist. I do not have the tools they do to voice my emotions; the only thing I have is my body, and I am here with my body. – Erdem Gündüz, Standing Man

Who is Standing Man

The Standing Man (Duran Adam), a still protest made by the performance artist, Erdem Gündüz, in Taksim Square was an example of passive resistance and creative protesting during the Gezi Park protests. Taksim square was where the Gezi Park protests had started. The standing man, Erdem Gündüz, stood in the square on the 17th of June 2013, looking at the Mustafa Kemal Atatürk painting hanging down from the Atatürk Kültür Merkezi (Atatürk Cultural Center) building in order to remember the protesters who died in the Gezi Park Protests.³¹ The protest was defined to be “singular, silent, stationary, and symbolic” by Nisancioglu, who wrote about the protest in the UK newspaper, *The Independent* (25 June 2013).

Is this a flash mob? Which characteristics of flash mobs can be seen here?

Within hours, this inspiring act had gone viral, the news spread through *social media*. The *duran adam* (standing man) protest was subsequently replicated across the country and beyond – in Ankara, Izmir, Amsterdam and London. There were people making the standing still protest alone or in groups in different places in the city and in the country. The performance like other flash mobs had a *rhizomatic* and *replicable* characteristic. It inspired other people, some witnesses of the performance in the square joined the standing man on location that day; “hundreds joined him in a silent vigil” writes *the Guardian* on 18th of June 2013. In a way the spread of the standing man news in the social media created a call for the public to participate in the performance individually, and communicate the message wherever they were.

The standing man performance used the *public space*, Taksim Square as symbolic for the Gezi events. In an interview made with him, Gündüz stated that he consciously chose to stand in the Taksim Square in a location where one of the big news agencies could see and record his act and make it heard (Izci, 23/06/2013, *Radikal*). The use of public space attracted attention by the news agencies and was broadcasted through various news channels.

This performance was a peculiar one in comparison to flash mobs that have been discussed previously in the literature because it was an individual act or an individual protest instead of a *gathering by a group of people*. One reason for this was that the intervention it made in the public space was not easily recognizable as political or extraordinary. Rather the replication of the performance by others in

³¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/18/turkish-man-silent-vigil-taksim-square>

various times and places made it noticeable. The standing protests were *ephemeral* as they started appearing and disappearing in different times and places. As individuals recognized the protest and they started standing in different locations. Another factor that made the standing man performance ephemeral was its ability to easily appear and disappear into the moving choreographies of daily life.

How can we connect this demonstration to theories? How, what concepts of which theorists help me to argue whether these flash mobs are critical or not?

I argue that the standing man performance can be understood as an example Scott's *everyday life resistance*.

One reason why this could be an everyday life performance of resistance is because: The protest was accessible to everyone in the public, it was a simple act of standing still that became rhizomatic and that kept emerging and disappearing in different places and times in the city and the country. It could be easily integrated into the choreographies and actions of daily life in the *public space*. Furthermore it could be done repetitively as an act and does not require any synchronization with the acts of others.

Moreover, the act of standing is not easily *legible* as a performance or a protest. By standing still, Gündüz left the police and the people perplexed, and it took a while for the police and the witnesses to understand what was going on and then to intervene. Standing still as an act was hard to be described as oppositional in the first instance. After long hours of standing the police and the people realized that this was not a random act of standing. This confusion, and the *illegibility* made the protest stronger against the police *intervention*, but also harder for the message to be perceived. The randomness of the act made the flash mob protest ephemeral, and hard to *capture*.

The standing man became the *symbol* of the passive resistance in the Turkey protests and communicated the message in a simple and direct way. The images were created and circulated on the relative autonomous zone that was given by the Internet. This type of resistance challenged the power of discourses, statements and gestures, and united the protesters under the act of standing.



Photo taken from: www.duranadam.com

Furthermore another point on which Scott is explanatory for the Standing man performance is when the police detained the standing man himself and the other protesters. As the protest / performance become legible to the government and to the police, the authorities didn't know how to deal with it so they detained the standing man and intervened in a violent way, instead of trying to further understand what the aim of the performance was. The police intervention was a result of the *legibility* of the action and the ability of the police and the power holders to define the motivation behind the act of standing as oppositional, or as an act that was associated with the events that had been going on in the streets of Istanbul. This legibility made the protest vulnerable to government and police intervention.

