CITIZEN MEDIA AND PUBLIC SPACES

Diverse Expressions of Citizenship and Dissent



edited by MONA BAKER and BOLETTE B. BLAAGAARD

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CITIZEN MEDIA

ROUTLEDGE

Citizen Media and Public Spaces

Citizen Media and Public Spaces presents a pioneering exploration of citizen media as a highly interdisciplinary domain that raises vital political, social and ethical issues relating to conceptions of citizenship and state boundaries, the construction of publics and social imaginaries, processes of co-optation and reverse co-optation, power and resistance, the ethics of witnessing and solidarity, and novel responses to the democratic deficit.

Framed by a substantial introduction by the editors, the twelve contributions to the volume interrogate the concept of citizen media theoretically and empirically, and offer detailed case studies that extend from the UK to Russia and Bulgaria and from China to Denmark and the liminal spaces within which a growing number of refugees now live.

A rich new domain of scholarship and practice emerges out of the studies presented. Citizen media is shown to embrace both physical and digital interventions in public space, as well as the sets of values and agendas that influence and drive the practices and discourses through which individuals and collectives position themselves within and in relation to society and participate in the creation of diverse publics.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers in media and communication studies, particularly those studying citizen media, media and society, journalism and society, and political communication.

Mona Baker is Professor Emerita in Translation Studies at the Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK. She is the author of *Translation and Conflict* (2006) and *In Other Words* (2011) and editor or co-editor of numerous reference works, including *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2009).

Bolette B. Blaagaard is Associate Professor of Communications at Aalborg University, Copenhagen, Denmark. She is co-editor of *Deconstructing Europe: Postcolonial Perspectives* (2012) with Sandra Ponzanesi, *After Cosmopolitanism* (2013) with Patrick Hanafin and Rosi Braidotti, and *Cosmopolitanism and the New News Media* (2014) with Lilie Chouliaraki.

Critical Perspectives on Citizen Media

Edited by Luis Pérez-González
University of Manchester, UK

Bolette B. Blaagaard
Aalborg University, Denmark

Mona Baker
University of Manchester, UK

Critical Perspectives on Citizen Media aims to define and advance understanding of citizen media, an emerging academic field located at the interface between different disciplines, including media studies, sociology, translation studies, performance studies, political science, visual studies and journalism studies. Titles in the series are focused on high-quality and original research, in the form of monographs and edited collections, made accessible for a wide range of readers. The series explores the relationship between citizen media and various cross-disciplinary themes, including but not restricted to, participation, immaterial work, witnessing, resistance and performance. The series editors also welcome proposals for reference works, textbooks and innovative digital outputs produced by citizen engagement groups on the ground.

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Voices *from* and *with* the Egyptian revolution
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Citizen Media and Public Spaces
Diverse expressions of citizenship and dissent
Edited by Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard

Forthcoming:

The Routledge Encyclopedia of Citizen Media
Edited by Luis Pérez-González, Bolette B. Blaagaard and Mona Baker

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-84764-4 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-138-84765-1 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-72663-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Sunrise Setting Ltd, Brixham, UK

To Gaza Parkour Team

An example of citizen media at its best

Founded in 2005, still dreaming of establishing a parkour academy in Gaza and representing Gaza in international parkour tournaments

May their dreams come true



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Contributors

Stuart Allan is Professor of Journalism and Communication, as well as Head of School, in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies (JOMEC) at Cardiff University, UK. His books include *Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis* (Polity Press, 2013), *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism* (Routledge, revised version, 2012) and *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives*, Volume 2 (Peter Lang, co-edited with E. Thorsen, 2014).

Sara Beretta is Doctor of Anthropology of the Contemporary: Ethnography of Cultural Diversity and Convergences, University of Milan Bicocca. She worked in Beijing between 2005 and 2007 researching the development of contemporary Chinese art. In 2009 she started a new research project related to video production and consumption, in which she focuses on independent cinema and the Web in urban China (Beijing, Shanghai and Kunming).

Mona Baker is Professor Emerita in Translation Studies at the Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK. She is the author of *Translation and Conflict* (2006) and *In Other Words* (2011) and editor or co-editor of numerous reference works, including *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2009).

Bolette B. Blaagaard is Associate Professor of Communications at Aalborg University, Copenhagen, Denmark. She is the co-editor of: *Deconstructing Europe: Postcolonial Perspectives* (2012), with Sandra Ponzanesi; *After Cosmopolitanism* (2013), with Patrick Hanafin and Rosi Braidotti; and *Cosmopolitanism and the New News Media* (2014), with Lilie Chouliaraki.

Lilie Chouliaraki is Professor of Media and Communication at the London School of Economics. Her research focuses on the communication of human suffering in mass and digital media. Her publications include *Discourse in Late Modernity* (1999, with Norman Fairclough; two editions), *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (2006, two editions), *The Soft Power of War* (ed., 2008) and *The Ironic Spectator. Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism* (2013).

Karen Cross is a Senior Lecturer in Media and Communications, in the Department of Media Culture and Language at the University of Roehampton, UK. She has recently published articles in *Visual Studies* and *Photographies* and is currently preparing a monograph for *Intellect* on the topic of Social Photography.

Stine Ejsing-Duun is Associate Professor in IT, interaction design, learning, and play and games. She is a member of the Communication, ICT and Learning Design (KILD) research group and the Research Lab: ICT and Learning Design, at the Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University Copenhagen.

Jenny Hughes is a Senior Lecturer in Drama at the University of Manchester, UK and is currently exploring theatre as a cultural response to economic precarity. Her publications include a monograph, *Performance in a time of terror* (Manchester University Press, 2011), and co-authored book (with James Thompson and Michael Balfour), *Performance in place of war* (2009, Seagull/Chicago).

Evgenia Nim is Associate Professor at the Department of Media at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE), Moscow, Russia, and research fellow at the HSE Laboratory of Media Research. She is co-author and co-editor of *The Tuning of Language: Communications Management in the Post-Soviet Space* (New Literary Observer, Moscow, 2016).

Astrid Nordin is Lecturer in the Department of Politics, Philosophy and Religion at Lancaster University. Her research interests fall in the intersection of contemporary Chinese politics and critical political theories. Recent publications concerned with Chinese citizen media include *Chinese Politics and International Relations: Innovation and Invention*, co-edited with Nicola Horsburgh and Shaun Breslin (Routledge, 2014).

Simon Parry is Lecturer in Drama and Arts Management in the School of Arts, Languages and Cultures at the University of Manchester. His research interests include activist performance, contemporary science in performance and the arts in education. He co-edited (with Jenny Hughes) a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* (Vol. 25, Issue 3) entitled 'Theatre, performance and activism: gestures towards an equitable world' (2015).

Luis Pérez-González is Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies and Co-director of the Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK. He is the author of *Audiovisual Translation: Theories, Methods and Issues* (Routledge, 2014).

Sandra Ponzanesi is Professor of Gender and Postcolonial Studies in the Department of Media and Culture Studies/Graduate Gender Programme,

Utrecht University, and Head of Humanities at Utrecht University College, the Netherlands. She is the author of *Paradoxes of Postcolonial Culture* (Suny, 2004) and *The Postcolonial Cultural Industry* (Palgrave, 2014).

Julia Rone is a PhD candidate at the Department of Social and Political Sciences at the European University Institute. She has published in collected volumes, including *Digital Cultures and the Politics of Emotion* (Athina Karatzogianni and Adi Kuntsman, eds), Palgrave Macmillan; and *Cultures and Ethics of Sharing* (Wolfgang Sutzl, Felix Stalder, Ronald Mayer, Theo Hug, eds), Innsbruck University Press.

Hilde C. Stephansen is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Westminster. Her research is situated at the intersection of political sociology with media and communication studies and focuses on publics, transnational social movement networks, media activism, citizen media and participation.

1 Reconceptualizing citizen media

A preliminary charting of a complex domain

Mona Baker and Bolette B. Blaagaard

This chapter draws on established scholarship in a variety of disciplines, the rich contributions to the current volume, and a wide range of concrete examples of different practices to chart the territory of citizen media as an emerging field of study and offer a critical examination of the main concepts that underpin it: *public(s), citizen/citizenship* and *media*. It further explores a range of features that characterize and delimit the concept of *citizen media* from related terms such as *citizen* and *participatory journalism*; *alternative*, *radical* and *community media*; and *social* and *digital media*. We conclude with a provisional definition of *citizen media* that encompasses content and practices, values and narratives, the collective and the individual, the local and the global, and the concrete and the virtual, and that acknowledges the complex dynamic of appropriation and reverse appropriation within which all citizen media initiatives operate.

Citizen Media and Public Spaces and the series in which it appears are part of a broad vision that extends beyond traditional scholarship to engage with the lived experience of unaffiliated individuals and collectives as they reclaim public and digital spaces in the pursuit of non-institutionalized agendas. These *citizens,* a term we will shortly critique and qualify, do so through a variety of media and practices, some of which are represented in contributions to this volume. They include witnessing and documenting events first hand, either textually, through tweets about unfolding events in Libya and Syria, for instance (Chouliaraki), or visually, using mobile phones or cameras during the 2005 London bombings in the UK (Cross), the 2014 Israeli attacks on Gaza (Blaagaard and Allan), and by refugees in international waters, a no-man's land that raises questions about the very concept of citizenship (Ponzanesi). They also include producing documentary videos to express a personal sense of alienation or raise awareness of social issues in China (Beretta); subtitling and disseminating a controversial documentary such as the BBC's *The Power of Nightmares* into Spanish to intervene in political debates from a non-mainstream perspective (Pérez-González); decorating a bus stop to draw attention to detrimental changes in the housing benefit system in the UK (Hughes and Parry); blogging and creating websites to disseminate non-mainstream

news in Bulgaria (Rone); creating shared communication platforms for activists to facilitate mutual learning and cross-fertilization in the World Social Forum (Stephansen); evading censorship in Chinese digital space (Nordin); designing or participating in locative media initiatives in Denmark and the United States in order to co-create urban space (Ejsing-Duun); hacking websites and blogs on the Bulgarian Internet (Rone); and staging different types of protest – from squirting black oil on British Petroleum's sunflower logo at the Tate Gallery in London (Hughes and Parry) to organizing nano-demonstrations consisting of plastic toys in Russian towns (Nim).

Other practices and media are not represented in this volume but are equally important to our preliminary conceptualization of citizen media as a field of enquiry. They include writing and painting graffiti in public space (Jaffe et al. 2012; Shehab 2015); producing mockumentaries (Roscoe and Hight 2001) that subvert official narratives; archiving (Elsadda 2015), a good example being the *Vox Populi* initiative,[1] which archives material related to the 2011 Egyptian revolution from the perspective of those involved in it, rather than those in authority; staging flash-mob performances (Molnár 2014), which might take the form of a Bollywood dance on a Mumbai train (Shresthova 2013) or flamenco dancing and singing in Spanish banks to protest the economic crisis (BBC News 2013); fansubbing, also known as amateur subtitling (Pérez-González 2013a, 2013b); volunteer subtitling and translation for revolutionary and protest movements (Baker 2016); modding, which involves modifying video games to enhance the immersive experience, or – to use an example from Layne and Blackmon (2013) – to change the narrative of a game to accommodate a feminist perspective; and performing parkour in the ruins of Gaza, as demonstrated on the cover of the current volume and on the dedication page; among many other types of intervention.

Many of these practices – like modding, producing mockumentaries, archiving and staging flash mobs – are not restricted to the type of citizen-led initiatives covered by our definition of citizen media, to be outlined in detail later in this chapter. Like most social activities, the particular form that a citizen media practice might take is part of the wider repertoire of social practices available to institutions as well as unaffiliated citizens, and even what starts off as a citizen-led initiative is often subsequently appropriated by corporate culture, as we argue later and as several of the contributors demonstrate. Our attempt to delimit a preliminary and inevitably porous conceptualization of citizen media here, and our involvement in initiating the series in which the current volume appears, are intended to inaugurate an ambitious project that involves building on existing scholarship in a variety of disciplines to map out a highly interdisciplinary territory of scholarly enquiry and practice, one where the boundaries between the university and the street, between different disciplines, and between physical and virtual spaces are all critically examined, questioned and renegotiated.

In order to establish this project on firm grounds, and without suggesting that our proposed conceptualization is not open to debate and rethinking as

we engage with the wider community, we need to clarify what we mean by *citizen*, *media*, *public(s)* and *space(s)* at this stage. The concepts of *the citizen* and *citizenship* already mark an interdisciplinary area of enquiry even before we link them to media and public space: they were developed in the fields of law, political science, migration studies and sociology, among other disciplines, and we engage further with them later in this chapter. *Media*, a term we also revisit later in the chapter, constitutes an entire field of studies in its own right, but it is increasingly being theorized within a wider range of disciplines, including communication studies, journalism and sociology, and often now features in discussions of performance, literature and visual anthropology. *The public* similarly crosses the domains of political science, communication studies and sociology, and when used in conjunction with the concept of *space*, as in this volume, recalls Jürgen Habermas' (1989) notion of the public sphere. But the concept of *space* is also theorized in a range of other disciplines, including urban studies, performance, film and media studies, postcolonial studies and migration studies. Beyond academia, all four concepts – *citizen*, *media*, *public(s)* and *space(s)* – have acquired a variety of meanings and connotations, depending on the interpreter's political position and the context in which they are used.

We begin our enquiry below by drawing on communication studies to examine the notions of *public* and *publics*, specifically engaging with some of the ways in which citizen practices address and construct public space, including physical, digital and networked spaces. We then move on to the two notions – *citizen* and *media* – that constitute the new territory we wish to map out, with a view to elaborating a preliminary definition of *citizen media* that delimits it as clearly as possible from the many terms with which it is often conflated, such as *participatory*, *community, alternative*, *radical, social* and *digital media*.

