

# THE RULES OF MINOR DISSENT

1. 100 Acts of Minor Dissent to be committed in one year, from **14 May 2013** to **13 May 2014**.
2. Verification of the Acts committed will be conducted at a live performance in Sheffield on **15 May 2014**, where each and every Act will be counted and confirmed.
3. Should 100 Acts be committed, the materials used in creating the Acts will form the basis for a free week-long art exhibition at the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield.
4. Should 100 Acts fail to be committed, a forfeit shall be levied. **That forfeit shall be the donation of £1,000 to UKIP.**



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100 ACTS

OF MINOR DISSENT

MARK THOMAS

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## AND SO IT BEGINS ...

**ACT 1** The Legal Deposit Libraries Act 2003 requires a publisher to deposit two copies of every book with the British Library; it is a nice law and has existed in some form in the UK since 1662. It means every book ever published since that date is held in perpetuity by the library, forming a cultural and intellectual archive for the nation.

I found this out in 2013, after self-publishing the play script of *Bravo Figaro!*, a play I had written about my dad.

I do not react well to legal letters unless I am sending them. So when the British Library legal deposit team wrote me a legal letter, a somewhat threatening letter, saying, ‘Unless you send two copies of *Bravo Figaro!* to the legal deposit library within 14 days of receipt of this letter we will fuck you up with paper cuts from the index cards!’\* I behaved to type and the following day I sent the British Library a box of 100 copies of *Bravo Figaro!* with a note:

Dear British Library,

**RE: Donations compliance.**

These have not been selling as well as I had hoped and are looking for a good home. If anyone wants to take a copy out of the library you might actually give them their own personal copy. Perhaps charge a small admin fee, say £5 and then, if you wouldn't mind, send the money to me.

Bless them, they replied.

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\* Strictly speaking this quote is inaccurate, but that was the legal gist.

Dear Mark,

Many thanks for the box with copies of your book *Bravo Figaro!* and the accompanying note. Sorry to hear this isn't selling so well.

Unfortunately our bookshop isn't geared up for the kind of arrangement you suggest.

We'd like to send copies to the other five legal deposit libraries and to approach READ International (which supports literacy in Africa).

*All the best.*

Frankly, if everyone replied with the same grace and wit as the British Library I would be out of a job.

Fortunately, the target of **ACT 2** reacted with the dignity and charm of a masturbating clown.

I assembled a few friends to help with this Act: my long-term collaborator Tracey Moberly (*artist from the Welsh Valleys*), Dr Bipasha Ahmed (*neighbour and psychology lecturer*) and fellow comic Josie Long.

I presented these intelligent, incisive and creative women with the most appropriate and meaningful gift I could find – a remote-control Barbie car. A bright and stunning pink toy with the words ‘Beautiful Girl’ on the bonnet.

‘Why do this?’ you ask.

‘Because I am a feminist,’ I reply.

One morning we took the cars up to Mayfair and then my friends raced them outside the Saudi Arabian Embassy.

The time trials outside the embassy gates resulted in a definitive winner:



### 1st SAUDI ARABIAN EMBASSY WOMEN'S CAR RACE



1st	Dr Bipasha Ahmed	12.30 seconds
2nd	Tracey Moberly	18.04 seconds
3rd	Josie Long	23.00 seconds

While we were taking the victor's photo, some of the diplomatic staff from the embassy ran up to the railings, shouting and furiously jabbing their fingers in the air. 'If you let them drive, THEY KILL THEIR CHILDREN!'

The Barbie cars are currently on loan to transsexual and transgender activists who will be racing them outside the Russian Embassy.

**ACT 3** is a variant on a popular Act of Dissent, namely this: the epitome of good manners in all decent homes is, upon receipt of junk mail containing a Freepost pre-addressed envelope, to a) insert the contents of the junk mail into the prepaid envelope, and b) post it back to the fuckers that sent it. This is based on the sound logic that if someone sends you their rubbish you are entitled to send it back, at their expense.

My variation on the practised etiquette on receipt of unwanted missives is based on the idea that if someone sends me rubbish I am entitled to send it back AND some of my own.

Foxtons estate agent sent me a glossy card inviting me to sell my home; I sent back Weetabix. This was accompanied with a note that the company should regard this as a request to be removed from their mailing list.

A motor company sent me half a tree's worth of promotional cack; I sent back an out-of-date tin of sardines.

Things took a turn for the weird when I received a note from the postman explaining a letter addressed to me did not have the correct postage on it and if I wished to receive the letter I should go to the post office, pay a small fine and the value of the postage. Which I did. The letter was a leaflet from Will's Art Warehouse.

Enraged at paying for a promotional leaflet, I inserted a large unwanted hardback book into a Jiffy bag and posted it to Will's Art Warehouse. Without a stamp. I have not heard from Will since.

On discussing this Act with some old anarcho-squatters from the '70s, they revealed that they would post breeze blocks to people they disliked, who, on receipt of the stampless package, had to pay for the delivery at the other end.

One day later I approach the counter staff at my local post office, who know me well, with a trial breeze block wrapped in brown paper.

'No, Mark,' they say as I offer them the package. 'If you want to send this to Mr Gove, you will need a stamp.'