To make the Standing Man performance continue in the public space, people tried to come up with creative solutions. The resistance continued with performances that were *illegible* as an act. Scott's argument that resistance emerges from what is illegible is explanatory for this situation. As standing became an oppositional act that can be stopped by the police, protesters delegate their shoes to protest for them and to invalidate the police intervention. In my understanding the process of the standing man protest can be an example for my discussion how the performance of resistance can be sustainable by being modified after it becomes legible and prone to intervention.

Castells' discussion about mass self-communication and meaning making is explanatory for the circulation of standing man images online. The information about the Standing Man protest and the *meanings* associated with it were spread on the Internet and *social media* and in the *networks*. From the 16th of June 2013 on standing had a new meaning as *resistance* and this new meaning of a random act caused a lot of discussions on the Internet. Furthermore the discussions it provoked on the Internet and in the international media gives us a possibility to associate the

flash mob with the act of meaning making that was discussed by Castells (2009, 2012).

theguardian

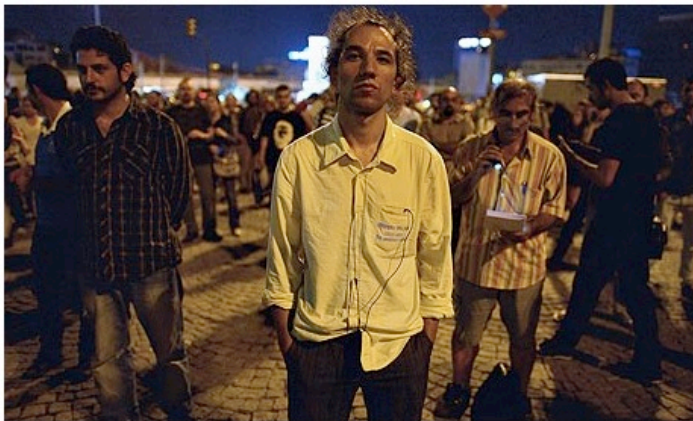
News | US | World | Sports | Comment | Culture | Business | Money

News > World news > Turkey

Turkish man inspires hundreds with silent vigil in Taksim Square

Erdem Gunduz – dubbed 'standing man' – stages eight-hour vigil and is joined by 300 people during silent protest

Reuters in Istanbul
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 18 June 2013 03.30 EDT
[Jump to comments \(41\)](#)



Erdem Gunduz stands in Taksim Square during a 'duranadam', or standing man protest, in Istanbul. Photograph: Vassil Donev/EPA

The images that were circulating in the social media framed the Standing Man protest with non-violent passive resistance and this helped to contrast the public action the severity of the police intervention and violence on the streets. It was able to portray the tranquility and the non-violence Gezi Park protests were pursuing. Furthermore even if the standing man performances were not taking place anymore, the circulation of photos videos and discussions on the standing man in the social media was making the protest resonate, even if it had to face police intervention in the physical space. In other words the relative *autonomous* place given by the Internet reproduced the protest and allowed it to continue to stand. IN other words in relation to Castells' discussion of *communication power*, the virtual images of the standing man posed a counter power to the spatial one and vulnerability of the subjects in space to governmental intervention. Even if the protests continued for a few days, the influence in the public discussions and the news continued for weeks.



Photo taken from: <http://www.internethavadis.com/hayatin-icinden/59435.html>

However even if the Internet gave a relatively autonomous place for discussion and sharing (Castells, 2009) for the protests, as these discussions become visible/legible by the state they risk being criminalized with new legislation and public statements of the authorities and the politicians in the public space. Just as the public space, the virtual space even if relatively protected and anonymous than the physical space, gets subjected to government intervention. The government tried to identify the social media users who were sharing information about the Gezi Park protests and making anti-government statements, from their personal information in the social media accounts and start legal processes that would penalize the acts in the virtual space. This is a deviance from Castells' claim about the autonomy of the virtual space.

In de Certeau's terms the Gezi park flash mobs they were dependent on time rather than the place. They were both created in an era of political chaos and activism. Unlike the flamenco flash mobs realized by Flo6x8, the pot and pan banging and the standing man protests were instant reactions to the events and political happenings in the country and tools for mobilizing the public and the citizens towards a change in the everyday life. This I conclude is the main reason for the creation of the flash mob protests that involved simple actions that everyone can perform and tools everyone could use. All this background happenings and the *zeitgeist* and made every reactionary performance oppositional, tactical and political in the Gezi Park Protest.