Public space(s)

Communication studies has traditionally drawn on Jürgen Habermas' (1989) concept of the public sphere to theorize the political dynamics and importance of communication. The Habermasian *public sphere* is a realm in which people may freely engage in debate about issues that concern them, and where 'access is guaranteed to all citizens' (Habermas 1964/2010:114). It is not the state or the institutions of bureaucracy, but is 'a sphere that mediates between society and state, in which the public organizes itself as bearer of public opinion [and] accords with the principle of the public sphere' (Habermas 1964/2010:115). The principle, or principles, of the public sphere consist(s) of accessibility, acceptance of a level playing field (with no privileges) and rational legitimation of arguments. Habermas's concept privileges mass media, especially the press, as the primary mediator between the systemic world – that is, the market economy and state apparatus – and the life worlds, or individual social actors. Indeed, in his 1964 encyclopaedia

entry on 'The Public Sphere', he explicitly states that newspapers, radio and television are the media of the public sphere. As facilitators of public debate and gatekeepers of the political sphere, the (mass) media are moreover in a position to influence what is being debated and how these debates impact society, as well as the state apparatus. Attempts to explain the work of journalists and the broadcast media as the so-called fourth estate continue to draw on the notion of the public sphere as theorized by Habermas, but the concept is increasingly being questioned. Its critique tends to focus on two main areas: first, the strict division Habermas maintains between the political, systemic world and its attendant bureaucratic structures on the one hand, and the life world of the public on the other; and second, the exclusive focus on rational and consensus-seeking debate and discourses in the public sphere as a whole (Torgerson 2010). Torgerson argues that rather than two separate spheres, one of which governs the other and needs mediators to facilitate debate, we should be looking at the public and systemic realm as one organic whole within which both public and systemic discourses intermingle and interact. Indeed, Torgerson believes that even the systemic realm is structured by discourse and not merely, as Habermas would have it, by bureaucratic regulations. Whereas Habermas places policy outside language, Torgerson insists on the structuring power of language, which is never neutral. It is this structuring power of language that renders the systemic susceptible to the impact of public discourse and dissent. Torgerson further argues against Habermas' reliance on reason and rational debate and instead views policy as a contextualized process, that is, as discursive social practice.

The impact of digitalization, online interaction and mobile media in recent years has further challenged Habermas's theorization of the political role of mass media, supporting Torgerson's argument that the public and systemic spheres are discursively interlinked. Political party leaders comment on social issues on Facebook, announce candidacies for presidencies on Twitter, and engage in taking selfies at statemen's funerals. The range and ready availability of diverse political voices has also changed the way we think of publics and the public sphere. Unaffiliated individuals may now engage in political conversation as easily as Members of Parliament and can cumulatively shift the 'systemic' agenda by posting photographs and comments or by recording and uploading visual records of a first-hand experience using their mobile devices. This multiplicity of voices and tenors, technologies and media platforms inevitably challenges the idea of *the* public sphere as one unifying space, as Stephansen (this volume) points out, citing the work of Nancy Fraser (1990) and her concept of counter-publics – i.e., alternative publics constituted by citizens in subordinate social positions. Michael Warner (2002), who also draws on Fraser (1990), famously argued for the idea of multiple publics: self-organizing and reflexive publics that are generated through temporal discourses and socially shared spaces. Warner's publics are always already simultaneously personal and impersonal, because public speech is addressed doubly to 'us' and to 'strangers' connected to

each other in an imagined community (Anderson 1989). This double address connects us to strangers in such a way that our subjectivity is immediately understood as resonating with that of others, Warner argues. In other words, publics not only share discourses and social space but also social imaginaries. Within these shared social spaces and imaginaries, publics do not need to engage in face-to-face – or body-to-body – interaction. Indeed, the very sense of 'place' and 'space' has long been questioned in communication studies (Meyrowitz 1985). The 'space' or infrastructure that seems to encompass publics today, it has been suggested, is the Internet, perhaps because of its potential inclusivity and ability to engender a multiplicity of experience (Fenton 2012). But we would argue that the kind of publics that have unfettered access to the Internet and the digital literacy to navigate it are restricted to certain geographical areas of the world and certain generational groups. As Fenton also reminds us, '[t]he Internet may be democratizing, but more often than not its effects are felt most strongly in the global middle class' (2012:155). Nevertheless, we accept – with Fenton – that the informal and unbureaucratic structure of the Internet, its transnational reach and fragmenting properties allow for unattached activism and an easy way out of political commitments: Internet publics and politics have no member lists and no physical connections, which limits and contains commitment to a political and social cause. The Internet, then, is not a democratic space *per se* but has the potential to function as such, for those who can access and use it, depending on the nature of various political and social practices and contexts (Fenton 2012).

Stephansen (this volume) refines the above conceptualization of publics by arguing against treating them as 'disembodied spaces of discourse' and proposing instead that we conceptualize them as 'spaces of political and pedagogic practice' – practice that extends beyond the production and circulation of media content. This perspective, she explains, has the advantage of alerting us to the 'material, embodied and social aspects of processes of public-formation' and allows us to conceptualize citizen media as 'more than just the technical infrastructure that supports counter-publics . . . [and] to consider the diverse constellation of practices that contribute to the making of publics', as she demonstrates very effectively through her case study of shared communication activism in the World Social Forum. Stephansen's approach nevertheless shares with other scholars we have already cited the idea of publics as *made* and as *emergent*, as being called into existence, both discursively and – from her perspective, and ours – through concrete practices.

Where traditional media studies tend to downplay the physical and concrete practices of citizens and publics, performance studies and theories of performativity add an understanding of public spaces and citizens' interactions within them in more tangible terms whose insights extend beyond performance studies. Theresa de Lauretis' (1987) and Judith Butler's (1990) explorations of the power of the performative demonstrate how we perform

ourselves within the disciplining norms of society. Focusing on norms of gender and sexuality, they draw on and develop Foucault's (1979) theoretical insights to argue that in performing according to certain norms and expectations, we simultaneously construct and uphold these norms. Building on Chouliaraki (2013), Blaagaard and Allan (this volume) discuss journalism as performative in similar terms, and argue that the performative power of this particular public space is likewise constrained by and enacts prevailing norms, in this case 'a certain set of frames within which a news story can be heard and understood'. Nevertheless, social norms are never static: they constantly evolve and are renegotiated through our disruptive performative acts and our conscious and unconscious reworking of them. Nim's discussion (this volume) of nanodemonstrations in Russia as 'a form of cultural performance' that broke with tradition, and challenged but did not (officially) break the law, testifies to the power of the human imagination and its perseverance in renegotiating and subverting prevailing norms. The very concept of a protest involving Kinder Surprise and other toys, she explains, 'was a novelty in the history of the Russian protest movement'. While it was initially met with the usual arrests and then with ridicule from the authorities and dismissed as 'a cheap sensation' by some, it did force the police to engage in the process of responding to an application for a permit to hold a toy protest and managed to attract considerable national and international attention.

McDonald's discussion of popular resistance during the first Palestinian Intifada alerts us to the transformative power of performance. 'Collective singing and dancing' during that period, he argues (2013:123–24),

> opened up performative spaces for the integration of new communities, bodies, and ideologies. Such media did more than simply give voice to the subaltern experience of dispossession, but in the act of performance it also offered an essential means of enduring that performance. Through performance new ways of imagining Palestinian bodies and the body politic emerged, opening spaces for contemplating new directions and new possibilities in the national movement.

Situated within the field of performance studies, specifically theatre, Hughes and Parry (this volume) extend the discussion of performance and performativity in public space in interesting directions. Focusing on forms of activism where protestors draw on the medium of theatre 'to create imaginative projections against the perceived order of things, and as tactical interventions and communicative tools', they opt for using the term *theatricality*, rather than *performativity*, because while similarly focusing on 'the performance-like character of the social, symbolic and material domains', *theatricality* directs our attention to the *techniques* involved in performance, which 'opens up an opportunity to examine how bodies work in relation to each other in contested sites through the manifestation of gestural grammars'.

A pivotal notion of performativity emerges out of this diverse body of work that suggests two interrelated understandings of what performing public spaces might entail. First, during the past three decades performance studies has engaged with the intersections between theatricality and interpretive anthropology and has drawn attention to the question of spectators and their role in mediating identity and community. The spectator is called upon by the theatricality of media to imagine herself as a (cosmopolitan) citizen and engage in acts of both local and global solidarity. Second, performativity means that we are always already performing – i.e. 'doing' and impacting others – through the words we use as well as our bodies, actions and other facets of our being; everything we do is a form of performance that participates in constructing the social space in which we live and act as citizens. This brings to the fore the issue of the media through which we perform and express ourselves and the question of how citizen media, as conceptualized here, interact within and construct public spaces.

Citizen media and related concepts

The public and publics, as we have argued, may be understood as emerging out of the multiple ways in which individuals and communities express themselves through performances, practices and discourses in concrete as well as virtual spaces. The media through which they express themselves are *citizen media*, irrespective of whether they are digital or physical. And yet, where the term *citizen media* is used in the literature, it often seems to be confined to citizens' engagements with digital and social media technologies. The emphasis is predominantly on the proliferation of citizen voices in digital space, and often exclusively on *citizen journalism*, a term that tends to be used interchangeably with *citizen media* (Allan and Thorsen 2009). This is especially true in the context of the 'I have a voice' paradigm, as Chouliaraki calls it (2013), where 'it is the personal and subjective imagery and storytelling that are seen as authentic and therefore truthful' (Blaagaard and Allan, this volume; Blaagaard 2013). In this conceptualization, driven by a variety of traditions within communication studies, reference to citizen media revolves around the political or newsworthy engagement with society by citizens who use mobile technology and digital media platforms to record, report and disseminate news online and through broadcast media. This, to our mind, confines the powerful concept of *citizen media* to a very limited area of practice and scholarship, completely conflating it with *citizen journalism*, a concept we regard as part of but not synonymous with *citizen media*. It also assumes a very restrictive definition of technology, which we understand, following Williams (1981, cited in Blaagaard and Allan, this volume), as 'the body of knowledge appropriate to the development of particular skills as well as the practical conditions of their application or use via a range of devices' (Blaagaard and Allan, this volume). Needless to say, these devices need not be digital.

Bowman and Willis's definition of *participatory journalism* is similarly too restricted to use as a synonym of *citizen media* as conceptualized here. *Participatory journalism*, they explain (2003:9), is

> [t]he act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.

Lievrouw (2011:215) offers a similar perspective, asserting that *participatory journalism* 'adopts the values and practices of mainstream news production and public opinion to cover issues, concerns, perspectives, and communities that are ordinarily sidelined by the mainstream press'. Our own research suggests that citizen reporting on and documenting of events is often at odds with 'the values and practices of mainstream news production and public opinion'; indeed, members of some collectives such as Mosireen in Egypt (Baker 2016) tend to be deeply suspicious of such values and practices, and of the entire institution of the press and mainstream media.

Rone (this volume) alerts us to another, related issue here. She makes a distinction between *participatory* and *citizen journalism* and argues that in participatory journalism, 'audience members contribute their voices to a centralized information news source', whereas citizen journalism 'is not dependent on the central presence of third party organizations'. In this sense, Rone explains, 'citizen journalism could be perceived as giving voice to those whose voices are ignored or suppressed and as capable of producing counter-publics and counter-discourses'. Notwithstanding the overlap and confusion surrounding the various terms we have cited so far, the idea of independence from a third party mediator or benefactor is highly relevant to our attempt to define *citizen media*, as we explain shortly.

Thinking along the lines we wish to pursue to elaborate a more robust conceptualization of citizen media, Rone also argues that '[t]he impact of citizen journalism [itself] . . . cannot be understood without placing it within the broader system of interdependencies involving mainstream traditional journalism and other citizen media practices such as graffiti, protest art and rap/hip hop, among others'. All contributors to this volume embed their discussion of different types of citizen media practices within this broader framework of citizen media research.

The current preoccupation with and conflation of citizen media with social and digital media is another phenomenon we would like to challenge. We view this development as restrictive as well as insensitive to the realities of the uneven global distribution of power and resources. It ignores the fact that many individuals and communities across the globe still lack adequate Internet access and relevant levels of digital literacy to participate meaningfully in the digital revolution.[2] Such marginalized communities continually

find ways of engaging in social and political life that are not captured by terms such as *social media* or *digital media*, and are grounded in physical spaces and concrete relations rather than virtual reality. Indeed, even those who exploit the full potential of digital technology to create virtual spaces in which to interact, foster diverse practices and mobilize are aware of the importance of the concrete dimension of their interactions. Stephansen (this volume) reports Tobias, a German activist she interviewed in Belém, Brazil, confirming that 'the physical co-presence afforded by participation in shared communication practices is fundamental to processes of network-building'. Tobias goes on to explain:

> I'm here and I do my coverage, but the fact of me being here has other effects, I speak to people, people speak to me . . . this is a bit . . . this process of articulation and network-building . . . I think this is very important, our participation in the coverage always has as a consequence that we are a living network.

We therefore propose a preliminary conceptualization of *citizen media* that does not restrict definitions of *media* and *public space(s)* to virtual spaces and digital means of expression but encompasses both the virtual and the physical, the digital and the concrete, as well as the possibility of the one acting through and upon the other (Isin and Ruppert 2015). Isin and Ruppert dismiss the idea of two separate spaces – online and offline – and argue that 'cyberspace is a space like social space, cultural space, economic space, or psychological space' (2015:41) within, across and through which we act and engage in political discourses and practices, a view we would certainly endorse. We thus wish to advance an understanding of *citizen media* that is flexible enough to allow insights from diverse fields from within and outside academia to bear on the discussion, and sensitive enough to variations in social and geographical settings to capture all forms of citizens' engagement with their environment. This is not to ignore or downplay the importance of virtual and digital spaces in shaping citizen engagement today. As Nim explains (this volume), while citizen-led movements and collectives often exist offline, 'their offline existence has to be confirmed by their presence in media networks and may at times undermine this presence'.

