

Harper Santana Randolph

## Capstone Analysis Paper

I am working with the idea of whimsy and how adding small acts of joy and absurdity to protest areas creates a safer space. This sense of whimsicality in protest spaces has been called many things: tactical frivolity, joyful resistance, and gentle weapons. I will be using the word whimsy, as many social media posts that cover these topics use the word whimsy. Within this paper, we will be looking at four events: Operation Inflation in Portland, where protesters don inflatable costumes in protest spaces. The 'Dildo Blitz', which started in Minneapolis, where people wielded dildos to make fun of and throw at ICE agents. The Art Shanty Sledding Contest is also held in Minneapolis, where, at an art village, people created handmade artful sleds with anti-ice messages. And finally, the pop-up aerobics classes which were held in front of an ICE facility in Portland. Events like these implement whimsy to foster community, spread joy, shift harmful rhetoric, and even display their sense of patriotism. Protesters are gaining visibility for their movement through social media as much as they are gaining visibility through the streets (Clair & Zhang). People are using whimsy as a carnival-esque and campy environment to shift the rhetoric of protest from being violent and scary to being a safe space to express righteous anger, and that anger to be received with humor and support. With the promise of hope and non-violence, whimsical protest also invites community into a situation where it feels that the world is strictly divided. Through the examples of the Minneapolis sledding competition and the Portland operation inflation, we see how embracing whimsy strengthens bonds through unified defiance (Diaz). The main way that this change of rhetoric and fostering of community is happening is through the creation of joy. Joy in protest spaces acts as a

disarming tool and a way to re-enchant people with the message and hope of change (Smith). Through the examples of the 'Dildo Blitz' and pop-up neon '80s-themed aerobics classes in Minneapolis, we see how these joyful tactics embrace absurdity and create this contagious laughter to diffuse tension.

### ***Community and Joy***

Community is one of the most prevalent topics we see within all these different whimsical protests. The Art Sled Rally in Minneapolis had a section to highlight the Latinx community in their city. This particular sub-community has felt scared and isolated since these ICE raids have started (Cipolle). Through this sledding competition, they were able to show that they are still there, and their personal expressions are celebrated in ways that they thought they had lost. These small acts of joy and solidarity bring a sense of mental refuge for those who are being harmed, or those who are starting to burnout. Organizers are looking for ways to create “fun, exciting, and new ways to help protesters avoid burnout” (Smith). These fun and random pop-up activities bring in more people, and it shows those who are scared that there are more people who care about them and want to support a future that will be safer. Joy draws people in by entering a space in an inflatable costume or a wheelbarrow of dildos. People will laugh and enter the space to see what's happening. There is a solidarity in joy; it brings people together and opens a door to invite them back (Smith).

### ***Changing Rhetoric***

In all of the examples we are analyzing, there is an overarching goal of shifting the atmosphere and “challenge violent depictions of the protests” (Clair & Zhang). By gaining attention through playful nature, there is potential to recreate a complex issue as one that's easier to understand. Instead of having to explain all the details and history of the ICE raids, you can simply show a video of someone in a frog costume getting pepper-sprayed through

their ventilation hole, or someone getting arrested for throwing a dildo at an immigration officer's car. Videos like these often illicit a 'gut-reaction' from viewers, shifting the expectation of violence from the protesters to an expectation of violence from ICE agents (Thompson). Instead of protesters being seen as violent thugs in a war-torn city, as the Trump administration says, these instances flip the script and create a strong counter-narrative about what's taking place in front of the protesters on their streets. Videos like the ones described are strange and surprising, and people who come across them on the internet share them with friends and family (Clair & Zhang).

### ***Patriotism***

Within interviews of individuals in these previously mentioned protest spaces, there is a surprising sense of patriotism. While they are actively fighting against governmental standards, these activists are utilizing American founding principles of freedom, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (Hall). Activists are 'queering' with the original national identity, where the Trump administration is calling the Latino population violent invaders, certain protest activities are highlighting their love for their Latino neighbors. The sledding competition had art that highlighted alebrijes, a sled that was a cup of horchata with a label that said: "We'll take our horchata warm cuz fuck ice". While there is no question on what these protesters are *against*, wielding signs that say "fuck ice" and lobbing dildos while shouting *eat a dick*, the whimsy of the protests also highlights what people are fighting *for*. Protesters are fighting for their First Amendment rights, safety, and recognition from their government.

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