

**Renegade, Channel 4 Britdoc Foundation, Arte,  
Article Z and Common Decency Present**

**A Shadow Distribution and Fix the World Release**

# **THE YES MEN FIX THE WORLD**

**A Film by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno (The Yes Men)**

**Co-Directed by Kurt Engfehr**

**87 minutes, 35 mm, 1.85**

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**Co-Director** ..... Kurt Engfehr  
**Special Appearance** ..... Reggie Watts  
**Editor** ..... April Merl  
**Additional Editing** ..... Johnny Burke  
**Animation** ..... Patrick Lichty  
**Original Music** ..... Neel Murgai and Noisola

**Presented By** Renegade Pictures UK, Channel 4 Britdoc Foundation, Charny-Bachrach Entertainment, Arte France, Article Z

**Produced By** Doro Bachrach, Ruth Charny and Laura Nix

**Executive Producers:** Alan Hayling, Jess Search, Patrice Barrat, Juliette Timsit, Amy Sommer

"Outrageously entertaining....This movie is glorious testimony to the moral power of satire." — [New York Magazine](#)

"It shines with raw wit and originality." — [Newsweek](#)

"Almost too good to be a film. More laughs per dollar than any other film fuel." — [Monsters and Critics](#)

"A hilarious movie.... Even if you don't agree with the Yes Men's political agenda, you'll get a big kick out of this movie." — [New York Post](#)

"Great fun... It takes some nerve, not to mention diabolical intelligence... to pull off the elaborate pranks devised by the Yes Men." — [New York Times](#)

"Fiendishly amusing... Out-Borats Sacha Baron Cohen at his most confrontational."—[Washington Post](#)

"Comedic vigilante justice... Media-savvy pie-to-the-face." — [USA Today](#)

"Hilarious, therapeutic, inspiring. The Yes Men are geniuses."  
— [Naomi Klein](#), author of *The Shock Doctrine* and *No Logo*

"There is more than one way for a film to tweak the powers that be ... *The Yes Men Fix the World* goes at it with a raised eyebrow and a droll sense of humor." — [New York Times](#)

"Funnier and more useful than Sacha Baron Cohen's *Brüno*." — [The Observer](#)

"We remain convinced that this is the year's top documentary film." — [New Scientist](#)

"One of the funniest movies I've ever seen, and two of the ballsiest guys I've ever met. Thank God for the Yes Men." — Morgan Spurlock, director of *Supersize Me*

"*The Yes Men Fix The World* could be this season's choice." — [Screen Daily](#)

"This movie is a hoot, and a pertinent one at that." — [Hollywood Reporter](#)

"Capitalist-critiquing chicanery... fat-cat-fooling fun." — [Variety](#)

"We think it is a serious matter when people willingly misrepresent themselves." — [Exxon](#)

"It's really a sick, twisted - I don't even want to refer to it as a joke."  
— [US Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)

"Pant-shittingly hilarious.... The thinking-person's Sacha Baron Cohen." — [Netribution](#)

[For additional clips please visit this page.](#)

## PRODUCTION NOTES

### **Filming locations:**

UK: London, Dundee

France: Paris

India: Bhopal

United States: New Orleans and Venice Louisiana, New York City and Upstate New York, Amelia Island Florida, Washington DC

Canada: Calgary

**World Premiere:** January 18, 2009 – Sundance Film Festival, Park City, UT.

**NYC Premiere:** October 7, 2009. Film Forum Theater. New York, NY

**Nationwide Theatrical Release:** October 23, 2009.

**MPAA Rating:** Not rated (one instance of profanity)

**Genre:** Documentary

**Languages:** English

**Running time:** Theatrical Version: 87 minutes (including end credit roll)

### **Awards:**

Audience Award, Berlin International Film Festival, 2009

Audience Award, Planet Doc Film Festival, Warsaw, 2009

Audience Award: Berkshire International Film Festival, 2009

**One-liner:** This gut-busting wake-up call follows two gonzo political activists from New Orleans to NYC to India as they pull off the world's most outrageous pranks. Beware, Corporate America: the Yes Men are here.

### **Brief synopsis:**

The Yes Men Fix the World is a screwball true story about two gonzo political activists who pose as top executives of giant corporations, lie their way into big business conferences, and pull off the world's most outrageous pranks. Armed with little more than cheap thrift-store suits, the Yes Men infiltrate the halls of power and turn corporate greed into raucous comedy. Sacha Baron Cohen meets Michael Moore in this gut-busting wake-up call that proves a little imagination can go a long way towards vanquishing the Cult of Greed. Who knew fixing the world could be so much fun?

## Synopsis

Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno are two guys who just can't take "no" for an answer.

They have an unusual hobby: posing as executives of corporations they hate. Armed with nothing but thrift-store suits, the Yes Men lie their way into business conferences and parody their corporate targets in ever more extreme ways, doing all they can to wake up their audiences to the danger of letting greed run our world.

The film opens as Andy, purporting to be a Dow Chemical spokesperson, gets on the biggest TV news program in the world and announces that Dow will *finally* clean up the site of the largest industrial accident in history, the Bhopal catastrophe. The result: as people worldwide celebrate, Dow's stock value loses two billion dollars.

The reality hits Andy and Mike like a ton of bricks: *people* want Dow to do the right thing, but the *market* has decided it can't. We have created a system that makes doing the right thing impossible. If we keep putting the market in the driver's seat, will it happily drive the whole planet off a cliff? As the banking crisis has shown, and climate change is now showing, it is fully capable of doing just that.

At conference after conference, the Yes Men try to wake up their corporate audiences to this frightening prospect, in the process taking on some of the world's biggest and baddest corporations. One audience asks polite questions after the Yes Men, posing as Halliburton, demonstrate six-foot-diameter inflatable grubs called "Survivaballs," designed to save the wealthiest from the dangers of climate change. And in what must be the most gruesome product demo on film, Andy and Mike pose as Exxon and pass out candles made from the company's new biofuel, "Vivoleum" – which, the oilmen in the audience discover too late, is made from the human victims of climate change.

In addition to shocking the powerful, the Yes Men act as gonzo journalists, delving deep into the question of why we have given the market more power than any other institution to determine our direction as a society. Along the way, they visit the accidentally hilarious underworld of the free-market think tanks, find humor at the site of the world's worst chemical spill, visit a "Gulf Coast Reconstruction Conference" which turns out to be all about homeland security, and try to take on (without luck) one of the beefiest conference organizers ever filmed. And as they appear on the BBC before 300 million viewers, or before 1000 New Orleans contractors alongside Mayor Ray Nagin, the layers of lies are peeled back to reveal the raw heart of truth.

Finally, in a spoof reported around the world last November, the Yes Men and friends give New Yorkers a taste of what headlines *could* look like if we band together to defeat the cult of the market. Above all, the film is a call to action. We *can* do better, it says; if the Yes Men can do it, we all can.