Perhaps the closest to our current attempt at conceptualizing *citizen media* is Rodríguez's various definitions of *citizens' media* – rather than *citizen media* – in her outstanding body of work since 2001. We begin with her definition of *citizens' media* in *Fissures in the Mediascape* (2001:15):

> Referring to 'citizens' media' implies first that a collectivity is enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible.

Where we wish to depart from this definition concerns its restriction of the term to *communities*, as evident also in Rodríguez's choice of the plural form of *citizens* rather than *citizen*. By contrast, we wish to work towards a definition that encompasses interventions not only by a variety of group formations, including communities and collectives of different sizes and compositions, but also by individuals – without losing sight of the fact that individual political acts address and conjure up a public and in this sense remain social acts. Generic examples we can cite include the lone graffiti artist who operates somewhere in the space between valued artistic activity and illegal criminal behaviour; the individual blogger who exercises his or her citizenship by creating a space of dissent, often becoming a target of oppressive regimes; the rap singer who performs in order to effect change rather than make money. Ellie Cosgrove's dance against sexual harassment in a London Underground tube carriage on International Women's Day in 2013 provides a specific example of an actual citizen media event that justifies our broader definition of the term to include individuals acting in public space. Cosgrove returned to the same carriage where she was sexually assaulted two years earlier to perform in public a dance that expressed her anger, discomfort and embarrassment at a deeply personal traumatic experience. As she danced, a sign she placed next to her read 'On the 4th Aug 2011 a man ejaculated on me in this carriage. Today I'm standing up against sexual harassment everywhere'. This individual, brave act of defiance also justifies our insistence on paying attention to concrete rather than merely virtual spaces in attempting to elaborate a definition of citizen media. In this case, the concrete, physical space – the exact same carriage Cosgrove was assaulted in on an underground line – is highly meaningful. The dance had to be performed where a traumatic lived experience needed to be revisited, challenged, exposed. Cosgrove had to 'take ownership of the space where somebody else exerted power over her against her will' (Bates 2013). This example also specifically highlights the importance of affect (discussed in Pérez-González, this volume) and of the individual body. As Culp (2013) explains, and as evident in some of the examples we go on to cite,

> regardless of all of the new and innovative forms of protest that have followed the boom in social and media technologies of the twentieth century, the body remains the basic tool of protest – especially when [*sic*] is not reduced to its suasive power. Even when discourse breaks down, the body continues to exert force.

Several other examples of individuals intervening in public space through the medium of their body are discussed in this volume. They include the Turkish protestor, Erdem Gündüz, who stood in silence on Taksim Square for 8 hours on 17 June 2013, eluding the prohibition on mass gatherings and attracting the attention of passers-by, and eventually the local and international media. Hughes and Parry's discussion of this and similar examples

draws on the concept of gesture to make sense of such interventions from the perspective of theatricality. A gesture, they explain,

> composes the body on a precipice by holding it in an attitude of attention . . . Each gesture reveals the precarity of the body's staking of its claim, but also materializes a bodily form that restores a sense of order . . . As such, protest gestures call on the apotropaic potency of theatricality to support the composure of bodies engaged in gesturing towards a different world at the same time as facing the present, in all of its terrors.

Another example discussed by Hughes and Parry is an artist-activist known as 'vacuum-cleaner', who cleaned highly visible urban spaces, such as New York's Wall Street and London's commercial district, during the three-months leading up to and following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, using a recycled 1950s model vacuum cleaner, and wearing a cleaning contractor outfit with 'cleaning up after capitalism' on the back. Such gestures, they argue, 'produce quotidian clefts that draw attention to a desire to remake the world in a way that exhibits care for all forms of life'.

And finally, as Beretta demonstrates in her contribution to this volume, much of what we would consider instances of citizen media – in her case, documentary film produced by amateurs in China – is not necessarily focused on the community, nor on effecting political change. It may instead look inward, to the self, to the film maker's own life and immediate relations, the intricacies and mundane happenings of daily life, and express his or her personal desires and aspirations.

Returning to Rodriguez's body of work, her subsequent, 2011 definition of the term in *Citizens' Media against Armed Conflict: Disrupting Violence in Colombia* is broadly in line with our own thinking. However, it raises another issue for us, as it seems even more restrictive than the 2001 definition. *Citizens' media* is defined here as

> communication spaces where citizens can learn to manipulate their own languages, codes, signs, and symbols empowering them to name the world in their own terms. Citizens' media trigger processes that allow citizens to recodify their contexts and themselves. These processes ultimately give citizens the opportunity to restructure their identities into empowered subjectivities strongly connected to local cultures and driven by well-defined, achievable utopias. Citizens' media are the media citizens use to activate communication processes that shape their *local communities*.
>
> (2011:24; our emphasis)

The emphasis on *local* communities rules out interventions that are directed at global issues and events that impact communities and individuals across the globe, or at least much of it.

And finally, the definition of citizens' media by Rodríguez et al. (2014:151), while not restricted to social and digital media, specifically restricts the concept to citizens' interaction with *media technologies*:

> Many different terms are used to label media technologies appropriated and used by social movements, citizens' groups and grassroots collectives, including: alternative media, social movements media, participatory media, community media, radical media, grassroots media, autonomous media, the French term 'médias libres', the Spanish term 'medios populares', and citizens' media.

Although, as mentioned above, we are assuming a broad understanding of technology (and media technology) along the lines proposed by Williams (1981, cited in Blaagaard and Allan, this volume), as 'the body of knowledge appropriate to the development of particular skills as well as the practical conditions of their application or use via a range of devices', this definition seems to still rule out some of the most important media we propose to include in our definition of citizen media, especially the human body.

What we have done so far is review and critique some of the literature on concepts related to and potentially overlapping with our proposed (re)conceptualization of *citizen media*. The latter, as will become clear in the next section, will depart from existing definitions in a number of important respects. Specifically, we attempt to avoid the prevalent focus on citizen media as content rather than as practices, values, narratives, and forms of individual and collective agency; the tendency to conflate citizen media with citizen or participatory journalism, and with it the reduction of citizen interventions in public space to the coverage and dissemination of news; the assumption that citizen media, still understood as citizen journalism, adopts the practices and values of mainstream news institutions; the common reduction of the concept to social and digital media and a tendency to disregard or downplay the face-to-face dimension of citizen interactions in public space; emphasis on the collective or community and disregard for the individual citizen; the focus on stable communities, which obscures the many forms of loose, temporary groupings characteristic of modern societies,[3] including 'ad-hocracies' (Pérez-González 2010) and what Pérez-González (this volume) refers to as 'fluid sociality assemblages'; and the privileging of the local at the expense of the global.

Reconceptualizing citizen media

We begin our attempt at reconceptualizing citizen media with a critical look at the meaning of *citizen* and *citizenship,* which seems to be taken as self-evident in much of the existing literature on citizen media and related terms.

Ponzanesi's contribution to this volume demonstrates clearly why it is no longer possible to adopt a definition of *citizen* and *citizenship* that is based on the concept of the nation-state or a mere document such as a passport or identity card. Ponzanesi focuses on migrants stranded between nation-states but who are nevertheless able to document their precarious existence, to act as 'witnesses of their own suffering', and ultimately bring a successful court case to fruition against a nation-state, Italy, that is not their own, using Article 34 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This study alerts us to the expanding landscape of liminality in which increasingly more people – like the refugees discussed in Ponzanesi – are now forced to live. As Ponzanesi argues, even 'these zones of marginalization and exclusion, heterotopias or non-places, can actually become places of semi-belonging and transformation', and hence spaces within which individuals and groups can act to bring about change. It is also important to bear in mind that the boundaries of nation-states, such as they exist, are always porous, and that many individuals and collectives of the type we wish our reconceptualization of the concept of *citizen media* to embrace increasingly act across geographical borders, within a global, shifting public space that is part physical and part virtual and that does not accord them the status of citizens as traditionally conceived. Our citizens are not citizens because they vote in elections and pay taxes within the confines of a nation-state. They *become* citizens when they engage in practices – perform political and aesthetic acts of citizenship (Isin 2008; Isin and Ruppert 2015) – that transform their sense of self and their environment, without expecting personal reward in the form of financial or cultural capital, and without the mediation of a third party or benefactor.

We further need to acknowledge that the very concepts of *citizenship* and *nation*, like that of *democracy*, are often the site of a complex and insidious exercise in hegemony, a tool in the hands of the powerful. Jonathan Cook's (2010) discussion of why Israeli 'citizens' are classed as either Jewish or Arab nationals demonstrates this clearly:

> Israel refused to recognise an Israeli nationality at the country's establishment in 1948, making an unusual distinction between 'citizenship' and 'nationality'. Although all Israelis qualify as 'citizens of Israel', the state is defined as belonging to the 'Jewish nation', meaning not only the 5.6 million Israeli Jews but also more than seven million Jews in the diaspora.

Cook goes on to explain that 'the special status of Jewish nationality has been a way to undermine the citizenship rights of non-Jews in Israel', and that many laws in Israel 'specifically privilege Jews, including in the areas of immigration rights, naturalisation, access to land and employment'. Indeed, Israel creates national groups 'with no legal recognition outside Israel, such as 'Arab' or 'unknown', to avoid recognising an Israeli nationality'.

The exploitative use and abuse of these concepts is also evident in the case of Ponzanesi's migrants, victims of Italy's push-back operations in the Mediterranean:

> On 3 October 2013, … an overcrowded boat containing almost 500 migrants capsized less than one kilometre off the coast of Lampedusa, resulting in the death of an estimated 300 refugees, mostly originating from Eritrea. The tragedy shocked Brussels, with the European Commission president José Manuel Barroso travelling to Lampedusa to pay tribute to the line of 300 coffins. The symbolic but empty gesture of the Italian government to grant them citizenship after death speaks of the paradoxes and abuses committed in the name of citizenship and border control.

Citizenship, then, is a constructed category (Mouffe 1992) and a crucial site of struggle over identity, territory, resources and narratives. Rodríguez's (2001:20) definition of citizens' media, quoted earlier, is in line with this understanding of citizenship as constructed and enacted. It is also in line with Stephansen's argument (this volume) that citizen media are 'media through which individuals *become* citizens'. With this critical understanding of citizenship in mind, we may now move on to elaborate who might count as *citizen* in *citizen media* and what might be understood as *media* through which individuals and collectives can enact citizenship.

It is difficult to find a term that allows us to delimit the agents of citizen media, whether individuals, collectives or entire communities, from the many types of individuals and groupings that operate in society. We deliberately avoid referring to them as members of *civil society;* the citizens in our understanding of citizen media often do not subscribe to this contested notion, and for good reasons – see Ehrenberg (1999) for a thorough critique of the concept of civil society. Rone (this volume) points to 'the growing global tension between civil society and the type of expertise it promotes and produces, on the one hand, and on the other, new social movements and the kind of collaborative knowledge they engage in developing from below'. For many, in fact, referring to an individual or group as a 'member of civil society' is now a way of discrediting them. Rone explains why:

> … the ideology of bottom-up organization has been implanted top-down by Western think tanks and … funding is made accessible only to people who have the necessary cultural capital, including knowledge of foreign languages and skill in 'writing up' projects.

This critique recalls Clemencia Rodríguez's (2011) argument that citizen media should not be thought of as an asset or help to Western (media) institutions, nor as a tool for disseminating public service announcements. Rather, citizen media must be understood as community building practices that engage their participants directly in multiple and grounded ways. It is

important to keep this critique in mind as we attempt to distinguish between instances of citizen-led engagement in public space and what Rone (this volume) refers to as 'orchestrated citizen media initiatives'.

We opt, at least provisionally, for *unaffiliated citizens*, by which we mean citizens who act on their own impetus – rather than in the context of a corporate structure, a political party, a media organization, an NGO, or similar institution – in the pursuit of a non-institutionalized agenda, and without the mediation of a third party or benefactor. This rules out an initiative such as the University of Manchester Citizen Science Project,[4] for example, which is institutionally driven rather than citizen-led, and has a clear benefactor: the University of Manchester.

By *media* we clearly do not mean *the media*, i.e., the press and the mass media, as is understood by the lay person, nor exclusively social and digital media. Instead, we mean the material and immaterial artefacts and devices that may be endowed with expressive power by human agents and used to communicate information as well as emotions, values, narratives. This includes the human body itself, as argued earlier, as well as an app or a piece of software used in locative media events (Ejsing-Duun, this volume), or to help migrants cross the US/Mexico border to reach water via a GPS system (Hughes and Parry, this volume). It also includes an artefact such as a tear gas canister or a tent, as Feigenbaum explains (2014:22) with reference to the Occupy movement:

> The circulation and remediation of tear gas canisters form part of occupiers' resistance. Symbolic solidarities are built around them, while material strategies for resisting tear gas and opposing its manufacture also move across and create social-movement networks. Tents and tear gas are just two of the significant objects that shape and mediate communication in the transnational Occupy movement. 'Other media' objects including fences, walls, and barricades also become communicative sites of exchange in places of political struggle . . . We cannot understand what it means to Occupy without these objects.