Overall both pot and pan banging and standing still were acts that could be considered as daily life resistance according to Scott's terms. The reason for this is because they were acts that are random dispersed and continuous. They required little coordination planning but unlike Scott's formula of daily life resistance, these protests and performances of resistance did make headlines because they became wide spread with the images and meanings associated with the protest being shared

online, and aimed to create awareness through communication rather than hoping for instant social change.

Italian Case: Movimento 5 Stelle / 5 Star Movement and the Flash Mob Against the Nuclear Energy

The big picture

One of the political parties that have entered Italian politics: Movimento 5 Stelle / Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, led by the comedian Beppe Grillo also used flash mobs to attract attention to the five main causes of the party. In founding the M5S, Grillo's motto was to start to do politics from the local level with the civic lists and the party started to use Internet as a tool that would position them closer to direct democracy.³² The M5S has been organized through the Internet and web blogs in order to create an interactive environment with the public. Jansen (2010) described Grillo's weblog as "an example of [...] digital storytelling which creates a collective 'us' in the virtual public sphere" (p. 200). In other words, parallel with the spirit of the Internet era, M5S used the Internet and networks to keep up the flow of communication on the causes and actions they were taking. According to Hartleb (2013) and Fella and Ruzza (2013) Grillo has been trying to bring ordinary citizens the sphere of politics. Further, Hartleb (2013) defined the movement as a "leadership-based grassroots movement" that started in 2010 (p. 138). The movement became a party with real electoral prospects during the 2010 regional elections, with four regional councilors being elected. The party made further gains at the 2012 local elections, receiving the third highest number of votes overall and winning the mayoral election for Parma. In 2013, in the general election, the movement entered the parliament with 25.5 % of the votes.

The party and its causes were born out of a need for new generation politics that is pointed out in how the party defines its political position, they claim to not to "base the politics on ideologies of the left or the right but on ideas".³³ In five stars that are in the name of the party represent five key issues that are focused on the party's politics: public water, sustainable transport, development, connectivity and environmentalism. During political campaigns M5S and Grillo have been using alternative ways to attract attention, gather people together, make their causes heard, and convince the audience to mobilize their democratic power to make a change in the politics. In the following part, I analyze one of the flash mobs organized by the M5S that contributed to the movements' distribution of information about the anti-nuclear cause.

³² <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/Send-in-the-clowns-Italy-s-V-Day/>

³³ http://www.beppegrillo.it/movimento/elenco_liste.php

How did it happen?

Aiming to attract attention to one of the causes that were emphasized by the M5S, the activists of the movement organized a happening that the organizers called a *flash mob*. The happening was a demonstration / a public performance against the production and usage of nuclear energy and weapons, which was a part of the political campaigns of Movimento 5 Stelle, in the period before the local elections on in 2011 and 2012.

The public event in the Calabria Region on the 9th of June 2011 started with the sound of an alarm that is played in the times of some war or natural disaster. As the siren was playing, some men dressed up in gas masks entered the zone with a yellow container, which had the sign of a nuclear substance on it. Meanwhile, the participants of the flash mob were walking around in the city as anonymous people that were passersby, with the sound of the alarm they suddenly fell down or dropped themselves to the ground. After a few minutes, they went back to doing the regular choreographies of the public space.

Why is this a flash mob? What kind of recurring characteristics of flash mobs can we see in the M5S happening?

The event was a *spontaneous* one. The participants of the event were in the public place as regular passers by before they fell down on the floor with the initiation of the siren. Secondly, the happening was a *temporary* one. It lasted a few minutes and the performers went back to their casual behavior and actions in the public space. However, the happening was *not ephemeral*, because even after the flash mob ended the participants and organizers from M5S was still visible in space. Thirdly, the event made an *intervention* in the *public space* and performed a story or choreography of death. This intervention created a *spatial figure* that triggered the witnesses to position themselves in relation to the performers. Furthermore, unlike it was seen in the initial flash mobs organized by Wasik or the majority of the flash mobs discussed in the literature, the organizers were not *anonymous*. The *M5S* identity was highly visible in the event. Finally, the event had a *purpose* of attracting attention to the anti-nuclear cause that was predefined and communicated to the participants of the flash mob.

How is the M5S flash mob related to the theories?