## Directors' Statement

In the beginning, we thought we were making a funny movie about a series of activist pranks, like our first documentary, *The Yes Men* (dir. Chris Smith, Sarah Price, Dan Ollman, United Artists, 2003). But in the first week of shooting, the first thing we did had such unexpected effects that we had to dig deeper into what it all meant. This could not be another observational documentary; this time we needed to try to expose the very systems and structures that have made our world what it is.

It all started with a call from an environmental activist friend of ours, Gillo Cutrupi. He had seen *The Yes Men*, which showed us impersonating the World Trade Organization and ridiculing them and the system they represent. Gillo suggested we apply our "skills" to a much more concrete issue, one that struck to the very core of what is wrong with the world: corporate governance.

Dow Chemical, Gillo told us, had recently bought Union Carbide, the company that caused the Bhopal catastrophe (the world's largest industrial accident). Carbide had never cleaned up the site, and their CEO had even skipped bail in India. Now Dow was saying that although they had bought Union Carbide, they did not own the liabilities, but only the assets, and had no obligation to the Bhopalis.

This was worse than wrong; it was profoundly criminal. Could we somehow shame Dow Chemical into doing what's right? If so, we might set a global precedent that would mean companies would think twice before endangering thousands of people - or buying the companies that did.

So we set up a fake Dow Chemical website, and we waited. Then, a week before the twentieth anniversary of the Bhopal catastrophe, we got the chance of a lifetime when the BBC mistook our fake Dow Chemical website for the real thing, and asked for a Dow representative to appear live on their show.

We sprang into action. Mike flew down to Paris, where Andy lived at the time, and followed him into the studio with a camera. There, in front of 300 million viewers, one "Jude Finisterra" took responsibility for the largest industrial disaster in history on behalf of Dow Chemical, and announced a \$12 billion dollar plan to clean up the mess and at long last settle with the victims.

At first we felt *great!* This was the biggest coup we had ever pulled off. But that night we learned that during the hour when the stock market had believed Dow was doing the right thing in Bhopal, Dow's stock lost \$2 billion in value! The financial system had effectively punished what it thought was Dow's good behavior.

Once we wrapped our head around this sad fact, we knew what our film had to do: expose the idiocy of an economic system that rewards criminality. What we didn't know was that we would

spend the next five years following this story through some of the weirdest filming adventures imaginable - and even, at one point, underwater!

At the end, we were glad it had taken so long, because right before we finished, the mortgage crisis hit, the "free market" was revealed to be a big con, and the whole economy fell to pieces. Everything we'd been talking about in the film was being talked about on the street. Where before people had given us blank looks when we talked about "markets," now people were listening, nodding in agreement, and relating their own stories of economic injustice.

For decades, environmentalists have been telling the world that we're all in deep trouble, and that our civilization's pursuit of endless growth will kill us as surely as any disease. Many of us thought they were right, but nobody knew how soon the whole world would be forced to listen. Today, our understanding of climate change means that problems we thought we had centuries to figure out, we must deal with in a decade. The rules of the game have changed. So what do we do?

So far, we've all done very little. For our part, we decided to make our movie into a popular, comedic call to action. A system that punishes a company for doing the right thing by its victims will, if left unchecked, take all of us over the cliff's edge. Can we make people laugh hard enough that they cry, and then set out to change things? We'll see. In any case, it's all we can do.

## **A Conversation with the Yes Men**

### **What's your new movie about?**

It's about action. Now that we in the U.S. have seen ourselves robbed to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars and understand how bankers and other "free-market" heroes have swindled us big-time, it's really time to act. And there are lots of ways to do that. Everyone needs to make change happen, whether by the weird methods the two of us do it, or by more intelligent means.

If we don't - if we let corporations do what they want, the way the free-market gurus have told us we must - the world will go to hell in a hand basket. We advocate that citizens be able to decide their own futures rather than let big corporations do it.

### **What was your first act as the Yes Men?**

We couldn't make it to the November 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, so we thought we'd do the next best thing and set up the fake website to highlight through satire what we thought was bad about free-market globalization. To our surprise, people started writing to our website thinking it was the real thing, and we eventually got invited to a conference as the WTO.

It took us about a month to realise that we should go, but we did, and we spoke in the name of the WTO to a small conference of lawyers in Salzburg, Austria. We proposed privatizing the whole system of voting, and allowing corporations to buy votes directly from citizens via the internet. That cuts out the whole complex of lobbying and campaign finance and all that crap: just have the money go efficiently from point A to point B. It's a free-market solution to democracy.

People just sat there and absorbed it and applauded at the end and weren't shocked. So in subsequent conferences we just upped the volume continuously.

### **Why "The Yes Men"?**

A yes man is someone who agrees with the boss no matter how stupid or idiotic. What we do is get invited to conferences and agree so hard, audiences *should* take notice. But they don't. And that shows the rest of the world that there's a serious problem here.

### **At one point Andy claimed to be a spokesman for Dow Chemical, saying Dow would pay whatever it took to clean up after the Bhopal disaster of 1984. What effect did that have?**

It wiped \$2 billion off Dow's stock price; we didn't expect that. When we reflected on that, we realized it meant that even corporate managers can't do the right thing. Even if they wanted to they would be punished by the market, by the system. That becomes the underlying thesis of our film: we need to change the rules that allow the market to reward bad behaviour.

More cheerfully, that action also resulted in 600 articles in the US press about how Dow had bought Union Carbide, but was refusing their liabilities. That was the whole goal of the action.

### **What about the false hopes?**

Hahahaha. Yup, what about them.



**Near the end, Andy poses as a representative of the US Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, and lays out a bold new plan to restore shuttered public housing in New Orleans. Did the residents ever get back into their homes?**

No. HUD ended up tearing it all down. You can't win everything. But it's a cumulative thing. We like to point out that the environment would be much, much worse off if there weren't an environmental movement. The same with any struggle. Only very rarely do these sort of things result in immediate, concrete change - one great example of that is when a protester named Tim DeChristopher recently posed as a wealthy industry type and won a bunch of oil and gas leases at auction....

**What alternatives do you propose?**

There are some fundamental problems with the system now that are just obvious, like corporate lobbying in Washington. Why not just rule it out? Then if people decide that we want health care for everyone, you won't have a \$100 million effort to subvert it. Same with a good climate-change bill - there's so much money against it it's just not going to happen. That's just wrong!

Surely we can figure out something else - it can't be rocket science. It could be just a matter of understanding that we can't allow corporations to do whatever they want any more. That's what our fake New York Times, that ends the film, was about: imagining a better world. It's not hard.

**Why can't we just write letters and get things changed that way?**

The historical precedent is that change only happens through people taking to the streets. In the Great Depression, Franklin Roosevelt instituted national healthcare, a retirement plan, labour laws, and so on. All these things that everybody in the developed world takes for granted, especially in Europe, came out of the Great Depression in the US. But it wasn't Roosevelt's idea. It was massive public pressure, regular people demanding these things, taking over relief offices and saying, "We need relief if we don't have jobs, we need to be kept alive." It was people in factories unionizing, taking over factories and marching down the streets. There were a lot of people forcing the changes that Roosevelt conceded.