Our definition of *media* in this context also includes recognizable genres such as documentary film, blogs, a march, a petition – any format that can be injected with specific meanings, values and expressive power. As Baker explains (2006:86):

> [O]nly a weak, marginalized party under some form of threat from a more powerful opponent would resort to the genre of 'petition'. Issuing a petition is in itself an attempt to elaborate a narrative in which the party being appealed to is portrayed as powerful but unfair or ill-advised in some sense, and the party doing the petitioning (which may include hundreds and even thousands of signatories) is marginalized but morally superior and able to draw on 'people power'.[5]

The Internet, including social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube, a newspaper or television channel, a cinema or theatre, are all *media platforms*, spaces where different types of *media* – an image, a joke, a video, a film, a petition – can circulate, be endowed with specific expressive power, and multiply. This attempt at clarifying what we mean by *media* as part of the specific term *citizen media* does not mean we can avoid using *media* in any of the myriad other meanings it has acquired in the literature, nor be able to qualify it every time we use it, given the ubiquity of the term. Nor does it mean that the media covered by the conceptualization we offer here are the preserve of unaffiliated citizens, the agents of citizen media as defined above. Not only are all such media part of the wider social repertoire available to mainstream institutions as well as individuals, but they are also subject to the dynamics of appropriation and reverse appropriation that characterize all interactions in society, as discussed below.

Our definition of *citizen media* can now be provisionally worded as follows:

> The concept of citizen media encompasses the physical artefacts, digital content, practices, performative interventions and discursive formations of affective sociality produced by unaffiliated citizens as they act in public space(s) to effect aesthetic or socio-political change or express personal desires and aspirations, without the involvement of a third party or benefactor. It also comprises the sets of values and agendas that influence and drive the practices and discourses through which individuals and collectivities position themselves within and in relation to society and participate in the creation of diverse publics.

Questions of appropriation and reverse appropriation in the context of citizen media

Blaagaard and Allan (this volume) remind us that 'the logic of mediation that governs our societies to an increasing extent very quickly assimilates the efforts of giving and presenting alternative voices, always threatening to put them into the service of capitalist power'. Rone (this volume) provides examples of the co-optation and incorporation of citizen journalism in Bulgaria 'into the already existing media universe of unclear ownership, scandalous content, and promotion of oligarchic interests'. Along similar lines, Cross (this volume) describes the use of citizen media content by media outlets like CNN[6] and the BBC as 'a kind of symbolic bleeding through of public concerns', and suggests that citizen media content (in her case photographs taken at the site of the 2005 London bombings by individuals caught in the underground tunnel) was exploited to drive a 'politics of sentiment' that was 'ultimately important for sustaining the wider justification for the global "War on Terror"'. Appropriation can thus take the form of an institutionalization of empathy, especially in news coverage of violent events, as

also evident in Chouliaraki's contribution. Chouliaraki queries how citizen witnessing contributes to the transnational institutionalization of empathy in her analysis of the different foci of BBC's incorporation of citizen voices in its reporting on the conflicts in Syria and Libya. She approaches the issue through the conceptual lens of citizen voice as a 'securitization of news' and demonstrates the use of citizen media to promote a politics of pity that now seems to drive global exchanges. Even this politics of pity, she demonstrates, is evoked selectively and to different ends in the coverage of recent conflicts in Libya and Syria.

Appropriation of the expressive power of graffiti connected to the Egyptian revolution provides another example from a different practice of citizen media. Abaza (2013), among others, bemoans the increasing commercialization and commodification of this citizen media domain. International funding organizations and cultural centres and curators, she explains, 'offer programs and propose spaces through funds for celebrating street art, music and artistic expression', but in reality these interventions co-opt street art 'by taming it through exhibiting graffiti in galleries and in safe spaces'. She goes on to warn that investing in art has become 'a forum for gentrifying public spaces and a way of manipulating violence, ultimately creating a new wave of a "culture industry" highly dependent on financial capitalism'.

Appropriation can also be of strategies, such as humour and irony, which are key to many citizen-led initiatives and forms of protest. Nim (this volume) offers an excellent example, namely, the Russian authorities' decision to respond to a humorous application to hold a nanodemonstration involving 'toys from Kinder Surprise (one hundred pieces), Lego figurines (one hundred pieces), toy soldiers (twenty pieces), soft toys (fifteen pieces), miniature cars (ten pieces)' in an equally humorous fashion, commenting to the press that the application for a permit 'should have been sent to the puppet theatre'; that the toys were not human but at least if they had been Russian-made they would have stood a chance of being allowed to protest, and that the protestors applying for the permit were perhaps like children, who tend to think of their toys as human beings.

Reverse appropriation, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as culture jamming, works in the opposite direction. In culture jamming, 'the images, ideas, and discourse of popular culture and commerce' are used by activists 'to critique and subvert that culture' (Lievrouw 2011:215), as evident in Adbusters' appropriation of the genre of commercial advert. This Vancouver-based initiative is 'concerned with the erosion of our physical and cultural environments by commercial forces'[7] and is best known for its spoof ads. Figure 1.1 is part of a series titled 'Obsession for men' (a similar series focuses on 'Obsession for women'). It demonstrates the kind of humour and satire that characterize these ads: here, a handsome, muscular man peers intently into his Calvin Klein underpants, visualizing the very idea of 'obsession' and self-centredness.

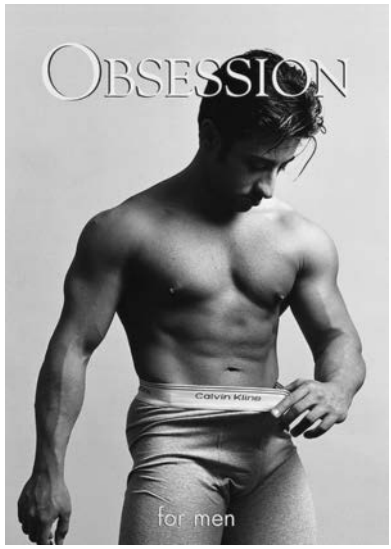


Figure 1.1 'Obsession for men' spoof ad. (Courtesy of Adbusters).



Figure 1.2 'Photo Op', 2005. (Courtesy of Kennard Phillipps, www.kennard phillipps.com).

A similar strategy is deployed by Kennard Phillipps, a collective originally established in 2002 in response to the invasion of Iraq. Their most famous photomontage (Figure 1.2), dated 2005, shows Tony Blair taking a selfie against the background of the destruction he had by then clearly unleashed on Iraq. The contrast between the horrifying scene in the background and the smug, flippant attitude evident in his facial expression and the nature of the activity he is engaged in shock the viewer and deliver a powerful message of anger and disbelief at his actions and the fate of Iraq. Kennard Phillipps describe their work as 'a critical tool that connects to international movements for social and political change' and as 'the visual arm of protest'.[8]

Conclusion

Processes of appropriation and reverse appropriation such as those discussed above complicate but also enrich our attempt to conceptualize citizen media as a field of scholarship and practice. The dynamic, shifting relationship between citizen media, as we have defined it, and corporate and mainstream culture means that the boundaries between the two are not stable and will not always be clear. Rather than attempting to tighten our definition of citizen media to the point of rigidity, we find it more productive to build the dynamic itself into any conceptualization of this evolving field, especially since deliberate appropriation is not the only process that can undercut the transformative power of citizen media initiatives. Becoming entrapped in the dynamic of visibility vs invisibility and trying to be mediagenic and newsworthy is another area of constant negotiation and renegotiation, particularly for protest movements (Nim, this volume). Lack of ongoing, critical reflection on the implications of the evolving design and practices associated with any citizen media initiative can also quickly turn it into part of the corporate market economy. As Ejsing-Duun explains, for instance, locative media projects, which are intended to address habitual modes of being in the city critically and help its inhabitants appropriate urban space, can easily turn into 'a form of middle class, capitalist, "tourist" entertainment that turns urban centres into destinations rather than structures that serve residents'.

Citizen media initiatives continually reconfigure the relationship between the private and the public, the local and the global, mainstream and alternative media, corporations and citizens, the state and the individual. The field of citizen media thus raises vital political, social and ethical issues relating to conceptions of citizenship and state boundaries, the construction of publics and social imaginaries, processes of co-optation and reverse co-optation, power and resistance, the ethics of witnessing and solidarity, and novel responses to the democratic deficit. As we attempt to chart the territory of this evolving field and stimulate an interdisciplinary debate around its core concepts, we will need studies, as Pérez-González explains, that demonstrate through examination of many different types of citizen-led initiatives the role that unaffiliated citizens now play 'in disrupting the cultural logic of

neoliberalism and contesting the commodification of media-based means of social and political critique', and that attend to both the local and the global, while acknowledging the transnational reach – achieved in large part through digital media – of such initiatives.

Notes

1 www.tahrirarchives.com (accessed 21 January 2016).
2 Elizabeth Bird offers a similar critique of the current preoccupation with digital media, arguing that '[p]opular culture is experienced and lived in many different ways and the Web 2.0 environment is not the only one that matters, especially outside the West' (2011:512).
3 We would also argue, with Pérez-González (this volume), for 'conceptualizing [at least some] citizen media assemblages as contact zones or undisciplined organisms which enable the inter-subjective construction of states of emotion, rather than as communities built around stable subjects of emotion' and fixed in particular locales.
4 www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/article/?id=15087 (accessed 23 October 2015).
5 This speaks very much to Warner's (2002) concept of the counter-public, which by definition is the 'under-dog'.
6 On the aggressive co-optation of web-based citizen reporting/witnessing by CNN's iReport.com, see Kperogi (2011).
7 www.adbusters.org/about/adbusters (accessed 23 October 2015).
8 www.kennardphillipps.com/about/ (accessed 2 November 2015).

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Part I
Empowering citizens

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2 Understanding citizen media as practice

Agents, processes, publics

Hilde C. Stephansen

Much recent commentary on citizen media has focused on online platforms as means through which citizens may disseminate self-produced media content that challenges dominant discourses or makes visible hidden realities. This chapter goes beyond a concern with media *content* to explore the much broader range of socially situated *practices* that develop around citizen media. Drawing on Couldry's proposal for a practice paradigm in media research, it suggests shifting the focus from 'citizen media' to 'citizen media practices' and demonstrates, through a case study of communication activism in the World Social Forum, how this framework can bring into view a broad range of citizen media practices (beyond those directly concerned with the production and circulation of media content), the different forms of agency that such practices make possible and the social fabric they can help generate. I conclude by arguing that a practice framework necessitates a rethink of the way that the concept of (counter-) publics is used in the context of citizen media. Citizen media practices of the kind described here can be understood not only as practices of 'making public' previously unreported issues and perspectives, but as practices of *public-making*: practices that support the formation of publics.

Once a marginal topic within academic research, citizen media now occupy a central position in debates about the democratic potential of new digital technologies. Such technologies are said to give rise to new forms of 'mass self-communication', challenging the traditional one-to-many communication model of the mass media and enabling individuals, groups and social movements to introduce their own messages into global communication networks (Castells 2009). Research on citizen journalism has examined the ways in which blogs, social networking sites and other ICTs have been used in a wide variety of contexts – from spontaneous news-reporting by ordinary people caught up in dramatic events, to bloggers challenging repressive regimes, to the incorporation of user-generated content in mainstream news media (Gillmor 2006; Allan and Thorsen 2009, 2014; Wall 2012; Allan 2013). Following the global wave of protest movements sparked by events in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, media and communication have become a central topic in social movement studies, with a fast-growing body of research

examining the use of social media platforms for mobilization and circulation of information among protesters (Bennett and Segerberg 2012; Gerbaudo 2012; Juris 2012; Anduiza 2014). Meanwhile, a growing body of research on digital storytelling has emphasized the potential of digital technologies to 'give voice' and enable self-representation by marginalized groups (Lundby 2008; Hartley and McWilliam 2009; Lambert 2013).

On the whole, commentary on citizen media has so far focused on the possibilities and limitations of online digital platforms as means through which citizens may disseminate self-produced media *content* that challenges dominant discourses, makes visible hidden realities or mobilizes people to participate in public action. In other words, the promise (or otherwise) of citizen media for democratic renewal tends to be framed primarily in terms of their potential to facilitate the circulation of otherwise unreported news, stories and opinions in the mediated public sphere. This is an understanding that resonates with work that has conceptualized the significance of citizen (or alternative/radical) media with reference to the notion of the public sphere – or, more specifically, to the concept of *counter-publics* (Downing and Hall 2001; Atton 2002; Downey and Fenton 2003; Rodríguez *et al.* 2009). In Habermas's (1989) classic account – which remains a ubiquitous reference point for debates on this topic – the public sphere is understood as an openly accessible realm of communicative interaction, in which private persons come together as a public to deliberate freely about issues of common concern. It forms the cornerstone of democracy, as the mechanism by which citizens can bring issues to public attention, participate in public debates and hold state authority to account. As developed by Nancy Fraser in response to the Habermasian notion of a *general* public sphere, the concept of counter-publics refers to 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (1990:67). Counter-publics function to expand the space of democratic discourse: by providing spaces where subordinate groups can formulate alternative discourses and interpretations of social reality, and by forcing issues that previously were considered private or beyond contestation into the public realm (Fraser 1990). Insofar as they provide the means through which alternative and oppositional discourses circulate, citizen media can be seen as central to these processes. In such a perspective, citizen media are understood as tools that enable the 'making public' of marginalized issues, opinions and knowledges – in other words, the circulation of media content.

In this chapter, I attempt to move beyond a focus on media content to explore the much broader range of socially situated *practices* that surround citizen media, considering their democratic potential. I use the term 'democratic' here in a broad sense, referring to the capacity of citizen media to expand the range of discourses that circulate in the public sphere and involve a broader range of actors in public deliberation. My interest is in how citizen media not only help disseminate already formed perspectives, but also how they can help create *preconditions* for marginalized actors to elaborate their

own discourses and interpretations of social reality. Underpinning my approach is an understanding of citizen media as more than just conduits for information, stories and opinions: such media can also form the focal point for practices that have the potential to transform subjectivities, reconfigure social relationships and contribute to processes of network formation and community building (Rodríguez 2001; Stephansen and Couldry 2014; Fotopoulou and Couldry 2015). I therefore propose shifting the focus from 'citizen media' to 'citizen media practices' to take account of the wide range of agents and processes that form *around* citizen media (cf. Mattoni 2012 and Mattoni and Treré 2014 on 'activist media practices').

