Détournement : the art of troubling

Confidence in the form of, for example, commodified debt or the commodification of future value, is an increasingly large part of today’s globalised economy. This was alarmingly illustrated in 2008 by the repercussions of marketing unstable debt in the form of subprime mortgages in the United States leading to a precipitous global financial meltdown. That was a collapse of confidence writ large. At the same time, confidence is also a cornerstone of everyday social and professional life. The non-ZERO-sum project (exhibition title of practical submission in MFA fulfilment) interacts with the notion of confidence, and more particularly economic confidence. At the same time, the project takes the view that engagement from a fine art perspective would have an inherently inadequate vocabulary if restricted to a representative practice, and so a more interactive approach was sought. Research into the radical activism of the Situationists in the 1950s and 1960s, and particularly their tactic of détournement (the deliberate subversion of social or cultural practices), has informed and influenced the development of an interventionist technique summed up in this thesis as: The Art of Troubling. The Situationists had a dichotomous relationship with art. The group was initially made up mostly of artists and is in other instances referred to as an art movement. They saw art as the fulcrum for social and political change, and had their roots in the Dada, Surrealist, and Lettrist movements. As such, they also carried the genes of the notion of an anti-art, which varied in concept between art as a disruptive and propagandistic practice to the subsuming of art into other forms of social activity. This thesis, Détournement: The Art of Troubling, describes non-ZERO-sum as a bespoke methodology designed specifically for engagement with its particular topic. As such, the concept does not necessarily follow a template for situationist intervention. In 1962, a growing rift between the artists and the political theorists within the Situationist International tore the group in two. In conclusion of the non-ZERO-sum project, this thesis offers the observation that perhaps it was the political faction of the Situationists that had a more compelling idea of an art that functions through its very own subsumption.