Overall, as seen in this example, flash mobs can be tools that are used by political parties to attract attention to a cause or to an issue that could be included in politics. Nonetheless, whether the flash mobs that are created in a more top down manner by the political parties maintain the same critical and resistant potential remains questionable. I argue that in the flash mobs of the M5S the division between the party politics and an oppositional demonstration gets blurred so does the critical potential. I argue that in this case, the opposition is to certain political projects of other politicians or parties rather than being an opposition to the spatial structures or power.

The critical potential of the M5S flash mobs can be discussed in relation to de Certeau's (1984) concept of *agency*. Given that the flash mobbers reinterpret the space through the choice of movements, the place they reinterpret in the anti-nuclear flash mobs is the space for the people to walk around. In de Certeau's words they reproduce the place while consuming it. Flash mobbers introduce new movements and objects to the space in realizing the flash mob performance and attempted to shift the dynamics of the space. Nevertheless, in my understanding the reinterpretation of space in the anti-nuclear flash mob of the M5S was rather staged as a public show or a performance that created a division between the performer and the spectators. The performance of flash mobs ends with the witnesses applauding the performance rather than seeing it as an action done with a political motivation.

In relation to de Certeau's discussion of *tactics*, the happening made a spatial intervention. However, the place in which the intervention that is made is not *a space of the "other"* that could be criticized or opposed. The public space in which the mob takes place is a place that casually hosts political actions and demonstrations. However, the M5S flash mob can be argued to be a *tactic* in the way it is not dependent on space but it is reproducible in different places and times.

On the other hand, even if the flash mobs were not created as instant reaction a social happening, I argue that M5S flash mobs against the use of nuclear energy used its critical and political potential in the public space to spread ideas about a general environmentalist cause. Castell's (2012) concept of *meaning making* can be explanatory for this since the flash mobs create meanings in the public space about the nuclear energy and substances destroying the living beings. The participants of the mob and the M5S used mass-self communication in order to frame their performance and give the anti-nuclear message. The public space created by the media technologies and Internet helped the message to be communicated to the people who were not there, as the flash mob was recorded and distributed online and allowed the happening to resonate in the networks.

Castell's (2009, 2012) theory of networks and networked social action is explanatory for the meaning creation that takes place during the mob. The choreography through the bodies that participate in the mob tries to form and communicate symbols for attracting attention to the cause against the use of nuclear energy. In my interpretation during the meaning creation the flash mobbers they represent themselves as living beings (animals, insects, plants) that were influenced from the nuclear energy, displaying collective death in the city. This performance of a collective death was staged in the public space. With the message the flash mob created, the M5S aimed to create awareness and provoke people to position themselves in relation to the use of nuclear substances and nuclear energy in Italy and around the world.

Nonetheless, the *meaning creation* in the M5S flash mob can be claimed to aim for an image building for the party rather than necessity of using different tools for expression. While distributing the information on the flash mob, the organizers used the name M5S in order to identify themselves with the cause. The web pages

that distribute information about the flash mobs state their aim as “mobilizing people” and attracting attention to the referendum on the 12th and the 13th of June against the use of nuclear energy (Constantino, 2011). M5S’s aim for mobilization stays in the political and legislative level, rather than giving people tools for mobilization with the flash mob.



Further, I put forward the claim that even if the flash mobs are created via the online communication and interactivity of the party members with the public, this communication could not avoid the organizational structure of the party or the causes from being hierarchical or the causes from being top-down. This is because as it was discussed in chapter two in relation to Castells, even if the networked type of organization went beyond the geographical limits, the participants that get informed stay limited to those that have access to the internet and the online networks of M5S and to those who have affinity with the M5S’s causes and politics. Moreover, different than the flash mob examples from Spain and Turkey, the participants of this cause did not appear in an anonymous way or as individuals reacting against an issue instead, they came together under the identity of M5S.

Furthermore via their flash mob performance the M5S attracted attention in the social media and the mass media and became visible. Unlike the Gezi Park flash mobs, the legibility of the performances by the state did not lead to any state intervention or criminalization of the performances or the participants, since the action was performed as a part of the party campaigns of the M5S. The witnesses / bystanders of the mob were puzzled but they preferred to distance themselves from the performance. Moreover the division among the performers and the regular public was visible. The flash mob in the M5S case is a public show rather than a

method for everyday resistance in Scott's (1985) terms. One reason for this is that everyday resistance the participation of everyone is equally important for the resistance to go on and to reach its purpose. But the M5S flash mob used this as a "show" that was combined with further mobilization in making a change.