To develop this approach, I take as a starting point Clemencia Rodríguez's (2001, 2011) concept of 'citizens' media' as media through which citizenship is performed. From this perspective, the significance of citizen media lies in their potential to activate processes that empower individuals and communities, strengthen social bonds and thus act as a catalyst for social change. In other words, the emphasis is on a broad range of communication *practices*. To elaborate this further, I turn to Nick Couldry's (2004, 2012) proposal for a new paradigm in media research that understands media 'not as texts or structures of production, but as practice' (Couldry 2004:115). This approach enables a broad set of questions to be asked about the practices people engage in that are oriented towards citizen media, and the generative potential of such practices. Guided by these questions, I then move on to demonstrate the utility of a practice-based framework for understanding citizen media through a case study of a transnational network of communication activists connected to the World Social Forum (WSF). This case study illustrates how such a framework can bring into view a broad range of citizen media practices (beyond those directly concerned with the production and circulation of content), the different forms of agency that such practices make possible and the way that certain practices can function to 'anchor' or structure other practices (Couldry 2004, citing Swidler 2001) – thus setting in motion processes that may have broader consequences for democracy and public life. I conclude by arguing that a practice framework necessitates a rethink of the way that the concept of the public is used in the context of citizen media. I suggest that citizen media practices of the kind described in this chapter can be understood not only as practices of making (news, stories or opinions) public but as practices of *public-making*: practices that support the formation of publics. Such a perspective exposes some of the limits of accounts that see publics as constituted through the circulation of discourse (Warner 2002; Barnett 2003), drawing attention to the material and social aspects of processes of public formation.

A practice-based approach to citizen media

Rodríguez (2001) developed the concept of 'citizens' media' to counter the then prominent preoccupation in the development communication literature with the potential of alternative and community-based media to

challenge unequal communication flows. Questioning the framing of such media in terms of counter-information, Rodríguez drew on radical democratic theory, particularly as developed in the work of Chantal Mouffe (1988, 1992; Laclau and Mouffe 1985), to arrive at an understanding of citizens' media as media through which individuals *become* citizens (Rodríguez 2001:20):

> Referring to 'citizens' media' implies first that a collectivity is *enacting* its citizenship by actively intervening in and transforming the established mediascape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformations and changes are possible.

In such an understanding, citizen media are a crucial site for the transformation of individuals into citizens, rather than conduits for already-formed citizens to disseminate information and ideas. Emphasizing their collective dimension, Rodriguez's definition shows how citizen media can be crucial to the construction of the kind of social fabric that is needed for civic culture to thrive; that is, citizen media help create the *preconditions* for the enactment of citizenship rather than provide the means through which an already established civic culture finds expression. Rodríguez draws on theories of communication as performance to emphasize the constitutive power of citizen media: 'Instead of transmitting messages about peacebuilding to audiences, Colombian citizens' media involve audiences in, and subject audiences to, the felt, embodied experience of peace' (2011:25). While Rodríguez is concerned specifically with citizen media in Colombia and their ability to counter the disruptive effects of armed conflict on local communities, the framework she develops has wider currency, not least because of the emphasis it places on communication *practices*: 'Citizens' media are the media citizens use to activate communication processes that shape their local communities' (2011:25). It is through the broad range of practices oriented *towards* citizen media – from training programmes for reporters to participatory production processes to neighbourhood screenings – that such media have transformative effects.

To develop a practice-based analysis of such media and their significance, it is useful to turn to Nick Couldry's (2004, 2012) proposal for a practice framework for media research. Seeking to move beyond two dominant traditions in media and communication studies – textual analysis and political economy – a practice approach, he explains (2012:37),

> starts not with media texts or media institutions but from media-related practice in all its looseness and openness. It asks quite simply: *what are people* (individuals, groups, institutions) *doing in relation to media*

across a whole range of situations and contexts? How is people's media-related practice related, in turn, to their wider agency?

Couldry builds on conceptualizations of practice in social theory (Bourdieu 1977; Schatzki 1999; Reckwitz 2002). Without digressing into the details of such conceptualizations, what concerns us here is their relevance to media research, which lies in the emphasis they place on the centrality of practice to the ordering of social life. Particularly as developed in the work of Schatzki, practice theory sees practice itself as the site where social order is produced and reproduced: 'it is from the *organizing* properties of distinct practices . . . that a wider 'social order' is made up' (Couldry 2012:39–40, citing Schatzki 1999). Practice theory thus understands patterns of practice as socially achieved; the outcome of practical co-ordination (and the mutual intelligibility that results from such co-ordination) rather than a product of abstract systems of meaning. For Couldry, such a perspective allows us to grasp the distinctive types of social processes that are enacted through media-related practices. Understanding media as practice means adopting an anti-functionalist perspective, focusing on what people do, say and think in relation to media rather than the media's supposed contribution to the functioning of 'society'; it means being open to the wide variety of media-related practices that people engage in and the ways in which they categorize their activities; and it involves paying attention to the role that media-related practices may have in ordering other practices (Couldry 2004). Drawing on Swidler's (2001) idea that certain practices may function to 'anchor' others, by enacting new patterns of action that in turn prompt changes in other practices, Couldry suggests that media-related practices may have a privileged role in anchoring other types of practice – and thereby structuring wider social relations – 'through the 'authoritative' representations and enactments of key terms and categories that they provide' (2004:122).

Couldry is not specifically concerned with citizen media, but the value of a practice-based approach for research in this area is clear. Understanding citizen media as practice means moving beyond a concern with the capacity of such media to make visible alternative perspectives and experiences to ask three broader sets of questions:

1 What do people do, say and think in relation to citizen media? How do citizen media practitioners understand their role? How are practices of citizen media production organized?
2 What *kinds* of practices do people engage in that are oriented towards citizen media? A practice approach involves broadening our perspective to include a much wider range of practices beyond those directly related to the production and circulation of media content.
3 What might the role of citizen media practices be in structuring other practices? By focusing attention on how such practices may contribute to reconfiguring the social contexts in which citizenship is enacted, this

question enables us to get at the potential of citizen media practices to contribute to the strengthening of civic culture – and perhaps even broader processes of social change (cf. Dahlgren 2009; Couldry *et al.* 2014).

Guided by these questions, I turn next to a case study to illustrate the utility of a practice-oriented approach to citizen media.

Citizen media practices in the World Social Forum

My empirical case study focuses on the practices of communication involved in the World Social Forum (WSF) process and draws on interviews and participant observation carried out at social forums between 2008 and 2013.[1] Since its inception, a network of (predominantly, but not exclusively, Brazilian and Latin American) citizen journalists and social movement communicators have used the WSF as a space for network building and experimentation with new communication practices. They have developed a particular concept of communication – *comunicação compartilhada* in the original Portuguese, which can be translated as *shared communication* – characterized by an explicit focus on creating collaborative production processes that bring activists together to exchange knowledge and debate communication politics. The idea of shared communication emerged on the eve of the first WSF in 2001, from a concern that the event would not receive adequate coverage in mainstream media. As a solution, organizers created a copyleft-based web publication system, named Ciranda, which enabled citizen journalists and movement communicators to share content – thus providing a much-needed outlet for independent media at a time when Web 2.0 technologies were not widely available.[2] Though it initially emerged out of a need to facilitate sharing of media content, the idea of shared communication soon acquired broader significance. As well as offering a platform for independent media coverage of the WSF, Ciranda also provided the occasion for communicators from around the world to come together – thus creating a space of sociality that encouraged dialogue and a sense of common purpose. In this way, the notion emerged that shared communication was as much about the experience of sharing a physical space and working collaboratively as it was about sharing content. At many subsequent social forums, activists set up dedicated spaces for shared communication 'projects', involving audio-visual, radio and written journalism, with the explicit aim of bringing together citizen journalists and social movement communicators to facilitate mutual learning and cross-fertilization.

While reporting on the events that take place at social forums is important for these activists, gaining publicity for the WSF is not their only concern. As is often the case with alternative and citizen media (Atton 2002), *process* is held to be as important as outcome, with activists emphasizing the importance of creating communication practices that are in keeping with

the broader principles of horizontality, openness and participation associated with the WSF itself. A key aspect of shared communication is therefore its prefigurative character, as one activist explained (Rafael, Brazilian activist, interview with author, January 2009, Belém):[3]

> One of the objectives [of shared communication] is to test different models and dynamics connected to the concepts that we defend, of sharing, of free knowledge, of working collectively. These are important because they . . . demonstrate concretely that another world is possible.

Social forums provide important occasions for communication activists to construct links with the various social movements that participate in these events and try not only to convince them through discourse of the importance of democratic communication but to demonstrate it in practice. By demonstrating how – concretely – 'another communication' can be done, and involving WSF participants in this practice, shared communication activists hope to spread their particular concept of communication to new actors in new locations (Ana, Brazilian activist, interview with author, January 2009, Belém):

> The practice of shared communication . . . is something that is important not just for us to disseminate news about the Forum but . . . to strengthen, globally, a counter-hegemonic communication, which gives space and voice to other groups, to other news, to other voices, that are excluded from the mass media. And we believe that from the moment a group comes to the Forum and enters into contact with this kind of process of knowledge production, they can take this idea with them beyond the Forum. Return home, and put into practice this exercise of collective knowledge production in the place where they do this on a daily basis.

By using social forums to engage in a prefigurative politics that demonstrates their model of communication in practice, shared communication activists envisage the gradual proliferation around the world of their practices. An important objective therefore has been to establish links with movements and grassroots groups in the locations where the WSF is held. Not wanting simply to report *on behalf of* social movements, shared communication activists have worked actively to encourage grassroots groups to do their own communication and in this way strengthen local and regional movement networks: a key aspect of shared communication has been a concern with training and capacity building. For example, in preparation for the WSF 2009 in Belém, Brazil, activists set up a Shared Communication Laboratory, which was in operation for a few weeks prior to the forum itself. Hosted by a local NGO that worked with audio-visual media as a tool

for popular education, the Laboratory organized a series of workshops that brought together citizen journalists, community radio organizers, representatives from social movements and university students. During these workshops, participants received training in principles of journalistic practice and use of equipment, discussed the significance of communication for social movements, began to produce media content relating to the WSF and made plans for how to organize the coverage of the event itself.[4]

At the heart of these activists' practices is a movement-building approach to communication. While the media's mobilizing function is usually understood in terms of social movements' ability to disseminate convincing media messages that mobilize people to join or support them, the emphasis here is as much on mobilizing people to participate in shared communication practices and building networks of solidarity among citizen journalists and social movement communicators. As one activist explained, the physical co-presence afforded by participation in shared communication practices is fundamental to processes of network-building (Tobias, German activist, December 2008, Belém):

> I'm here and I do my coverage, but the fact of me being here has other effects, I speak to people, people speak to me . . . this is a bit . . . this process of articulation and network-building . . . I think this is very important, our participation in the coverage always has as a consequence that we are a living network.

Shared communication, in brief, involves mobilization, movement-building and the proliferation of alternative communication practices, as well as the circulation of media content. It involves a laborious process of constructing social relationships, involving new actors in the production of media content and setting in motion dynamics in the places where the WSF is held. As captured by a slogan frequently used by shared communication activists – 'communicate to mobilize to communicate. . .' – communication is seen as an integral part of movement dynamics.

Alongside these practices, which are oriented towards the creation of more inclusive and collaborative media forms *within* social movements, shared communication activists also engage in practices aimed at constructing more democratic media environments (at national and global scales) that provide space for a greater diversity of actors and voices. A key concern has therefore been to put issues such as concentration of media ownership, censorship, access to information technologies and media literacy on the global civil society agenda. Social forums have provided important occasions for seminars during which activists have discussed communication policy in different contexts, debated strategies for media democratization, shared experiences of repression and censorship – and in the process developed a sense of shared identity and common purpose. Such practices have been consolidated with the establishment of the World Forum of Free Media

(WFFM) – or *Fórum Mundial de Mídia Livre* in Portuguese – a forum that aims to support the development of a global grassroots movement specifically focused on media and communication. Linked to, but organizationally separate from, the World Social Forum, the WFFM was first held in conjunction with the 2009 WSF in Belém and has since gone through a number of iterations, the most recent being the fourth WFFM held in Tunisia in March 2015 in connection with the WSF.

Still at a formative stage, a key aim of the WFFM has been to develop a sense of collective identity around the concept of 'free media'. This has involved the creation of collectively agreed documents, including declarations issued at the WSF 2011 in Dakar and the WSF 2013 in Tunisia, as well as a World Charter of Free Media adopted at the fourth WFFM in March 2015. These documents set out key issues and challenges for media democratization and aim to establish a set of core principles that free media adhere to. The WFFM has also involved significant efforts to develop a comprehensive definition of free media that includes the widest possible variety of actors and media forms. Through these practices, the WFFM has enabled a consolidation of the sense of collective identity formation that first emerged with the development of shared communication practices in the WSF. As one organizer explained, the increased focus among activists on media and communication as a political issue has facilitated a shift in collective identity (Ana, Brazilian activist, March 2013, Tunis):

> At the beginning of the WSF in 2001 we couldn't talk about a communication movement. We were alternative media, people that produced. Now we can talk about a movement.