Today, we have a president and a lot of people in Congress who wouldn't mind doing the right thing. But they need our pressure. If they can point to people protesting, they can say to the industrial forces pressuring them, "I can't do what you're telling me to do because people are taking to the streets." This is a crucial part of democracy.

Fortunately, the banking crisis has helped make millions of people more political, and we're starting to see a lot more action. Our movie, we hope, will contribute to this.

**What made you guys political?**

We both have grandfathers who died in the Holocaust; that must have instilled in us how out of hand things can get if you just trust an ideology. And today, trusting an ideology is what has happened, in a really big way.

Look at the way that people excuse injustice: "It's the market, it's a necessary evil; like any other system it's just a kind of side effect, unfortunate." That's the way all ideologists have excused the horrors that their ideologies have unleashed on the world. They all think that it's doing basically a good job and yes, there are these problems like the Gulags or whatever, but...

## Key Facts from The Yes Men Fix the World

- On December 3, 1984, thousands of people in Bhopal, India, were gassed to death after a catastrophic chemical leak at a Union Carbide pesticide plant. More than 150,000 people were left severely disabled – of whom 22,000 have since died of their injuries - in a disaster now widely acknowledged as the world's worst-ever industrial disaster. Although Dow Chemical purchased Carbide in 2001, it still refuses to address its liabilities in Bhopal - or even admit that they exist.
- After the Yes Men's impersonation of a Dow chemical spokesperson on BBC World on December 3, 2004, accepting full responsibility for the chemical spill, Dow's common shares lost over \$2 billion dollars in value in less than an hour.
- "It's really a sick, twisted -- I don't even want to refer to it as a joke," HUD spokeswoman White told CNN. "At this point, it's not funny." This was in response to HUD "spokesperson" Rene Oswin's "surprise announcement" alongside Mayor Ray Nagin to a room full of contractors, explaining how instead of tearing down public housing relatively unscathed by Hurricane Katrina, HUD would be rebuilding it so that displaced residents could return. "Right now, a lie is better than the truth," said Annie Chen, media coordinator for Survivors Village, a tent-city protest for the reopening of public housing in New Orleans, who applauded the Yes Men's stunt.
- "Reggie Watts" was an Exxon janitor who donated his cancer-ravaged body to produce the test version of Vivoleum, ExxonMobil's new fuel made from the human flesh of climate change victims. At least that's what a conference full of oil and gas execs heard when the Yes Men impersonated Exxon at Canada's GoExpo 2007. In the "funerary observance" video played at the conference, "Reggie Watts" was actually played by Reggie Watts, an award-winning stand-up comic.
- "It is fake and we are looking into it," said *New York Times* spokeswoman Catherine Mathis, of the Yes Men's "dream edition" of the paper. Over 100,000 copies were distributed in Manhattan on November 12, 2008, with headlines such as "Iraq War Ends," "Court Indicts Bush on High Treason Charges," and "Nationalized Oil to Fund Climate Change Efforts."
- ExxonMobil and Dow Chemical spokespersons lashed out at the film in an interview with the Reuters press agency, shortly before the film's U.K. theatrical opening in August 2009. "We think it is a serious matter when people willingly misrepresent themselves," said Rob Young, a spokesperson for the world's largest oil company.

## About the Filmmakers

### **The Yes Men**

The Yes Men have been called "the Jonathan Swift of the Jackass generation" by author Naomi Klein. They pose as corporate bigwigs, infiltrate the world of big business, and scandalize unsuspecting audiences in ways that shame the world's biggest corporate criminals. Although fronted by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, their membership includes hundreds of secret agents.

The group first gained international notoriety a decade ago by impersonating World Trade Organization spokesmen on international TV and at business conferences. In 2004, United Artists released a feature documentary about their hijinks (*The Yes Men*, directed by Chris Smith, Sarah Price, and Dan Olman) that was distributed theatrically around the globe, and won numerous awards.

Prior to founding The Yes Men, Bonanno and Bichlbaum ran the subversive website RTMark, which was the subject of over a dozen New York Times news features in the late '90s. Individually, Bichlbaum and Bonanno have established careers in film, writing, and media arts. Bichlbaum has published two books of fiction writing, and Bonanno has written and directed a feature documentary and numerous short films. Their work is regularly shown in museum exhibits such as the 1999 Whitney Biennial. Currently Bichlbaum is living in New York and teaching at Parsons, The New School for Design while Bonanno lives in Troy, NY and teaches at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.

### **Andy Bichlbaum**

#### **Director, Writer, Producer**

Andy Bichlbaum is a guy from Tucson, Arizona, who has held a bunch of jobs and was fired from pretty much all of them. He has a "terminal" degree in experimental fiction writing, of which he published a couple of books that made him so rich and lazy that he took up computer programming to pass the time. While "working" as a programmer, he spent some time orchestrating the infamous "Simcopter Hack," in which 80,000 copies of a macho video game were found - shortly after being shipped to stores - to be "enhanced" with swarms of kissing boys. Fired, yet again he became a celebrity among a small but interesting group of lazy queer hackers, and enjoyed the attention so much that he went on to found the notorious "anti-corporate corporation" RTMark.com, a website that matched illegal activist projects with investors and skilled helpers. This Web 0.5 site generated lots of attention in the media and was mistaken as art by a number of curators, who included it in the Whitney Biennial and other major shows. In the course of running RTMark, Bichlbaum and his conspirator Mike Bonanno stumbled into starting The Yes Men when a fake WTO website they created accidentally received an invitation from a law conference in Austria. Today, in addition to Andy's many jobs with The Yes Men, he teaches at Parsons, The New School for Design.

### **Mike Bonanno**

### **Director, Writer, Producer**

Mike Bonanno is a guy from Troy, New York, who spent his formative post-childhood years making mischief. He once switched a bunch of street signs in his college town of Portland, Oregon to read "Malcolm X Street," before getting a group of friends to vomit red, white, and blue in celebration of the visit of a man named Dan Quayle. He then graduated to more serious things: purchasing talking GI Joe and Barbie dolls, switching their voiceboxes, and returning the result to store shelves. The resulting media firestorm (the action even inspired an episode of *The Simpsons*) made Bonanno so famous that even lazy queer hackers like Bichlbaum heard about him, and in 1996 a couple of mutual friends (one of whom is now an actual rabbi) put them in touch. In addition to his creative work, he enjoys skating on thin ice after the first freeze of winter along abandoned stretches of the old Erie Canal near Troy, New York, where he lives and works as a Professor of Media Art at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He has a Scottish wife and two babies.

### **Kurt Engfehr**

#### **Co-Director**

Kurt Engfehr grew up next to a steel mill in a working class suburb of Detroit. He decided against a career in the plants when a friend had his finger ripped off by a band saw. Kurt saw the future, and it was TV. After living and failing all over the country, he settled in New York City where he worked at HBO, MSNBC and National Video Center, etc. as a staff Avid editor. He edited promos and programs for Lifetime, CBS and ABC, and created a series of short films featuring Chernobyl, the guitar playing penguin. Kurt was senior editor on Michael Moore's Emmy nominated show "The Awful Truth" (1999).