Overall, M5S organized themselves towards a criticism of the existing politics and political discussions. They adapted the movement or the party to the new age of "digital politics" (Hartleb, 2013) and used flash mobs as a tool for these digital politics. They exposed the critical potential of flash mobs in a wider scale, in the political world and in the era of digital politics. They spread the word via flash mobs and turned it into a valid movement in the political realm by mobilizing people.

The most important point missing element in the M5S flash mobs were the context or the zeitgeist that was created by the people in de Certeau's words, in a macro level that would put the flash mobs in a critical position in the public societal space. The top down placement of the cause by the M5S and the issue's detachment from the spirit of the era resulted in the influence of the mobs to be limited. The M5S and its causes were born out of a need for new political causes and motivations, and the flash mob example shows that the critical potential of the spatial figure that is created by the flash mob remained limited to the space of the politics and political parties, even if it was practical in attracting attention and communicating messages.

Concluding Remarks

One common point in all the flash mobs is having characteristics of tactics. This is because, in the three examples of flash mobs are dependent on the spirit of the era rather than being dependent on place. The time dependence in the M5S flash mobs was rather on the political era. The time dependence of all four flash mobs is on a relatively macro level. The dependence on space was not very apparent in all four examples that have been analyzed.

Each of the four flash mobs emerged as a result of different series of events. The first three flash mobs emerged as a reaction of the public to a social event, or as a need that was born in the field of politics. In the pot and pan orchestra, standing man and the flamenco flash mobs there was some social discontent that led to a series of public demonstrations. All three are reflections of some issue that is present in the society. In the fourth one the issue was given by a group of people / by a political party which was created out due to a gap on the political level. The emergence of the political party was a result of a political situation.

I argue that these flash mobs that are discussed have a critical and political potential because – referring back to Brejzek (2010) definition of resistance – they form a site-specific "spatial choreography of resistance" that can challenge the power embedded in the place. In all the examples of flash mobs "place" and "space" is a source of power that can be challenged via the symbols that come up as a part of the communication processes and the flash mobs position their physical presence in relation to the spatial power.

All these four examples made it possible to see different practices of flash mobs in varying contexts, realized with different motivations. The common point in all these flash mobs is that in each of them place was an important source of power. By explaining these flash mobs, I aimed to show how the flash mobs of different types and origins create critical, political messages in space, play with the spatial politics by creating new meanings that in the long term may lead to a change in the dynamics and practices of the population, and make changes in political methods. The four flash mobs that were discussed all emerged as the result of a series of events that created the spirit of the era. Further all of them have been parts of wider scale social movements. In other words, their emergence and realization was dependent on the time and the era in which they lived.

In conclusion, the spirit of the era or the context remains as an important factor that determines the critical and potential of the flash mob that takes place. The contexts crucial in making flash mob a significant tool that can be used towards an end. The context and the era in which the flash mob takes place makes it interpreted as a political act that can be used in demonstrating and communicating messages.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This thesis was, set out to look at the critical potential of flash mobs in space as a physical concept and in the space of politics. My aim was to show the critical look (vision) of the flash mobs in the social space, public space, daily life and in the politics as a space. In analyzing the critical potential of flash mobs I attempted to bring together theories of media, political anthropology (social theory) and philosophy (theory of everyday life). My aim was to point out that flash mobs were being used as critical tools that attract attention to a certain cause or issue in the public space.

I tried to show place's role as an important source of power for the flash mobs to present their critical political potential. Place as a concept and a physical space kept recurring in each theoretical section. I tried to indicate how flash mobs could embody and present a counter power to the power embedded in the place. I argued that this embodiment of symbolic meanings made the criticism present and visible in space.

Throughout the thesis I presented how flash mobs, which were considered by a part of the literature as meaningless, ephemeral, and pointless to one which proved it to be a critical and political one. I used three theories, which gave us three different theoretical lenses to look at the flash mobs. The first theory was Manuel Castells' theory of networks (2009, 2012) and networked social movements (2012), which brought the power of communication into the scene as a type of power that I claimed was used by the flash mobs in order to challenge power in the place. Castells' discussion of networks and networked social movements was crucial in understanding how the meanings and symbols that were created during the communication processes came to be embodied in the physical space. Moreover, Castells' theory of networks and power of communication provided the zeitgeist for the age of flash mobs and the role of networked communication in political action. It presented the larger scale movements, which I claim incorporated flash mobs as political tools in their "ideology" and methods of action.