As the discussion so far demonstrates, then, an approach to media research that focuses on what people 'do, say and think' in relation to media can reveal a broad range of practices beyond those directly related to media production and consumption. Shared communication activists engage in a distinct set of *organizational practices* oriented towards the creation of collaborative production processes that stimulate exchange of ideas, skills and experiences. As part of their commitment to strengthening movement-based communication processes, activists also engage in *capacity-building practices* aimed at equipping grassroots activists with the skills they need to produce their own media. Both of these sets of practices underpin broader *practices of network formation*: by creating spaces of sociality and involving new actors in collaborative processes of media production, activists aim to strengthen links among communicators and build networks of solidarity. Such practices, in turn, have been consolidated through a range of *movement-building practices* aimed at strengthening struggles for media democratization and developing a sense of collective identity among communication activists.

This case study illustrates how a practice framework can bring into view distinct forms of agency enabled by citizen media practices. It demonstrates

how the shared communication practices developed at social forums gradually facilitated an understanding among activists of themselves as organizers, pedagogues and participants in a 'free media' movement as well as producers of counter-information. Through their prefigurative character, shared communication practices offer activists lived experience of 'another communication', providing a powerful impetus for engaging in communication activism. The sense of solidarity and collective identity developed through collaborative media production and exchange of experiences in turn may provide a source of strength for citizen journalists and social movement communicators who often operate in very difficult circumstances. A practice approach, in brief, enables a consideration of how citizen media practices can create the *preconditions* for distinct forms of agency to emerge. It is through participation in these practices that citizen journalists and social movement communicators develop a sense of their own individual and collective agency; their identities as communication activists are constituted through the enactment of citizen media practices.

The processes described above also provide one example of how a particular set of citizen media practices can function to 'anchor' or structure other practices, in a process whereby changes in one set of practices (or the introduction of new practices) prompt changes in others (or generate further new practices); see Couldry (2004), Swidler (2001). An initial set of practices aimed at facilitating the sharing of independent media content (creation of a web publication system and shared physical spaces with access to computers, editing equipment and technical assistance) soon generated a further set of practices oriented towards experimentation with new organizational forms. By providing activists with alternative experiences and definitions of 'communication', these, in turn, prompted the development of practices of capacity building and network formation aimed at spreading 'shared communication' to new actors. The emerging sense of shared purpose and collective identity generated by these practices provided the foundation for a further set of practices aimed at building a social movement focused on media and communication. This process emerged in an iterative manner, through experimentation with new practices and collective reflection on these practices.

Citizen media practices as practices of public-making

What are the implications of adopting a practice approach for how we understand the democratic potential of citizen media? As highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, work that has sought to conceptualize citizen media with reference to the notion of (counter-)publics has tended to emphasize the capacity of such media to support the circulation of alternative and oppositional discourses – in other words, the focus has been on the ability of citizen media to make marginalized actors and issues visible in the public sphere and in this way expand the space of democratic discourse. A practice

approach, however, necessitates a rethink of the way the concept of the public is used in relation to citizen media. The case study of communication activism in the WSF demonstrates how such an approach can bring into view a much broader range of practices oriented towards citizen media, beyond those directly related to the production and circulation of media content. This means the significance of citizen media cannot be understood purely in terms of their ability to 'make public' previously unreported issues and perspectives. Focusing on citizen media practices means treating citizen media as more than just the technical infrastructure that supports counter-publics; it requires us to consider the diverse constellation of practices that contribute to the *making* of publics.

The understanding of publics as *made* that I propose here draws on recent literature that has sought to theorize publics as emergent (Barnett 2003, 2014; Mahony *et al.* 2010). Such 'emergence-oriented' accounts emphasize the mediated, reflexive and indeterminate qualities of publics, and focus attention on how publics are constituted, resourced or called into existence.[5] In such a perspective, the public is 'not best thought of as a pre-existing collective subject that straightforwardly expresses itself or offers itself up to be represented' (Mahony *et al.* 2010:2–3); rather, the interest is in how publics are *made*. One way of thinking about publics as emergent is to see them as constituted through the circulation of discourse, as does Michael Warner (2002:67):

> A public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic; it exists only as the end for which books are published, shows broadcast, Web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists by virtue of being addressed.

This kind of 'chicken-and-egg' circularity is, according to Warner, essential to the phenomenon of publics. Thus, he argues, '[a] public may be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence' (2002:67). Barnett similarly draws on a deconstructionist critique of representation to develop an understanding of the public as 'a figure *par excellence*, only ever spoken for, instantiated in different guises in different contexts' (2003:23). Publics, in this account, are conceived as 'more or less durable networks of communication' (2003:9), brought into existence by the acts of representation that constitute them.

Seen through this lens, citizen media are not simply the means through which pre-existing social actors and issues are brought into the public sphere. Warner's and Barnett's accounts draw attention to the constitutive role of citizen media in the *making of publics*. However, they operate with a somewhat disembodied perspective, suggesting that it is purely through the circulation of discourse – in the form of newspaper articles, TV programmes, blog posts, etc. – that publics form. A practice framework enriches such accounts

by highlighting the material and social aspects of processes of public formation. As shown above, paying attention to what people do, say and think in relation to citizen media can reveal a diverse range of practices that form *around* the circulation of media content. When considering how citizen media contribute to processes of public-making, it is important to consider the full range of these practices.

Returning to my case study, the circulation of citizen media content is certainly one important aspect of the making of a public (or publics) around the WSF. By producing and disseminating media coverage of social forum events, shared communication activists contribute to the circulation of discourse relating to the WSF – and, in doing so, help constitute a 'WSF public'. More specifically, the online circulation of citizen media coverage of the WSF might contribute to the formation of a transnational counter-public, by expanding the reach of WSF participants' oppositional discourses across national borders and thus connecting movements in different places and contexts. A practice framework, however, highlights the much broader range of citizen media practices that can contribute to the making of publics. The practices of collaboration, capacity-building, networking and movement-building discussed above constitute important *preconditions* for the production and circulation of counter-discourses by the movements and groups that participate in the WSF. Capacity-building practices, such as those enacted in the context of the Shared Communication Laboratory, enable grassroots groups with little or no previous experience to begin producing their own media content. Collaborative organizational practices make it possible for activists to share skills and experience, and for novice journalists, video-makers and community radio activists to learn from their more experienced counterparts. Attention to these forms of practice captures processes of informal pedagogy and learning that can empower marginalized groups to elaborate and disseminate their own interpretations of social reality. This is not just a matter of acquiring technical skills; citizen media practices – at their best – can also enable people, collectively and individually, to voice and elaborate new discourses that challenge established truths (Rodríguez 2001).

Practices of networking and movement-building, meanwhile, are crucial to the development of a social infrastructure for the circulation of citizen media coverage of the WSF. Although online citizen media platforms are potentially global in reach, in the sense that anyone in the world can in theory connect to them, this is in no way guaranteed. Inequalities of access aside (a far from trivial issue), the dispersed character of the internet means that in order to come across citizen media content people need to know where to look. Practices of networking and movement-building, such as those described above, help connect dispersed citizen media initiatives, making activists aware of each other's existence and creating opportunities for linking and sharing content. The face-to-face encounters facilitated by social forums are crucial to the creation of bonds of solidarity that motivate activists

to support and promote each other's work. The emphasis that activists place on the construction of networks founded on 'thick' social relationships also provides a clue to how discourses may travel beyond the circulation of media content. Because shared communication activists tend also to be connected to particular social movements, they become important conduits of knowledge, bringing what they have learnt at the WSF back to their own constituencies. This may contribute in more subterranean ways to the making of publics, as discourses circulate through the interpersonal relationships that activists engage in on an everyday basis.

A practice framework, in brief, highlights the *social* foundations of publics, by bringing into view the broad range of socially situated practices that form around – and are necessary for – the production and circulation of media content. In the particular example used here, the range of practices developed by shared communication activists suggest that the making of publics depends on networking, movement-building and the proliferation of citizen media practices as much as on the circulation of citizen media content. It involves a laborious process of constructing networks of solidarity across geographical and political borders, setting in motion dynamics in new places and empowering marginalized actors to elaborate their own discourses and produce their own media.

Returning to the broader questions of citizenship and democracy with which this chapter began: how might we conceptualize the democratic potential of citizen media practices, beyond their capacity to make previously unreported perspectives public? One possible answer lies in conceptualizing publics as spaces of political and pedagogic practice, rather than as disembodied spaces of discourse. As Henry Giroux has argued (2001:236, emphasis added), the public sphere might be understood as a

> specific form of political *practice* that takes as its central concern the organizing of human experience so as to enable individuals to formulate interpretations of social reality in a critical and emancipatory fashion.

In such a perspective, a key question when considering the democratic potential of citizen media practices concerns their capacity to contribute to the emergence of publics that can support democratic knowledge production of the kind proposed by Giroux. This involves paying attention to the forms of agency that such practices make possible and the social fabric that they can generate, as well as the messages that are circulated through citizen media.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illustrate the utility of applying a practice-oriented framework to the study of citizen media. I have suggested shifting the focus from 'citizen media' to 'citizen media practices' to bring into view the broad

range of socially situated practices that surround citizen media, and argued that it is necessary to take this broad range of practices into account when considering the democratic potential of such media. At their best, citizen media become the focal point for practices that can help create bonds of solidarity, contribute to processes of network formation, enable individuals and groups to develop new capabilities and – importantly – develop a sense of their own agency and voice. Citizen media practices can thus contribute to the emergence of a civic culture that supports critical, emancipatory processes of knowledge production.

Adopting a practice-oriented perspective involves rethinking the concept of (counter-)publics, focusing on how citizen media practices can contribute not only to *making public* previously unreported issues and perspectives, but to the *making of publics*. A practice framework – by highlighting the material, embodied and social aspects of processes of public-formation – exposes the limitations of perspectives that see publics as constituted purely through the circulation of discourse. As this chapter has shown, the wide range of practices that often develop around citizen media (such as practices of collaboration, capacity building and networking) constitute important preconditions for the production and circulation of (counter-)discourses. Focusing attention on citizen media practices, therefore, highlights the social foundations of publics. It leads to a conceptualization of publics as spaces of political and pedagogic *practice*, not simply as networks for the circulation of discourse.

Though the exact nature of practices oriented towards citizen media will of course vary from context to context, the case study of communication activism in the WSF presented in this chapter illustrates the *range* of practices that a practice framework can bring into view. For others wishing to apply this framework to their own examples of citizen media, the three sets of questions outlined earlier offer a guide for producing a contextually specific and socially grounded analysis of such media and their democratic potential. At the heart of this approach is an emphasis on the social and collective dimensions of citizen media and their embeddedness in wider cultural fabrics.

Acknowledgement

This chapter is based on research funded by an ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) doctoral studentship (2007–2010), a travel grant from the University of London Central Research Fund (2010) and support from the Centre for the Study of Global Media and Democracy at Goldsmiths, University of London (2013).

Notes

1 The case study presented here forms part of a larger ethnographic study of media and communication practices in the WSF process. I participated in the European Social Forum in Malmö, Sweden (2008); the Social Forum of the Americas in Guatemala (2008); the WSF 2009 in Belém, Brazil; the 'WSF Ten Years' event

in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2010); the Extended Social Forum of the Peripheries in Pelotas, Brazil (2010); the World Education Forum in Palestine (2010); the WSF 2011 in Dakar, Senegal; and the WSF 2013 in Tunisia. During these forums I conducted a total of 86 in-depth interviews with communication activists and forum organizers. The case study presented here is based on a smaller subset of 21 interviews conducted with activists specifically involved in the 'shared communication' projects described in this chapter.

2 www.ciranda.net (accessed 28 August 2015).

3 All translations are my own, from Portuguese. All names have been changed to protect anonymity.

4 For a detailed account of how communication activists in Belém engaged with the WSF, see Stephansen (2013).

5 For a fuller discussion of the notion of 'emergence-oriented' perspectives on the public and how these differ from other perspectives, see Mahony and Stephansen (2016, forthcoming).

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3 Frontiers of the political

'Closed Sea' and the cinema of discontent

Sandra Ponzanesi

This chapter explores some of the ways in which cinema as a medium can offer possibilities for civic action and political transformation. It proposes in particular an analysis that foregrounds the relationship between postcolonial cinema and citizen media as a way of articulating active participation that manages not only to transform public space but also to propose alternative visual registers. Postcolonial cinema, I argue, contests mainstream and dominant visual registers that propose stereotypical or biased representations of the Other, undoing tropes of mastery and control by offering, or opening up, the space for different voices and viewpoints. The argument is developed through an analysis of *Mare Chiuso* (*Closed Sea*, Italy, 2012), a documentary film by Andrea Segre and Stefano Liberti, focusing in particular on the video footage produced by the refugees themselves during the Italian push-back operations in the Mediterranean, which features in the film. Interpreted as an example of citizen media, the miraculously saved video footage becomes a symbol for self-representation as well as political self-determination.

Cinema is a transnational medium that is particularly suited to conveying messages of dissent and social critique that extend beyond the boundaries of the nation. It can do so by setting in motion an engagement with multiple audiences, by connecting different worlds and realities, from the local to the global. In what follows I focus in particular on postcolonial cinema and some of the ways in which it engages with citizen media, specifically in terms of unearthing the complex legacies of the colonial past which continue to haunt the present, before turning to the analysis of the documentary film *Mare Chiuso* and the video footage produced by some of the migrants featured in it.