Kurt then segued from TV to film by working on *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) for which he won the American Cinema Editors Award for best documentary editing. Not being able to pry himself away from bowling, Kurt was co-producer and editor for the documentary *A League of Ordinary Gentlemen* (2004), that won the Audience Award at the 2004 SXSW Film Festival. Kurt then edited Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the highest-grossing documentary film in history.

Kurt then worked on *Seamless* (2005) a movie about NY fashion directed by Doug Keeve, who previously made, *Unzipped* (1995) which most people found ironic considering just how much Kurt knows about fashion. He followed that up by editing Angelina Jolie's directing debut, the documentary, *A Place in Time* (2007) which can currently be seen by nobody as it sits in her closet. He was co-producer and editor on the documentary *Trumbo* (2007). A string of producing roles followed, starting with *Taking Liberties* (2007) a UK doc about the erosion of civil liberties under Tony Blair that just had a theatrical run and won a BAFTA nomination for its director. He followed that up with a doc about the selling of beauty called *America the Beautiful* (2007) and *Bigger, Stronger, Faster* (2008) a documentary about steroids, cheating, and excess in America.

A slight career change appears to be under way as Kurt has accidentally begun to direct. He's just finished up co-directing duties on the film *The Yes Men Fix The World*.

### **April Merl**

## **Editor**

April Merl's editing credits include feature documentaries Seamless and Trumbo, and Angelina Jolie's directorial debut A Place in Time. She also served as editor and producer on the documentary short Talkin' Water. She is currently working on the feature documentary 2012: A Time for Change.

## **Johnny Burke**

### **Editor**

Johnny Burke is a UK based, freelance documentary editor, whose work has gone on to win a number of awards, such as "The Boys from Baghdad High", Amnesty Awards Best Documentary and Winner of the British Foreign Press Association Award for Best Television Documentary 2008, and "Japan: A Story of Love and Hate," winner of Best International Documentary at The Norwegian Documentary Film Festival, Volda, Norway 2009.

## **Neel Murgai**

### **Composer**

Neel Murgai is a multi-instrumental composer, performer and teacher. He studies sitar with Pundit Krishna Bhatt. Western composition he has learned from Edgar Grana. Neel is also a frame drummer and overtone singer. Currently he is in matriculation for a Master of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Arts at Goddard College. Neel uses his diverse influences and education to create a unique music with a modern global perspective. He has contributed his music to many bands, dance and theater troupes, documentaries and TV programs. His group, the Neel Murgai Ensemble performs a self styled Indo chamber-jazz with sitar, tabla, viola and cello. They will be releasing their debut CD in 2010 on Innova Records. Visit <http://www.neelmurgai.com> for audio samples and more info.

Neel's music has been featured in the Documentary "Crossing Lines" and the BBC programs "Holidays on a Plate" and "Holidays in the Danger zone". He has worked with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company in their productions, "Blind Date" and "Another Evening: I Bow Down". He has also worked or performed with the Manhattan Children's Theater, Dusara Dance, Morgon Kara, Akim Funk Buddha, Mission on Mars, Thurston Moore, Loren Connors, Suzanne Languile, Pharoah's Daughter, Suphala, Samir Chatterjee, Mat Maneri, Sameer Gupta and others. Neel has performed at Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Carnegie Hall, National Theater of Taiwan, Melbourne International Festival, Arts and Ideas festival, Artsposure, Art Wallah, Mendhi Masti Masala, Blue Note, Joe's Pub and in many other venues around the world.

## **Noisola**

### **Composers**

From Milwaukee, Wisconsin, come a composing duo known as Noisola. They will write a more complete bio shortly.

## **Ruth Charny**

### **Producer**

Prior to moving to New York City, Ruth Charny spent a number of years working in a variety of producing capacities at Philadelphia's NPR station, WHYY-FM. There she produced award-

winning and ground-breaking shows, including the program, “The 8th & Diamond Sound”, funded by the Department of Justice, in which young, at-risk gang-members learned radio programming as a way to reach out constructively and creatively to their neighborhoods, and “Free Speech”, a live forum, recorded at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in which the city’s movers & shakers would brainstorm creative ideas with the live audience.

When she moved to New York City with her two small children, she continued working in radio at New York’s WBAI-FM and initiated the popular reading series in which well-known New Yorkers and celebrities would read aloud from such classics as “Moby Dick”. She then took off a period of time to raise her children and returned to direct several films for WNET-TV, including, “The Last Space Voyage of Wallace Ramsel” and for A&E Network, “Kitchen Sink”, and most notably, “Girls in Suits at Lunch”, which premiered at the New York Film Festival.

Ruth started producing film in 1992, working on Barry Primus’ “Mistress”, starring Robert DeNiro, Robert Wuhl, Eli Wallach, and Martin Landau. In 1993, she produced Richard Glatzer’s “Grief” with Illeana Douglas and Craig Chester. In 1995, she produced David Salle’s “Search & Destroy” with Dennis Hopper, Griffin Dunne, Ethan Hawk, and Christopher Walken. This was the first of 2 films that she produced with Martin Scorsese. The second was Allison Anders “Grace of My Heart” with Illeana Douglas, John Turturro, Matt Dylan in 1996. In between, she produced Christopher Munch’s “Color of Brisk and Leaping Day” with Michael Stipe and Jim McKay. In 1998, she produced Garret William’s Sundance lab project, “Spark” with Terrence Howard, and in 1999, “Drowning on Dry Land” with Naveen Andrews and Barbara Hersey. In 2000, she produced Dan McCormick’s “Other Voices” with Rob Morrow, Campbell Scott, and Stockard Channing. In 2001, she continued her work with Christopher Munch and produced again with Michael Stipe and Jim McKay Sundance Film Festival award-winner “The Sleepy Time Gal” with Jackie Bisset. In 2001, she produced Todd Louiso’s Sundance Film Festival award-winner “Love Liza” with Philip Seymour Hoffman and Myra Paci’s Sundance Lab film, “Searching for Paradise” with Chris Noth. In 2004, she produced with InDiGent films and IFC, Alan Taylor’s “Kill the Poor” and Jennie Livingston’s short film, “Who’s the Top?” In 2003, she produced with Ed Pressman and Content Films Curtiss Clayton’s “Rick” with Bill Pullman.

She has recently been consulting for the NYC-based game design company, gameLab, and developing new projects with Daniel Handler aka Lemony Snicket for the Internet, as well as producing a TV series based on the works of UK/American best-selling author, Neil Gaiman for the Independent Film Channel.

## **Doro Bachrach**

### **Producer**

As a producer, Doro Bachrach has won an Academy Award, four Emmies, and two Peabody Awards. She produced “Soldier's Girl” starring Troy Garity and Lee Pace which premiered at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival, based on the true story of Pfc. Barry Winchell, who was murdered by a fellow soldier for his love affair with a transgendered nightclub performer. “Soldier's Girl” was nominated for three Golden Globes, two Independent Spirit awards and won an American Film Institute award. For HBO, she produced “Truman” starring Gary Sinise based on David McCullough's biography, which won the Emmy and Cable ACE award for Best Picture as well as the Producer's Guild award. She produced “Citizen Cohn”, also for HBO, based on Nicholas von Hoffman's portrait of Roy Cohn with James Woods. “Citizen Cohn” won Best Picture at the

Cable Ace Awards and a Peabody Award, whose board cited the film as “perhaps the best picture produced in any medium in 1992”.