Later, the discussion proceeded with James Scott's concept of legibility and illegibility that were analyzed in relation to the state's vision. I presented flash mobs as a performance resistance as emerging from the illegible practices in the space. Furthermore another theory that gave a crucial point of view for analyzing flash mobs was Scott's (1985) analysis of peasant resistance. This theory allowed me to present the flash mobs as a performance of resistance in daily life. In relation to Scott (1985), flash mobs were presented as the motor force for the resistance that is at the core of protests, as a demonstration of resistance.

In the final theoretical chapter, Michel de Certeau's analysis of the practice of everyday life served as a guide to look at the flash mobs' spatial intervention from a micro-philosophical point of view. I argued this embodiment during the realizations

of flash mobs to be tactical according to the definition of Michel de Certeau (1984). I discussed that the flash mobs intervention in the place of the other to be crucial for shifting the use of space and present a critical look to the uses of the space in public life. I argued that this critical look, the reproduction of space while using/consuming it and the novel symbols that were performed/presented by the flash mobs were representations of agency in the place which was argued to impose structures on people / subjects. In this chapter, I looked at how de Certeau's theorization of the consumption and production of practices and meanings in space could be explanatory for the flash mob's use and embodiment of symbols in the public space.

At the intersection of these three different theoretical approaches, in the fifth chapter I continued with the discussion of four different flash mobs, and the explanation of their critical potential in relation to the three theories. The analysis of these four flash mob happenings attempted to display a map of common critical points and some divergences from the recurring characteristics and the critical potential in distinctive flash mobs. I concluded that the social and political context in which the flash mobs were taking place was crucial in creating a critical potential of the flash mobs as public demonstrations.

I have tried to show that flash mobs as spatial figures of resistance make public the meanings created by the participants, inspired by the illegible practices and illegible meanings to the state through ephemeral performances in public. Flash mobs aim to ask questions rather than give answers. The flash mob as a figure of resistance goes against the meanings in the public space, challenges and creates questions in the mind of the public, and aims to destabilize the existing habits in the space and in everyday life.

This research could be considered as significant in the way that it tried to look at flash mobs through three theories that haven't been used in the discussion of flash mobs and it pointed out different directions of possible research in the social, political and art field. It has been a research that was influenced by the spirit of this era that hosts many social movements, and social change. Further, research included discussions on the Gezi Park Protest that had started around the time when this research has started therefore it is one of the early attempts that tried to analyze make sense of the Gezi events in the academia.

Throughout this research it was possible to discover how flash mobs could be a method for waking up the political identities of people that seek for a political area that is beyond the classical divisions of political opinions. It can be seen in the analysis of the examples of flash mobs that the way these happenings wake up the political identities in the everyday life is not abstract or overwhelming. Rather they give tools and meanings that are accessible and possible, as in many cases it motivated people to take action in for causes starting from simple practices of daily life. I concluded that flash mobs have the potential to inspire people and discover the agency and power for creation each individual has.

Future studies in this area may delve deeper into the analysis of the flash mobs as a physical presence in the public space and as a political tool. Further, it is an intriguing but challenging work to learn about the motivations of the political flash mobbers and learn about the individual origins of the political potential.

Another field of research that could be explored could be the flamenco's potential for opposition and a performance of symbolic resistance and the body's role in the performance of resistance.

In summary, this thesis tried to offer a deeper analysis of one of the new ways of forming and communicating political messages in the public space. Flash mobs' novel ways of counter-acting the existing spatial-hierarchy and power structure offer new discourses to the public space and political arena and an area that unites people beyond the segregationist discourses of current politics. Furthermore, by focusing on the flash mobs as a social political event, I demonstrated how daily life practices play a role in the formation of critical political messages in the public space and how mobile technologies, Internet, and networks enable the communication and coordination of individuals in forming the spatial choreographies that may challenge the existing meanings and structures of power.

The analysis of the political potential of flash mobs that can be seen as small steps towards change, an act that was born out of a necessity to express and understand what was going on in the world. Being inspired from Shakespeare's famous monologue,

“All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages...” (*As You Like It*, Act 2, scene 7, 139–143)

Flash mobs are a performance on the world's different stages: the streets, the social media and the private sphere. All the participants of the mobs have their exits and entrances to the “place” as a stage. In all three of these worlds they play their many parts in the formation, actualization, and spreading of the mobs and the messages. Being active in these three worlds/stages is a necessity for the flash mob to have impact on the world's progression and evolution; being a citizen, being a networked individual, being a performer, and being an activist.

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