Postcolonial cinema and citizen media

The specificity of postcolonial cinema is that it proposes alternative visions and aesthetic forms that challenge societal inequalities and bring to light hidden histories and perspectives. In this sense, the term 'postcolonial cinema' has little to do with the origin of the film-makers, nor is its

use specifically related to the content of a film. Instead, it references a particular form of engagement with the way in which representation is organized and formalized to fix otherness or deviancy (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012). As Stuart Hall explains, '[w]ithout relations of difference no representation could occur. But what is then constituted within representation is always open to being deferred, staggered, serialized' (1996:215). The main task of postcolonial cinema is to contest mainstream or dominant visual registers that produce stereotypical or biased representations of the Other, and to expose tropes of mastery and control, thus offering or opening up the space for different voices and viewpoints to be expressed. This means accounting for the perspectives and voices of the oppressed both in ideological and in visual terms, looking for different registers of film making, distribution and reception. In this respect migrant cinema can be seen as a subcategory of postcolonial cinema, as it specifically focuses on issues of mobility and integration. Postcolonial cinema has a broader scope as a framework of analysis, whereas migrant cinema reflects one of the many strands that exemplify a postcolonial way of reading the world.

Postcolonial cinema therefore provides a platform for subaltern marginalities, making the 'others' protagonists and part of the mainstream narrative. This enables marginalized communities to find ways to articulate their presence and participate in different conceptions of social and political life. They become active participants in constructing their media image and media representations. What they produce and how they produce it also falls within the remit of 'citizen media' as conceptualized in this volume, because they make use of media to critique and contest social structures and shape political realities. They become not just the objects of representations, but also shapers and makers of dislocated visions.

Postcolonial cinema then engages in making the invisible visible[1] (Young 2012:21), in developing a visual repertoire that can create a dialogue between aesthetic representations and political intervention. This agenda, which is pursued through film making and its distribution and reception, is intended to allow invisible citizens, unpeople (Curtis 2004) or alien subjects (Marciniak 2006), to find alternative locations for conveying forms of participation and mediation that would otherwise remain unrecorded or ignored. Though we are talking at times of small-scale productions, with limited circulation and *cachet* for international festivals, the films are still likely to reach an informed or interested audience. Audiences can access new stories and memories via the normal distribution channels, but also through the widespread circulation of digital media productions via social network sites such as YouTube, Twitter and Vimeo.

Postcolonial cinema aims to make an impact on public life, to alter the way the notions of public space and political participation are perceived. Yet it deals not just with the present and the public realm, but also with the past and the private, be it individual or collective. It engages many genres (from melodrama

to documentary), historical periods (from the Ottoman Empire to Soviet rule), and different geopolitical contexts (the West as well as the postcolonies; Mbembe 2001) by way of unframing the dichotomy of oppression and resistance, visual mastery and blind spots.

The domain of 'citizen media', as defined in this volume, encompasses not only the form and content produced by non-affiliated citizens but also the role citizens and their practices play in public space and their ability to transform that space. Citizen media is therefore envisaged as operating through a different *pallete* of art forms, creating diversified political interventions in a bid to pursue an inclusive agenda. In this sense, postcolonial cinema will often fall within the domain of citizen media, not only because it incorporates alternative forms of participation but also because of its emphasis on inclusion and contestation, an emphasis which has historical roots as well as methodological implications.

In the 1960s, Third Cinema, for example, attempted to challenge the economic dominance of First Cinema (i.e. Hollywood) and to differentiate itself from counter-hegemonic, but still European and nation-based Second Cinema (art houses), by proposing a revolutionary alternative that would focus on the masses and express their political goals through innovative cinematic forms (Gabriel 1982; Wayne 2001). Its strategies included not only promoting a poverty of financial means, as it wanted to put forward an 'aesthetic of hunger', but also the use of non-professional actors (as in Italian neo-realism) and most of all the pursuit of embattled and subversive goals. Often influenced by the revolutionary thinking of Frantz Fanon,[2] this was a cinema that magnified not individual and oedipal stories, but the revolt of nations that wanted to liberate themselves from the clutches of imperialism, injustice and oppression. Initially established in Latin America by leading figures such as Ottavio Getino and Fernando Solanas (who wrote the script for Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers*, 1966), Third Cinema spread across the world, not only reflecting the Third World's need to reclaim its authority and place in the transnational order, but as a style of denunciation and dissent that could involve the First World as well as the Third World, as long as it staged a way of transforming the political order and the role and visibility of its neglected citizens.

I therefore propose to explore the relationship between postcolonial cinema and citizen media as a way of articulating a notion of active participation that manages not only to transform public space, but also to articulate alternative visual registers. I will do so by explaining the origin of postcolonial cinema and its connections to its closest predecessor, Third Cinema, and engaging with the ways in which cinema as a medium can offer possibilities for civic action and political transformations. The discussion will prepare the ground for an analysis of *Mare Chiuso*, a documentary film by Andrea Segre and Stefano Liberti, and in particular the video footage produced by the refugees themselves during the Italian push-back operations in the Mediterranean. Interpreted as an example of

citizen media, the miraculously saved video footage becomes a symbol for self-representation as well as self-preservation.

Cinema as social commentary

Third Cinema has exerted a strong influence on postcolonial cinema and may be considered its predecessor, although postcolonial cinema does not claim to be a movement or a genre, but rather a form of engagement with the visual narrative of empire and its deconstruction. The concept is thus not intended as a new label for cinematic production, but rather offered here as a framework of analysis – an epistemological standpoint or optic through which films emerge in their engagement with and contestation of power dynamics. It is a navigational tool that allows us to unearth the complex legacies of the colonial past that inevitably haunt the present. However, as a tool of analysis and a mode of reading that address power relationships in visual terms, the concept of postcolonial cinema can also be applied to film productions that are not explicitly postcolonial, such as orientalist movies and ethnographic documentaries, Hollywood classics and recent productions, migrant and world cinema, and recent global productions such as Nollywood and Bollywood films.

As such, then, postcolonial cinema is less explicitly polemical than Third Cinema, but it is still strongly engaged with the political and concerned with authoritarian oppression. It does not deal directly with freedom fighters, liberation heroes or decolonization movements, but has a more oblique relationship to protest and the politics of dissent, and problematizes the cinematic tools, media technologies and distribution networks through which we receive information and images (Ponzanesi and Waller 2012:7).

While sensitive to collective issues, postcolonial cinema often focuses on individual causes and quests, without losing sight of the multidimensionality of characters. These characters are often, but not necessarily, marginalized, displaced or disenfranchised by more subtle and diffused forms of oppression than the colonial/colonizer binary, such as labour migration and the global redistribution of capital. The colonial/postcolonial focus becomes actualized in a new realm of sensory and political experiences, where power relationships are relocated, shifted and rearranged. As neo-colonial configurations of power emerge in the contemporary world, we are reminded that the colonial hangover is far from over. Film and media in general can deal with the imaginary and the real, offering new opportunities for resistance and subversion through the frame of aesthetics and micropolitics. The master narratives break down into kaleidoscopic visions that refract larger, often repressed, miswritten and unofficial histories of the nation, magnifying the role of identity in its intersection with issues of class, gender, ethnicity and race.

Along with these intersectional issues, one of the most frequently recurring features of postcolonial cinema, especially of the postcolonial migrant cinema which is at the heart of the analysis in this chapter, is that of

non-places. Postcolonial subjects, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are often depicted in non-places such as city outskirts, hotels, detention centres, refugee camps, on the open sea or in airports (Augé 1995). This is an important trope of postcolonial cinema which underlies its political as well as aesthetic component. In the European contexts of migrant cinema, the reference to liminality, or spatial location at the periphery, operates as figuration as well as material place, to convey the borderline identity of subjects who are still perceived as guests in Europe.

In many European migrant films, the postcolonial subjects, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers become marked as 'other', and therefore socially ordered elsewhere, through their physical displacement to the outskirts of society, into liminal spaces that function as waiting rooms or holding areas designed to control access to 'legal' Europe, for example. However, these zones of marginalization and exclusion, heterotopias or non-places, can actually become places of semi-belonging and transformation (Ponzanesi 2012). One example is the role of the Mediterranean as a non-place that, through the many passages by migrants trying to reach Europe, becomes a location for alternative forms of claimed citizenship, expanding the borders of Europe towards a new liquid frontier. One of the aims of this chapter is to analyse how forms of citizen media reappraise the Mediterranean and turn it from a non-place to a space that is inhabited not by ghosts or invaders but by subjects entitled to human rights and European citizenship.

The Mediterranean as a non-place

In analysing *Mare Chiuso* (Closed Sea, Italy, 2012), a recent film by documentary film-makers Andrea Segre and Stefano Liberti, I will aim to highlight the connection between citizen media and the debates on postcolonial cinema, migration and non-places. The film is particularly relevant at the time of writing – in 2015 – for its engagement with the current and ongoing immigration emergency in Europe and in particular Southern Europe, Italy and Greece, where thousands of immigrants are landing illegally after a perilous crossing of the Mediterranean in trawlers or rubber boats, risking their lives and turning the Mediterranean into an open cemetery. Immigration to Southern Europe is a recent and rather sudden phenomenon that has been addressed by passing and applying unclear and inappropriate immigration laws. Desperate migrants attempting to reach the Italian and Greek shores (from Albania, North Africa and the Middle East, especially Syria at the time of writing)[3] to secure a future in Europe have been confronted with push-back operations by the Italian military marines. The territorial proximity of the Southern European shores and North Africa should make the Mediterranean an interesting crossroads space, fluid and in continuous evolution, but instead it has become a heavily politicized and patrolled non-place.

In this ongoing series of crossings by migrants, the Mediterranean acquires a new role and valence – which has been extensively studied in history,

anthropology and political theory – as a location that connects as well as separates; at times it is also a location of mediation and a contact zone, where different cultures have criss-crossed and co-existed for centuries, superseding the notion of land as important for territorial contiguity and unity (Boria and dell'Agnese 2012). The Mediterranean is seen as the border of Europe, offshore, and therefore as a political frontier where the new issues of citizenship are debated and guarded. But it is also a liquid continent or an open cemetery, due to the many unsuccessful crossings of migrants whose destination – 'Europe' – is never reached. While the media emphasize the 'illegal' landings as invasions, the reality of these modern odysseys is that of illegal refoulements, i.e. the expulsion of persons who have the right to be recognized as refugees. The principle of non-refoulement was first laid out in 1951 in the UN Convention on the Status of Refugees, in which Article 33(1) states that

> No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.[4]

Notwithstanding this provision, the reality since 2008 has been that of migrants coercively rejected in push-back operations that brought them outside the common gaze, a strategy that reflects the political inadequacies of the Italian government and the European Union.[5] In the widespread metaphor of 'waves' of migrants, where cargoes of distraught people on *gommoni* (rubber boats) or *carrette di mare* (dilapidated trawlers) face the Italian navy securing the Italian coastline, the Mediterranean emerges, as Russell King writes, as 'a liquid frontier separating the rich north (Europe) from the poor south (North Africa, the 'third world') and temptingly open to migrant crossing' (2001:8). Although cultural theorist Iain Chambers has located the Mediterranean as a postcolonial hybrid where multiple histories, languages and cultures intersect and flow into each other, he too is aware of the ambivalence and the ambiguity that the Mediterranean has acquired in recent decades, as an open graveyard filled with unclaimed bodies (2008:33):

> Here the concept of the Mediterranean is set adrift to float towards a vulnerability attendant on encounters with other voices, bodies, histories. This is to slow down and deviate the tempo of modernity, its neurotic anxiety for linearity, causality, and 'progress,' by folding it into other times, other textures, other ways of being in a multiple modernity.

Chambers' poetic invocation embodies the ambiguity of the Mediterranean, not as a space where power imbalances cease but where they are articulated 'otherwise', allowing for reciprocal patterns of cross-cultural call and response. If revisiting the Mediterranean in this way means attending to

repressed histories of contact and communication between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, it also means recasting maritime history in terms of securitization and inhospitality, with the sea extending the law of the land into a space marked less by freedom and openness than by anxiety and fear. The Mediterranean, as a Sea of Death, is indelibly marked by the crimes perpetrated by generations of human traffickers, but also by the violent rejections and expulsions enacted by those forces – military and otherwise – that currently patrol its shores. It has become not just the liquid frontier of Europe, but also a repository for the continent's unwanted (Laviosa 2010). It is a place of transit where the abject bodies of migrants, undocumented people and refugees intensify, literally and figuratively, the asymmetries produced by globalization.[6]

Mare Chiuso, push-back operations and the colonial legacy

In *Mare Chiuso,* Stefano Liberti and Andrea Segre use the documentary genre as a way of engaging with reality, or better, with a denunciation of reality, siding with marginalized people who suffer injustices despite their entitlement to human rights and European citizenship. This is a cinema *engagé* that contests the status quo and denounces abuses of power. It can be read as a postcolonial film since it engages with the visualizing of subalterns by giving them a podium and a voice through a cinematic language that contests romanticized and stereotypical representations of the immigrant subjects in favour of real-life testimonials and subjective viewpoints. The film features interviews, archival footage and original footage captured on mobile phones by migrants themselves at the very moment that patrolling Italian guards appear on the scene. The film-makers met the victims of the push-back operations in the UNHCR Shousha refugee camp, on the border between Libya and Tunisia, and in two reception camps for asylum seekers (C.A.R.A.) in southern Italy: Sant'Anna in Crotone, Campania and San Giorgio Lucano in Basilicata. Their interviews with the victims form the main part of the documentary, along with footage from a session of the European Court of Human Rights held in Strasbourg in May 2009. The footage shows us that the refugees, who had been sent back to Libya, used Article 34 of the European Convention on Human Rights to sue Italy – in what became known as the *Case of Hirsi Jamaa and others* (2012)[7] – for indiscriminate push-back operations in high seas (Palladino and Gjergji 2015). The Court subsequently obliged Italy to pay a fine of 15,000 euros to the complainants – 11 Somalis and 13 Eritreans. During the public hearings of the Strasbourg trial held on 22 June 2012, footage of which was also shown in the documentary, one of the three solicitors representing the migrants stated that the European Union should prevent this 'Guantanamo on the high seas' from ever happening again.