Among the independent films Bachrach has produced are “Love Hurts” with Jeff Daniels and John Mahoney, also written by “Soldier’s Girl”s screenwriter, Ron Nyswaner and “Noon Wine”, adapted from Katherine Anne Porter’s novella starring Stellan Skarsgård. With Oprah Winfrey's company, she produced Charles Burnett’s “The Wedding” starring Halle Berry and “Amy & Isabelle”, with Elizabeth Shue and Viola Davis. She was the associate producer of “Dirty Dancing”. For several years, she served on the Board of Directors of the Independent Feature Project and is currently a board member of the Virginia Film Festival at UVA.

### **Alan Hayling**

#### **Executive Producer**

Alan Hayling is a co-founder and Editorial Director of Renegade Pictures, an independent documentary production house in London. Prior to forming Renegade Pictures Alan Hayling was Head of Documentaries at the BBBC. At the BBC, he was responsible for a wide range of factual programmes shown across all the BBC’s television channels. Whilst there he and Jon Rowlands co-created Mischief a populist six part investigative series for BBC3 and Alan executive produced the multi-awarding winning documentary Children of Beslan. Previously Alan was Editorial Director at Mentorn, one of the UK’s largest producers of factual programmes. There he expanded its range of programming by launching a science department, a factual drama department and factual entertainment group. He initiated international formats including "Britain’s Worst Driver", the reality show "Paradise Hotel" for Fox, and drama-documentaries like "The Hamburg Cell" for Channel 4 and HBO.

Prior to Mentorn Alan spent ten years as a Commissioning Editor for Documentaries at Channel 4. Whilst there he created and commissioned the strands "Secret History" and "Secret Lives", "Undercover Britain" and a range of documentary series and single films. He was the Channel 4 executive in charge of work by some of top filmmakers in the field including Errol Morris’s "Dr Death", Phil England's "Shanghai Vice" and Molly Dineen's film "Geri," Michael Moore's series "The Awful Truth" and commissioned his hit film "Bowling for Columbine."

### **Patrice Barrat**

#### **Executive Producer**

Patrice Barrat is a founder and executive director of Bridge Initiative International. Barrat has won many awards in 29 years of journalism, including the Amnesty International award, BAFTA award, FIPA Golden Award and Adolf Grimme Preis for documentaries like Famine Fatigue, Drowning by Bullets, the Vis-a-Vis series, Sarajevo: A Street Under Siege and The Other Algeria. Films he produced were also featured at the Cannes Film Festival (Condor) and in Locarno and Rotterdam (How Arnold Won the West).

### **Jess Search**

#### **Executive Producer**

Jess Search is the Chief Executive of the Channel4 BRITDOC Foundation ([britdoc.org](http://britdoc.org)), an independent, non-profit organisation supported by Channel 4 in the UK. The foundation is five

years old and has supported over 50 films including this year's Sundance double winner *Afghan Star*, Grierson winner *Here's Johnny* and BAFTA winner *Chosen*. Previously Jess was a Channel 4 commissioning editor for 5 years and remains involved in shootingpeople.org, the online filmmakers network she founded which celebrated its 10th birthday last year with 38,000 members.



**PRESS CLIPS**

## All Suited Up for Mischief, To Rumple Stuffed Shirts

It takes some nerve, not to mention diabolical intelligence and financial resources, to pull off the elaborate pranks devised by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno

**STEPHEN HOLDEN**

**FILM REVIEW**

(who are in real life Jack Servin and Igor Vamos), the antiglobalization activists and satirical performance artists known as the Yes Men.

Whether their high jinks accomplish much beyond momentarily embarrassing the corporations and government agencies they misrepresent at business conferences and public forums is an open question. But it is great fun to watch them do their dirty work. In their second film, "The Yes Men Fix the World," they pose as representatives of Dow Chemical, Halliburton, Exxon and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. The most outrageous of the modest proposals offered by these impostors might have made Jonathan Swift smile.

"What we do is pass ourselves off as representatives of big corporations we don't like," Mr. Bonanno cheerfully explains at the beginning of the film. "We make fake Web sites, then wait for people to accidentally invite us to conferences."

**ONLINE: PREVIEW**

A trailer for "The Yes Men Fix the World":

[nytimes.com/movies](http://nytimes.com/movies)

The Yes Men have no doubts about the righteousness of their cause. At the top of their enemies list stand Milton Friedman, "the guru of greed" (their words) and champion of free-market economics, who died three years ago, and his followers.

In the movie's first and greatest prank, they set up a fake Dow Chemical Web site and waited for a response. A week before the 20th anniversary of the 1984 Bhopal disaster at a Union Carbide pesticide plant in India, the BBC mistook their site for the real thing and invited a corporate representative to give a live interview. Posing as the fictional Jude Finisterra, Mr. Bichlbaum declared on television that Dow, which had bought Union Carbide in 2001, was taking complete responsibility for the deadly gas leak and would set up a \$12 billion fund to compensate the victims and clean up the site.

Dow stock plummeted, until the hoax was revealed. But the company never acted on the Yes Men's suggestions, and television commentators denounced the



SHADOW DISTRIBUTION

Mike Bonanno demonstrating the "Survivaball" in a scene from "The Yes Men Fix the World."

stunt as a cruel joke for giving the victims of the disaster false hope. But when the Yes Men are shown visiting Bhopal after the interview, the people they talk to express an amused gratitude for the news media attention.

In the silliest and most Swif-tian stunt, the Yes Men impersonated Exxon spokesmen at an energy conference in Calgary, Alberta, and passed out candles made of Vivoleum, a foul-smelling new biofuel supposedly made of flesh from people who had recently died. In a filmed testimonial, the stand-up comedian Reggie Watts plays an Exxon janitor dy-

ing of cancer who donated his body to produce the test version of the fuel. The hoax was spotted, and the Yes Men ejected.

The funniest prank, played at a gathering of insurers, has them pretending to be Halliburton representatives demonstrating the Survivaball, an inflatable pod six feet in diameter and engineered to be an all-purpose protection from catastrophic climate change. The wearer, once outfitted, resembles a giant doughnut equipped with buglike feelers, waddling along in baby steps. How anyone could take such an invention seriously is almost be-

yond comprehension. But at the end of the demonstration, insurance representatives line up to accept the Yes Men's fake business cards.

