

# A HISTORY OF SUBVERTISING

1<sup>st</sup> BC 1958 1968 1973 1977 1979 1980 1982 1984 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1998 2002

Roman dwellers of Pompeii, excited or upset by certain gladiatorial battles, add personal responses to 'adverts' promoting the events.

The Situationist International, a group of intellectuals and artists, launch their inaugural journal in which they discuss the concept of 'détournement' as the integration of artistic production into cultural spheres (including advertising) in order to denounce their vaskity.

Employing paint markers and spray paint, protesters during the May demonstrations and strikes express their frustration with advertising and consumerist logics on billboards across the Parisian streets and underground system.

Jean-Jacques Michel and Victor Schwach publish 'Le détournement d'affiches', the first academic paper on subvertising. In the paper, the authors analyse the meaning of the May 1968 subvertising actions.

Emergence of the first subvertising collective: Billboard Liberation Front. The BLF, based in San Francisco, uses paint and graffiti to expose and ridicule corporations.

The group Billboard Utilising Graffitiists Against Unhealthy Promotions, a collective of artists, activists and medical professionals, starts attacking cigarette and alcohol advertising on the streets of Sydney.

Keith Haring moves from painting and drawing into the illicit realm of New York subvertising, first by painting over a jeans advert, reversing its meaning, then more famously, and two years later, by drawing his infamous characters in white chalk across subway advertising spaces.

Jill Posener publishes 'Spray it loud', the first book dedicated to subvertising. The book showcases a large amount of humorous graffiti interventions into billboards that display the sexist underpinnings of particular advertisements and consumer society more broadly.

The art collective Les Frères Ripoulin ('84-'88) is launched. Inspired by New York graffiti and Gubiism, they start underlining the world's first full billboard takeovers. They collaborate with Keith Haring to take over various billboards on the platform of Metro Duplex in Paris. The action is followed by an *illicit* exhibition on the platform.

The anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* publishes its first issue. The magazine prints its own mock adverts, revealing the horrors of certain corporations and capitalist economics more broadly.

Billboard Liberation Front publishes 'The Art and Science of Billboard Improvement', the world's first subvertising how-to manual.

New Jerseyart collective Artflux collaborate with the artist Ron English paste their large-scale posters over billboards in an attempt to hijack the meanings of corporate and state messages.

Mark Dery coins the term 'subvertising' in an *Adbusters* article, describing it as 'subvert[ing] advertising's attempts at directing the consumer's attention in a particular direction'. Reverend Michael Pheiger, realising that Chicago's minority communities contained disproportionate number of alcohol and tobacco advertisements in comparison to white neighborhoods, splattered red paint on billboards. He went on trial and was acquitted. Reverend Pheiger followed in the footsteps of Reverend Calvin O. Butts who conducted similar subvertising in Harlem a year earlier.

The organisation *Résistance à l'Aggression Publicitaire* (*Resistance against the aggression of advertising*), also known as 'antipub', is founded by media theorist François Brune, writer René Macaire and artist Yvan Gradis. Using subvertising, they confront the advertising industry and its multiple socio-economic effects. In the decades that follow, antipub collectives spread across France and Belgium.

New York-based graffiti writer paints his pseudonym *KAWS* onto a billboard in New Jersey. The artist Zevis 'shoots' advertising models by spraying dripping red graffiti paint between their eyes.

The subvertising collective *Consume Hasta Morir* is founded, and starts developing counter-advertising strategies, including the subvertising of billboards across Madrid.

In Berlin, the artist Zevis suits out model from billboard in what he calls a 'visual kidnapping', asking a 500,000 € ransom from the attacked advertiser.

2003 2004 2005 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019

In Paris, hundreds of subverters, under the common pseudonym 'Robert Johnson', paint over advertisements in multiple metro stations using brushes and paint bombs. A trial is organised against 62 of the alleged 'vandals'.

Kyle Magee paints over his first billboard in Melbourne. It is the first of many subvertising acts, always undertaken midday, that would eventually lead to the organisation *Democratic Media Please*, an organisation that removes advertising from public space in order to confront corporate control over the media landscape.

The Cut Up Collective starts appearing on the streets of East London. Their method, unsurprisingly, is to select and cut up a billboard poster into thousands of pieces ('pieces'), reassembling the pieces into an entirely novel poster, which is then, in turn, installed on the original billboard space.

The London-based artist The Decapitator 'beheads' models on outdoor advertisements by pasting his own digital prints of a decapitated head over the original heads.

The first recorded digital billboard hack. The process exposed by Totenkopf, the 'hacker' herself, during the hacking conference Defcon. 'Close window' buttons, recognisable from online pop-up advertisements, are pasted on billboards and bus shelter advertisements across France by the Pop Down Project.

Launch of the Argentinian collective *Proyecto Squatters*. The collective is a self-proclaimed counter-advertising group known for painting over, writing over, or crossing out the texts and images of advertising to subvert their messages and bring to light what advertisements commonly hide.

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