



DAZED &
CONFUSED
Vol. II, no 56
DÉCEMBRE 2007

THE DISMANTLERS

THE REVOLUTIONARY FRENCH
COLLECTIVE RECLAIMING THE
STREETS FROM ADVERTISERS



Les Deboulloneurs, roughly translated as The Dismantlers, are an organised anti-advertising movement that meet up on a monthly basis to attack and deface a specific billboard in a public space. They strike in broad daylight, minus masks or any form of disguise, and even the particulars of their planned meetings are common knowledge, loudly announced all over their website two weeks prior to the event. Such exposure is deliberate, as Nicolas, member of the Paris faction explains: "We want the police at every meeting and we want arrests." This might sound masochistic but the point of police intervention is paramount to Les Deboulloneurs' cause. With every arrest, a tiny tug on the government's sleeve becomes a little more discernible. This collective want a public debate and they won't stop until they get it. As Nicolas points out, "This way of acting is the only choice we have."

With each faction containing anything from 50 to 200 people, in most major cities in France, the charm of the movement (aside from the prevalent ethos that advertising is bad for culture, bad for the brain, bad for free thought) is that they want realistic things. They understand that most of the cogs twisting the commercial running of the western world are reliant on the advertising man, and their argument is a simple one – we should be able to choose whether we are exposed to advertising or not. In the same way you can choose to turn a channel on the TV to avoid a McBurger hard sell or flip a page in a newspaper to ignore a hair product promising elusive sex-appeal, this group want the same rules to apply to the streets.

Les Deboulloneurs want all advertising reduced to a compact 50x70cm scale – a reference to the French government election posters of yore. Reduction in dimension

means the elimination of city wallpapering and super-sized branding. Ideally it leaves an individual free to go about their business without being distracted or bombarded, either consciously or subconsciously. Nicolas puts forward the idea of an ad-free world a little more poetically, "Your mind is not polluted, you don't have to see the messages, you aren't influenced or concentrating on them, you can dream."

Why isn't this happening in England? Nicolas looks up from his notepad and answers, "Why did it only happen in Paris two years ago?" The logistics of running around Leicester Square tube station with a can of the finest neon spray paint Woolworth's has to offer, loaded up with a backpack of good will and noble intentions sounds like a great idea, sounds like the kind of cool crusade most politically conscious people could get along with. But a few renegade Banksy imitators aren't going to get a whole government on board. The individual cost of doing something in mimicry of Les Deboulloneurs's cause is, as Nicolas suggests "too high and unsustainable." That's why they formed the group, for protection both personally and legally, and ultimately to legitimise the politics behind their actions. COLETTE THURLOW

www.deboulloneurs.org