In New Orleans Mr. Bichlbaum, posing as Rene Oswin, a bogus spokesman for the Department of Housing and Urban Development, announces to a group of contractors that instead of tearing down public housing that had been relatively unscathed by Hurricane Katrina, HUD would rebuild and reopen it for the return of displaced residents. The agency was not amused, and once again the Yes Men were de-

## The Yes Men Fix the World

*Opens on Wednesday in Manhattan.*

Written and directed by Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno; edited by April Merl; music by Neel Murgai and Noisola; produced by Mr. Bichlbaum, Mr. Bonanno, Doro Bachrach, Ruth Charny and Laura Nix; released by Shadow Distribution. At Film Forum, 209 West Houston Street, west of Avenue of the Americas, South Village. Running time: 1 hour 27 minutes. This film is not rated.

nounced for spreading false hope.

In the movie's final stunt the Yes Men printed and passed out thousands of copies of a facsimile of The New York Times, dated July 4, 2009, and stamped with the motto "All the news we hope to print," with the headline "Iraq War Ends." It concludes the movie on a wistful, utopian note.

If the Yes Men's antics have a lot in common with the stunts of Sacha Baron Cohen and Michael Moore, they are executed more in the spirit of dry amusement than as showboating, gotcha moments. For as entertaining as they are, the Yes Men are not stars; after the movie ends, it is hard to remember what they look like.

Their failure to shame companies like Dow Chemical into doing what the Yes Men believe to be the right thing brings up the question of why they bother. I imagine they would argue that they are sowing the seeds of a populist revolt somewhere down the line. If they can do it, why not us?

New York Post, Friday, October 9, 2009

**THE YES MEN FIX THE  
WORLD ★★★**

**C**APITALISTS aren't just greedy,  
they're stupid. Really stupid.

How else do you explain the success of  
Andy Bichlbaum and Michael Bonanno,

two ordinary guys who founded a group  
of political pranksters known as the Yes  
Men, who make corporations, politicians  
and journalists look like fools.

Their exploits roll out in "The Yes Men  
Fix the World," a hilarious movie written,  
directed and produced by the guys them-  
selves.

It shows how Bichlbaum and Bonanno  
— a mix of Michael Moore and Sacha  
Baron Cohen — pass themselves off as  
corporate spokesmen or government offi-  
cials and pull off outrageous pranks, for

which their targets always fall.

Targets range from Dow Chemical (re-  
member the 1984 gas leak in India that  
killed thousands?) and Halliburton (Dick  
Cheney's pet corporation) to the BBC and  
New York Times (a phony edition de-  
clares the end of the Iraq war) to the  
mayor of New Orleans (a rather pompous  
gentleman, it appears) and the governor  
of Louisiana.

The Yes Men also recently put out a  
fake copy of The Post to publicize global  
warming.

Bichlbaum and Bonanno operate in  
much the same way as Moore, but since  
they are nowhere near as recognizable,  
people are more easily taken in.

Even if you don't agree with the Yes  
Men's political agenda, you'll get a big  
kick out of this movie.

*Running time: 87 minutes. Not rated  
(nothing objectionable). At Film Forum,  
Houston Street, west of Sixth Avenue.*

— **V.A. Musetto**

## MOVIES

## No Celluloid Escape

**Documentaries reign at the Berlinale, where gritty, low-budget films reflect the grim global mood.**

By **Michael Levitin** | NEWSWEEK

Published Jan 31, 2009

From the magazine issue dated Feb 9, 2009

In "The Yes Men Fix The World," a man posing as an Exxon executive shows up at an oil conference in Calgary and unveils the company's breakthrough energy source: Vivoleum, a new biofuel product made of human bodies. He also dupes 300 million viewers when he poses as a Dow Chemical representative on TV, announcing that his company will clean up India's toxic Bhopal plant and compensate all of the victims. Before he's through, the eco-stuntman interviews scientists and families in New Orleans, where he dresses as a U.S. government spokesperson and promises—to a believing Mayor Ray Nagin, among others—to reopen public housing and force Exxon to pay \$12 billion to restore the region's wetlands.

The film, showing this week at the Berlin International Film Festival (Feb. 5–15), is part journalism, part mockumentary, influenced in turn by Michael Moore, "Borat" and television newsmagazines like "20/20." Tackling the themes of climate change, corporate greed and wealth disparity—on a budget of just over \$1 million—it shines with a raw wit and originality that have inspired e-mails from students who saw the premiere at Sundance and are eager to fix the world. "This is a moment when everyone is reconsidering what we've been doing for the last 35 years," says Mike Bonnano, who codirected the film with Andy Bichlbaum and Kurt Engfehr, the editor for Moore's "Bowling for Columbine" and "Fahrenheit 9/11." "If we use this as a learning moment and change the way we do business, we can actually prevent the end of the world as we know it."

In a year that already feels like the end of the world as some know it, the Berlin film festival is rife with films like "The Yes Men" that capture the most urgent issues of the day: the environment, social unrest, economic insecurity. Even for the Berlinale, which is known for embracing the political and the avant-garde, this year's lineup is exceptionally gritty and provocative. Some see the trend as a reaction to the widespread excesses of the film industry, and to the shakeout looming among competing studios. Independent films enjoyed booming art-house runs in the 1980s, but were co-opted by the big studios in the 1990s. Now, with production houses as well established as Universal and Focus feeling the squeeze, the doors may be opening for less experienced, more cost-conscious filmmakers, sparking a return to cinema's more daring roots. "We see a new development toward radical, fearless types of filmmaking," says Wieland Speck, director of the festival's Panorama section, which represents the riskier, lower-budget productions—the films that grim economic times have put back into vogue. "It's becoming juicier again."

# The Yes Men Fix the World

(NC)



**Philip French**

The Observer, Sunday 9 August 2009

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Funnier and more useful than Sacha Baron Cohen's Brüno, this guerrilla movie records for posterity the serious satirical work of the poker-faced American pranksters Andy Birnbaum and Mike Bonanno, who set out to expose the lies and misdemeanours of conglomerates. They create a website that gets them invited by the BBC to speak on behalf of Dow Chemicals, the new owners of Union Carbide, and in a live programme on the Bhopal catastrophe, they apologise to the Indian people and make a large, generous offer of compensation.

The Yes Men Fix the World

**Production year:** 2009

**Countries:** France, Rest of the world, USA

**Cert (UK):** 12A

**Runtime:** 90 mins

**Directors:** Andy Bichlbaum, Kurt Engfehr, Mike Bonanno

**Cast:** Andy Bichlbaum, Mike Bonanno

[More on this film](#)

After hurricane Katrina, they go to New Orleans as spokesmen for the Bush regime's Department of Housing and Urban Development offering to restore displaced working-class people to the housing projects the private sector has taken over. And so on. The pair's liberating, empowering humour has their targets shouting "unfair" and accusing them of duping the public as they go to Halliburton and back.

## Film review: *The Yes Men Fix the World*

NewScientist

12:31 12 August 2009 by [Kat Austen](#)

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**Interview:** *The Yes Men: 'Take to the streets'*

It's 2004. Shares in Dow Chemical are tanking after news breaks that the company is to reverse its stance on the [notorious industrial accident in Bhopal](#), India, at a plant run by its Union Carbide subsidiary. For 20 years, the company has resisted calls to increase the compensation offered to victims and clean up the site. Now it's decided to commit up to \$12 billion to do so.