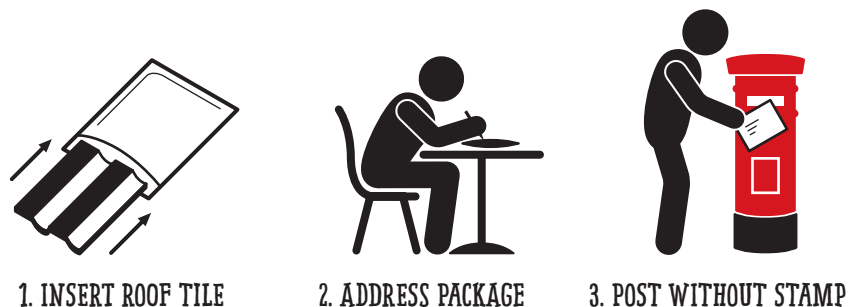
Times have changed and it appears one can no longer send breeze blocks in the post. But you can ...

**ACT 4** ... send roof tiles.

The tile slips snugly into a Jiffy bag, weighs quite a bit AND fits into a postbox.

So next time you go past a building site, arm up, then follow the rules:

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Be warned: it is a seriously addictive pastime. Just before Christmas my wife was walking down the street when she caught sight of me standing in the middle of a skip.

‘What are you doing?’ she asked incredulously.

I said, ‘I’m looking for a reply to Virgin Media.’

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**ACT 5** In 2011 tax-avoiding bookseller Amazon acquired the DVD rental company LoveFilm (now *Amazon Prime Instant Video*) and with it the ire of many of the 10 million in the UK with hearing loss. While in the US Amazon’s on-demand services provide subtitles, Amazon was refusing to do the same for its UK customers, or even provide information about which DVDs were already subtitled and which were not, making choosing a film a lottery if you are one of the 10 million. Why such a difference in policy, you ask? I have no idea except perhaps that Amazon is forced to subtitle in the US to comply with anti-discrimination legislation.

This prompted Stephanie McDermid to launch a petition on Change.org, calling on Amazon to behave with a semblance of dignity and provide accurate and comprehensive information about subtitled

films. Despite 14,000 signatures Amazon would not even respond to letters from the chief executive of campaigning group Action on Hearing Loss.\*

On the last day of the 100 Acts – **13 May 2014** – after locating Amazon’s swanky new headquarters in Holborn, London, with the aid of some friends and a tallish lightweight aluminium ladder, we slapped a poster on the glass frontage of Amazon’s HQ above the revolving entrance doors.



AND ... that evening Amazon announced a change in policy.

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\* The new name for the RNID.



**ACT 6** could have been so easily avoided if only Amazon had responded sooner. In the short period between putting the poster up and the company's response, I had sent Amazon Prime Instant Video's Vice President Tim Leslie a TV/DVD combo in the post, using their Freepost address.

The TV/DVD player had a note taped to it that read, 'Dear Amazon, without subtitles this isn't much use if you are deaf.' It weighed 11.41 kilograms, the largest Freepost committed in the 100 Acts.

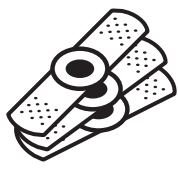
Here are some of the other items sent in prepaid or unpaid packages:



LARGE HARDBACK



EARTH



CORN PLASTERS



BROKEN CLOCK



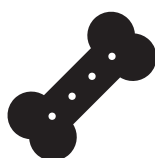
STONE (WITH A HOLE)



PLASTIC BAG



NEW PURITANS CD



OLD DOG BISCUIT



WEETABIX



SHOWER CURTAIN HOOPS



A FISH



HALF A BOX OF ALPEN



**ACT 7** was inspired when a friend gave me a copy of a book called *One Day*.<sup>\*</sup> I loathed this book so much that it spawned a new form of heckling: book-heckling.

This is how you book-heckle:



1. Enter bookshop, browse.
2. Locate target book, pick book from the shelf.
3. Having prepared your heckle in advance (*on a smallish piece of paper, about the size of half a cigarette*) insert your heckle into the book, keeping the paper close to the spine to stop it falling out when opened.
4. Shut the book, place it back on the shelf.
5. Walk away.

On entering Waterstones – I don't take on local independent bookshops, just corporations – I head for Fiction and my target book *One Day*, open, insert heckle and exit.

Whoever bought that copy would have found a small piece of paper on page 36 with the words:



And then another on page 48:



<sup>\*</sup> *One Day* a brief review: Richard Curtis thinks it's twee.

Book-heckling is quite addictive, and soon others followed:

Book: *Fifty Shades of Grey* – Author: E. L. James  
Location: Tesco – Page 46:

OTHER READERS PREFERRED  
PROPER PORNOGRAPHY

Book: *The Enchantress of Florence* – Author: Salman Rushdie  
Location: Waterstones – Page 146:

NO ONE WOULD KNOW IF YOU  
STOPPED READING THIS

Book: *Inferno* – Author: Dan Brown  
Location: WHSmith – Page 55:

THE PERSON WHO BOUGHT  
YOU THIS AS A GIFT HATES YOU

Book: Any – Author: Ian Rankin  
Location: WHSmith motorway service station – Page 67ish:

ADMIT IT, YOU THINK YOU MIGHT  
HAVE READ THIS ONE BEFORE

Book: Any – Author: John Grisham  
Location: Numerous – Page 1:

CONDITION OF SALE:  
PLEASE LEAVE IN HOLIDAY COTTAGE

Book: The Bible – Author: Various  
Location: bedside drawer, Premier Inn – Page iii:\*

ALSO AVAILABLE IN ARABIC

A young woman sent me a photo of her book-heckle for Stephenie Meyer's  
*Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn*:

If you are over 16, grow up  
and buy *Dracula*



\* A friend goes one step further and he signs the title page:  
'Thanks for your continued support, Jesus.'