Why the change of heart? Dow representative Jude Finisterra, announcing the decision on the BBC World TV channel, explains that it's "the right thing to do". There's no comparison between the value of money and that of human life, he says. Fine sentiments, but expensive ones: within minutes, Dow shares have fallen by 3 per cent, the beginning of a slide that will ultimately wipe more than \$2 billion off the company's value.

And that's the first Dow Chemical hears about it. The company says it doesn't have a spokesman named Finisterra, the announcement is a hoax, and it's made no promise to increase its commitment in Bhopal. Finisterra is actually Andy Bichlbaum, frontman for audacious pranksters [the Yes Men](#).

Bichlbaum and fellow Yes Man Mike Bonanno target big business and its supporters, whose hypocrisy and callousness they aim to expose. As their new film, *The Yes Men Fix the World*, documents, their modus operandi is to put unexpected words into others' mouths and see what happens.

### Posers

To that end, they've posed as officials of the World Trade Organization, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and ExxonMobil, among others, and routinely set up fake websites in the name of companies or organisations, sowing confusion about who's really saying what. This extends to their own identities: Bichlbaum and Bonanno aren't their real names. Sometimes the intention is to provoke shock and disgust at their targets' actions, sometimes it is to ridicule – but as with other pranksters, the biggest pay-offs come when they hoodwink their antagonists into giving themselves away.

At one point, for example, they present a corporate conference with an "Acceptable Risk Calculator" which determines how many lives can be lost if the profit is high enough – and sets out which nationalities can be paid off most cheaply. Their proposal is greeted with interest: it's "refreshing", they're told. Elsewhere, we see a host of free-market advocates bragging about how their lobbying prevented the US from signing up to the Kyoto protocol.

This approach has made The Yes Men plenty of enemies. Even some of those sympathetic to their causes think they push the boundaries of morality, and they've been accused of irresponsibility and thoughtlessness – for example, by giving false hope to victims of the Bhopal accident. So why do they do it?

The film forgoes the unsubtle voice-overs common among films with clear political agendas, mostly allowing the footage and interviews to speak for themselves. There are slightly patronising descriptions of the free-market ethos throughout the film, but they are sporadic and short-lived. There are also statements about the need for government regulation to protect human rights from being squashed in the pursuit of profit. But for the rest of the time the Yes Men leave it to the audience to draw their own conclusions.

### Should, can't

Mine are that the Yes Men present visions of the world as it might be if ideas and minds weren't chained by "should" and "can't" – what real change might look like. The film culminates in this way, with the distribution of 80,000 copies of a fake edition of *The New York Times*. The cover date is six months into the future, and the spoof paper reports the end of the Iraq war and the switch to a "sane" economic regime, as well as advertisements from companies promising to dedicate themselves to good causes.

Impossible? Perhaps, but you could say the same about two ordinary men walking into the BBC and passing themselves off as representatives of one of the world's biggest companies. "Can't" is an over-used word.



By [Robert Bianco](#) and [Gary Levin](#), USA TODAY

[« Fisticuffmanship | Main | Three movies: 'Humpday,' 'The Messenger,' and 'Spread' »](#)

## It's the Yes Men!

Like this story? Share it with Yahoo! Buzz



The Yes Men are a pair of jokers who go around making life miserable for corporations they deem to be major polluters and disaster profiteers, while trying to make the rest of us laugh a little.

Since Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno (real names Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos) require a degree of anonymity, and they have powerful enemies, they're surprisingly easy-going when recognized at a bus stop at the Sundance Film Festival. Of course, that's why they're here. After their self-titled 2003 movie, they're back at Sundance with a further chronicle of their troublemaking -- *The Yes Men Fix the World*.

"There is an endgame. We're either faced with saving the world now, or not having one. That's what the film is about," Bichlbaum said as the bus carried them through Park City.

The pair post fake websites for their target corporations, which get the pranksters invited onto news programs and major industry conferences. Given the platform, they administer comedic vigilante justice by announcing, say, [a \\$12 billion clean-up plan for the Bhopal, India, pesticide gas disaster](#) that killed thousands in 1984, shaming the parent company (Dow Chemical) and hitting them with a media-savvy pie-to-the-face.

That's in the new movie, along with Bonanno turning up as a fake representative of Halliburton selling an Armageddon life-support system called The SurvivaBall, a ridiculous inflatable pod that can allow the "richest of the rich" to happily bounce around a post-apocalyptic world.

Obviously both are committed environmentalists, but even The Yes Men had to laugh at some of the green-boasting at the festival. On their Sundance-embossed new jackets were tags indicating "environmentally aware zippers," made out of recycled material. Bonanno laughed: "That sounds like putting a Band-Aid on a severed head."

Check out how cool it would be to live in a SurvivaBall:





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Blog

## The Yes Men: sometimes it takes a lie...



About Greenpeace

Posted by josscc on 4 August 2009.

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Yay - the Yes Men have a new documentary out! The anti-corporate activists, who specialise in posing as top executives of corporations they hate on TV and at business conferences around the globe, hit the big screen later this week with "[The Yes Men Fix the World](#)".

Described by one reviewer as 'Bruno meets Michael Moore', they put their Hunter S Thompson brand of gonzo journalism skills to good use parodying their corporate targets in ever more extreme ways - basically doing everything that they can to wake us all up to the danger of letting greed run our world. On the way they delve deep into the question of why we have given the market more power than any other institution to determine our direction as a society, and investigate the unintentionally hilarious netherworld of free-market think tanks, where they figure out a way to defeat the logic that's destroying our planet.

Not to mention appearing on the BBC before 300 million viewers to announce that chemical giant Dow will finally clean up the site of the largest industrial accident in history, the Bhopal catastrophe. The result: as people worldwide celebrated, Dow's stock value lost two billion dollars.

They've also managed to get up the noses of the world's largest oil company, Exxon Mobil, who've accused the film of containing "inaccuracies" about their business. Interestingly, the oil giant stopped short of calling the Yes Men outright liars, despite a scene in the new film featuring an [entirely fictional new Exxon biofuel called Vivoleum](#), made from the human victims of climate change.

Exxon's hesitation to fully condemn the Yes Men may be related to the fact that they themselves frequently communicate "inaccuracies" - only theirs have potentially deadly consequences. *The Yes Men Fix the World* shines a light on some of Exxon's biggest lies, including the way [they funded advertising that says climate change is not a problem](#).

"Exxon Mobil has told lies of a total, criminal world-ending sort" says Andy Bichlbaum of the Yes Men, "and nobody but a psychopath would find them entertaining."

For those who do want be entertained, *The Yes Men Fix the World* previews on August 7th at the Odeon Pantom Street in London, and premieres in 20 cinemas across the UK on August 11th.

[Watch the trailer >>](#)

[Buy tickets, get screening dates and times >>](#)

[Get active: Take the Yes Men challenge >>](#)

## The Yes Men fix the world. We ask what keeps them going?



Written by Nicol Wistreich | 08 August 2009  
Posted in [people](#) - documentary



*As the Yes Men - the thinking-person's Sacha Baron Cohen - see their latest film released in the UK, Netribution sneaks its way into a secretive underground political cell known only as 'Soho House' to find them out and learn more.*

The [Independent's](#) Johann Hari recently [asked the question](#): "when you are just one person sitting on a warming planet – when you see economies collapsing, wars raging, and reasons for fear on every corner – how should you react? What can you do?". Many of us, he argued, settle for defiant pessimism: "I can't make any difference. It's all going to happen, whatever I do. The political conversation.. has nothing to do with me anyway", leading us to buy a bigger lock for our door, distrust our neighbours and not go out much, other than to occasionally let rip and collapse in a drunken mess on [Latvian stag weekends](#).



I was fortunate enough to put the question to the [Yes Men](#) - who seem to have taken the crown of accessible yet uncompromising political satire - when I met them in London a few weeks ago ahead of the release of the pant-shittingly hilarious [The Yes Men Fix the World](#) - winner of the Audience award at Berlin, and 'best documentary of the year' according to the New Scientist. [Andy Bichlbaum](#) explained that they simply "do things that are fun". Pessimism is avoided, he said, "if you do what you are drawn to and think it can have a positive effect, if you do what you want to do and it's enjoyable. The despair comes from not doing anything and just sitting there and letting things happen."

Indeed it was frustration with the status quo which led them into Yes-ing the first place: "I started it more or less when I was in college and there was a certain frustration," says Andy. "It could seem pointless to be in a march, while [this was] something that could give me more satisfaction, that we had more fun doing."

Still not funded to prank all year round (wot no Channel 4 series?), the pair hold down day jobs as University lecturers while jetting around the world pretending to be people that they aren't. Few by now will have missed the infamous stunt where Bichlbaum was invited on to BBC News 24 as a representative of Dow Chemical, and proceeded to do the one thing the owner of the chemical plant behind the [disaster which has killed an estimated 25,000](#) people and disabled many more has never done - and apologise unreservedly for the disaster, promising to shut the plant and pay out some \$12bn in compensation and clean-up (25 years on, the ground water there is still toxic, and litigation [continues](#)). Dow's stock price collapsed by some \$2bn before the stunt was revealed.



The [Yes Men Fix the World](#), after a slightly awkward start, gallops into one of the funniest documentaries I've seen in years that had me both in tears, as the pair visited Bhopal today; and stitches, as executives at a VIP annual petrochemical luncheon learn that the candles they are holding are made from the flesh of an Exxon janitor, as part of a cunning plan to recycle climate chaos casualties into a fuel source. The film takes us behind the scenes of the pair's thinking, planning and stunts - with few areas avoiding their attention. We see them share a stage [with Mayor Nagin in New Orleans](#) where post-disaster relief has become mass-privatisation, with only four state schools left in the entire city; uncover Halliburton's executive protection survival suit; and - in one of their most touching stunts - handed out 80,000 [alternative 'good news' copies](#) of the New York Times, declaring peace in Iraq, a restructure of the economy and a new maximum wage law ([PDF](#)). With more stunts planned in the run up to Copenhagen, the men don't seem to sleep - indeed for the film's release in the UK, the pair handed out beautifully branded B'EauPal water in Soho, and at the Dow offices:



What seems remarkable - besides their ability to get away with these things - is the balance between focusing on local issues and the bigger picture, which is summed up by Andy as the point that "we've entrusted our destiny to this crazy ideology [consumerism] that has now gone bankrupt and it's obvious it's gone bankrupt. But we really need to sever our ties with it." It's a message no longer exclusive to radicals and the far left - taking centre stage from Fanny Armstrong's *Age of Stupid* to Douglas Rushkoff's *Life Inc* to Annie Leonard's brilliantly concise and informative 20-minute Creative Commons short *The Story of Stuff* (which taught me that every bin bag of rubbish in my house is matched with 70 bags of rubbish created in the production of that waste - and that 99% of goods Americans buy will be binned within six months). In short, as Leonard says, "you cannot run a linear system (of production and consumption) on a finite planet indefinitely". Even Disney seems to agree, with *Wall-E* and its accompanying website, being perhaps the most grimly disturbing illustration out of any of them of the consequences of business as usual, of a society built first and foremost around consumerism, greed and short term, unsustainable thinking.

So, are these guys the answer? Heroic cultural leaders such as Bichlbaum and Mike Bonnano, Banksy and Kalle Lasn, Armstrong and Rushkoff, Mark Thomas and Michael Moore, Colbert and Stewart - sticking the finger up to Goliath as they press for the change we want but don't know how to get, while cracking some good jokes?

Actually, this is the second bad response to the problems of the world Hari identified in his article, giving our leaders and cultural figures sole responsibility for change, investing in them superhuman expectations to make up for the rot that we all see and sigh for, while letting us once more sit back and put our feet up, trusting that Obama or the Yes Men will sort it out. It's just as dangerous as apathy:

*"Both these moods leave you – the ordinary citizen – inert. All you can do is focus on your own personal life and wait, for disaster or salvation. But these twin dispositions leave out the real option that is waiting for you. It is the only one that has ever delivered political change in the past, and it is the only one that will pull us out of the ditch now. It is where ordinary individual citizens – you – come together and raise their voices and offer solutions of their own."*

This echoes the Yes Men's message, as Mike explains: "it's only by individual action that things change. There's not driving a car, that kind of thing, then there's also putting pressure on corporations and the government to change. Specifically putting pressure on our elected leaders to make sure that they have the mandate to pass the laws that we hope to see at Copenhagen. There's tons of organisations here that are doing it, from the more radical ones like *Plane Stupid*, to groups like *Friends of the Earth*."

And if they wanted to follow in the Yes Men's shoes, any advice? "It's not very hard, that's what I'd say to begin with. It's not rocket science" explained Andy. "You can watch our movie, figure out how we do it and go and do it. It's one technique amongst many for getting the message out there. And for supporting a big movement that's making change."

To help this further, the Yes Men have created a website that both explains how they do it, gives ideas, and encourages groups to mobilise around specific issues. At [challenge.theyesmen.org](http://challenge.theyesmen.org) you can sign up to stunts - from a campaign against the **targetted recruitment of ethnic minorities and the ultra-poor** for the military, to the Raging Grannies Action League for US health care reform.

Johann Hari argues it's actions such as these that move civilisation forward, and that as a species we depend on such movements:

*"Far from being some dreamy call to kumbaya, collective political action is the single biggest reason your life is incalculably better than that of your great-grandparents. When people first called for equality for women, when people first started to conduct scientific experiments, when people first suggested paid weekends and holidays for ordinary workers, they were greeted by the same glib pessimism we hear today. It'll never happen! What can we do?..."*

*Who was the leader of feminism? Who was the leader of scientific progress? Who was the leader of workers' rights? Sure, there were inspirational individuals along the way. But they happened as a result of millions of ordinary people demanding it, and never giving up. If we had waited for leaders to spontaneously see the light, we would be waiting still."*

Or as Bichlbaum says, "Now that the world is in great danger, we really have to figure this out. It's a great moment."