Mare Chiuso's impact on the viewer has to be understood not only within the context that inspired it (the 2009 agreement between Berlusconi and

Gaddafi to control migration flows between Italy and Libya), but also against the backdrop of the specific events that have been unfolding since the film was released in 2012. It strikes the viewer as a stunning documentary that is particularly touching because of its portrayal of the reality experienced by many refugees who continue to attempt to cross the Mediterranean to reach Lampedusa, or other southern coastal posts in Europe. Lampedusa, a small island to the south of Sicily, close to Tunisia in North Africa and separated only by the strait of Sicily, has become a metaphor for Europe's unwanted. A tiny island of fishermen transformed by modern mass tourism, Lampedusa has been continuously in the news for the repeated dramas of refugees stranded on its shores, transferred into cramped CPTs (*centri di permanenza temporanei*, or temporary detention centres) or drowned on the high seas even before reaching the coastline.

The background story to this documentary is one that persists to this day. It is the story of many attempted or failed crossings of the Mediterranean. A record number of 170,000 migrants reached Italian shores in 2014 alone, a figure that continued to rise significantly in 2015, but not all attempts were successful – quite the opposite. The surge in the number of deaths has sparked renewed debate as to whether European search-and-rescue operations are adequate in the face of the humanitarian crisis triggered by the escalation of conflict in the Middle East and Africa (Aljazeera America 2015). Events that have particularly influenced public opinion since the filming of the documentary include shipwrecks that despite wide media attention were forgotten within a week. On 3 October 2013, a year after the release of the film in 2012, an overcrowded boat containing almost 500 migrants capsized less than one kilometre off the coast of Lampedusa, resulting in the death of an estimated 300 refugees, mostly originating from Eritrea. The tragedy shocked Brussels, with the European Commission president José Manuel Barroso travelling to Lampedusa to pay tribute to the line of 300 coffins. The symbolic but empty gesture of the Italian government to grant them citizenship after death speaks of the paradoxes and abuses committed in the name of citizenship and border control. In Milan, a flash mob was organized in support of the migrants of Lampedusa. People lay down in Galleria Vittorio Emanuele as 'dead bodies' covered with white sheets, the hollowed black bodies being replaced by whiteness and invisibility.[8] Such drownings and deaths have been repeated since 2013 without any substantial changes taking place. Another tragedy occurred in February 2015, when more than a dozen overcrowded boats tried to reach Lampedusa, with some 3,800 people attempting to cross the Mediterranean in the course of a few weeks, resulting in the death of more than 300 people.

On 19 April 2015, the greatest tragedy of all took place. A boat off the cost of Libya, south of the Italian island of Lampedusa, capsized, resulting in the dramatic estimate of between 700 and 900 people drowned. This created a new special emergency and led to a summit in Brussels, which responded with inadequate and even more restrictive measures, such as

imposing higher penalties and sanctions on human traffickers and a strategy plan to bomb all suspect vessels and ships on the African coast to prevent them crossing, consequently drowning innocent people. Once again, the problem (what causes unrest in Africa and the Middle East and what the responsibilities of the European Union are) is not addressed; only its consequences. Introducing short-term measures that penalize and criminalize the mediators of these exploitative conditions, with the aim of blocking terrorism through ISIS activities, will not diminish the flow or the problem (*Der Spiegel* 2015).

The filming of *Mare Chiuso* precedes but today continues to evoke these events. It focuses on a previous period when the Gaddafi regime was still in place (from 1969 until 2011). During that period, the Italian government resorted to illegal operations in order to block the stream of migrants across the Mediterranean, using an official push-back operation that violated the Geneva Conventions on the rights of refugees and the duty of providing rescue in case of danger by deporting the migrants to detention camps in Libya, a territory outside the jurisdiction of the Geneva Convention. Of particular concern in this context is the fact that migrants did not have access to asylum procedures, which they could only start once they reach Lampedusa, and that they were expelled to Libya, a country that is not their country of origin but a transit stop and that does not have a functioning asylum system, has not signed the Geneva Convention on Refugees and practices large-scale expulsion of undocumented migrants (Andrijasevic 2006).

The illegal refoulement actions (or push-back operations) were a consequence of the infamous Friendship Treaty, signed in 2008 by Berlusconi and Gaddafi. The agreement was supposed to put an end to a painful chapter in Italian history, relating to Italian colonialism in Libya and the inhuman concentration camps set up between 1929 and 1931,[9] mostly to uproot Bedouin nomads who supported the resistance movement led by Omar Al-Mukhtar. The end of this colonial chapter was linked to an injection of funding of up to 5 billion euros over 20 years for key infrastructure projects, the nature of which remained undefined. Although the treaty had economic benefits for Libya and the parties involved claimed to be motivated by a wish to end past disputes, it simultaneously implicated Libya in the establishment of a violent technology of security. Against the backdrop of Libya's colonial history, it seemed particularly paradoxical for it to apply forms of containment that are similar to those the Italians used against Libyan people during colonial times (Powell 2015).

There is a clear link here between the failure of Libya as a security border and the failure of the Italian government, and with it the European Union, to deal with the flows of globalization and the consequences of decolonization. The treaty constitutes a remapping of the colonial sovereign logic that implicates Libya in the production of sovereign violence against refugees. It re-enacts Italian colonial history by implicating Libyans in Italy's violent sovereign ban on refugees and asylum seekers. Through this remapping,

Libya has been transformed into a border zone of exception that is both outside but also inside the jurisdiction of Italian sovereignty (Palombo 2010:51–2).

Mare Chiuso

Andrea Segre has tried through his film making to bring the plight of migrants caught in this postcolonial remapping to international attention. His films focus not so much on the migrants' arrival in Europe as on the causes that lead them to make their perilous journey, and provide a platform for their voices and stories to be heard. He has produced a consistent *oeuvre* that tries to address these issues in a consistent and politically sophisticated manner by focusing on the origins and developments of migrations from Africa, long before the migrants even reach Europe, in order to reveal migrants' motivations and depict life stories that are hidden behind the mediatized renditions of Italian and European reports. These themes are reflected in the trilogy of films he directed prior to *Mare Chiuso*: *A Sud di Lampedusa* (South of Lampedusa, 2006), *Come un uomo sulla Terra* (Like a Man on Earth, 2008) and *Sangue Verde* (Green Blood, 2010).

In *Mare Chiuso* (Closed Sea, 2012), Segre, together with co-director Stefano Liberti, brings the story of *A Sud di Lampedusa* to a further climax by telling, in documentary form, what actually happened to African refugees on the Italian ships during these push-back operations and in the Libyan prisons after their deportation. On 6 May 2009, an overloaded boat with Somali and Eritrean men, women and children was intercepted in international waters. The boat was not fit for sailing and failed to continue its trip towards Lampedusa. Under the 2008 Friendship Treaty between Italy and Libya, these people could be and were returned to Libya even though they were in international waters and subject to international legislation.

One of the central elements of *Mare Chiuso* is a few minutes of video footage recorded on smartphones by the refugees themselves during their encounter at sea with the patrolling Italian police. The footage is a rare cameo that provides evidence to incriminate Italy in unlawful practices. According to Elisabetta Povoledo of the *New York Times* (Povoledo 2012), the video footage is particularly touching 'because it is real': She goes on to explain:

> Because it was taken from a mobile phone, the images are jumpy and all-over-the-place, but it's unlikely that a professionally shot movie would have captured the spontaneity of the joy – and relief – of the boatload of mostly Eritrean migrants rescued by the Italian navy in the Mediterranean after a harrowing four-day crossing from Libya . . . The excitement of the migrants is palpable at the prospect that they would soon be taken to Italy.[10]

But this story has no happy ending. Initially friendly, the Italian navy receives a phone call and they change their behaviour and approach. Instead of taking the migrants on the rubber boats to safety as required by international law, they transfer them onto Italian military ships and return them to Tripoli, where many were subsequently mistreated for refusing to leave the Italian ship.

The story is told through interviews in addition to the video footage. Semere Kahsay is one of the main characters interviewed for the film. He tells us that he had to send his pregnant wife ahead of him because he did not have enough money to pay for both of them. His wife arrived safely and waited with their baby daughter for him to make the crossing, but as the victim of the push-back operation described in the film he could not join his family. Semere has a particularly powerful presence in the film, and provides cinematic force through his simple life story: he tells of his own odyssey, evoking a recurring theme that features in the different narratives, with his trip across the sea, his imprisonment in Libya, his long stay in the refugee camps and his great disappointment in the Italian dream. 'Thank you, Italians', he says, and then breaks down – 'We love Italy and all Italians. But thank you'. As it happens, there is a happy ending to his story. In the summer of 2011 Semere acquired the right to political asylum, 2 years and 5 months after his departure from Eritrea.

Notwithstanding the powerful impact of interviewees such as Semere, the most dramatic part of the film remains the video footage, which the migrants themselves miraculously managed to preserve and pass on to the two film-makers. The short 5.49-minute stretch – which was filmed by Semere, using a smartphone – has the familiarity of a home-made video.[11] It shows a boat, although it is hard to see whether it is a rubber boat or larger carrier, overloaded with Eritreans, mostly men and probably one woman in the frame, in the middle of the sea and under a blue sky. People smile directly and greet the camera, as if they are on holiday and enjoying a trip with friends. Some, of different ages, wear orange–blue safety vests, several wear caps and we hear them talking in their native language, Tigrinya. At 38 seconds into the video the camera focuses on a big white ship approaching the boat. The images become jumpy, moving between body parts and unfocused details, while we clearly see the big ship quickly approaching. People continue to speak to the camera, telling stories and embracing each other convivially, evidently excited by the arrival of the ship. The film-maker asks questions and various people respond and interact as if in an extemporaneous video clip. At 3.30 minutes into the video the camera focuses again on the huge white ship, which seems to be carrying Italian marines, now still at a safe distance. Migrants turn towards the ship in anticipation and joy because they assume they will be rescued. The last minute of the footage records the confusion and some discussion about what is going to happen. At 4.35 minutes we see a smaller boat leaving the white ship and approaching the migrants. We see later on that it is a yellow rubber boat. Slowly we

start noticing a couple of military men and a couple of men who are shirtless. They seem to address each other in English. In the last 10 seconds it is hard to anticipate what will happen. Ropes seem to be offered to attach their boat to the migrants'. Suddenly the video is interrupted and there is no more footage.

Only through the film shot by Segre and Liberti and their interviews with the people on the boat, who were deported to Libya, do we come to know what happened afterwards. At first friendly and helpful, the military receive a phone call that makes them change their attitude and approach – possibly a call from the authorities telling them not to rescue the refugees but to send them back to Libya. On the big ship, the migrants start to understand that something is wrong and that the ship is not travelling in the direction of Italy, as they can detect from the position of the sun. Once they realize that they are being sent back to Libya, they begin to resist and the Italian marines respond with violence; one migrant is even beaten on the head by a club so badly that he bleeds. Though the migrants' footage constitutes the core of the film, it is through the framing of the entire documentary by the directors that migrants' stories acquire a logic and coherence that turn them into an instrument of protest and vindication. The video was later used as evidence against the Italian state in the European Court of Human Rights, and this is the scene that we see at the opening of the film and at the end.

Hence it was through their own filming on a smartphone that these witnesses of their own suffering managed to challenge the legality of Italy's push-back operations, in a powerful example of how citizen media practices can bring about change in social and political life.

Conclusions

Mare Chiuso provides a rare example of migrants documenting their own suffering and of engaged postcolonial cinema adopting the cause of refugees and asylum seekers as a central focus, not only in elaborating a film's narrative but also in delivering its visual content through the migrants themselves and their footage. By weaving together the aesthetic and the political, the film managed to achieve a subtle balance between artistic testimonial and social denunciation, and to succeed in bringing about concrete political change. Not only was Italy sued on the basis of the facts portrayed in the film, and obliged to offer compensation, but the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg also issued a ruling in favour of the refugees and their version of the truth. The film's success in reversing the mainstream narrative and giving credence to the migrants' perspective, and the migrants' own skill at preserving the short clip they recorded, testify to the empowering potential of digital tools, now widely available and highly adaptable. Without suggesting that they are simply a democratizing tool, it is fair to say that digital media have enlarged the space of participation and protest, for migrants and other constituencies. Yet it is within the medium of cinema

that the video footage provided by migrants could be framed in such a way as to facilitate a deeper understanding of the texture of representation, interpretation and dissent that goes beyond the digital revolution and straightforward accounts of the past as well as the present.

This documentary film, which started with the modest ambition of showing footage and interviews to record the story of one group of migrants, has now travelled to many international festivals and has been received very positively by critics and activists. On the evening of the Lampedusa drama on 3 October 2013, mentioned above, the film-makers decided to make the film freely available for streaming 'as an exception' – as a form of protest and denunciation, and an expression of solidarity with all migrants and with the dead.[12]

Mare Chiuso thus contributes to the tradition of postcolonial cinema by demonstrating how power relationships are historically constructed and constitute part of the colonial legacy, but also by showcasing moments of resistance that foreground the voices and histories of otherwise marginalized subjects, who are spoken of in the media in sensationalist terms but are hardly ever allowed to present their own perspective on events. The video is an example of what new digital media can do for citizen participation and of the power of witnessing it enables. Negative tropes, such as the Mediterranean as a non-place and references to the European inability to face 'the immigrant invasion', are contrasted with beautiful visual images of refugees calmly telling their stories of hope and despair. Unlike Third Cinema, the film depicts not a mass movement of protest but individual stories and testimonies that can raise public awareness and evoke empathy. The elaborate camera work and the warm colours produced by the images of the desert and the interiors of the refugee tents not only confer dignity and respect on those silenced subjects but aesthetically help to create a productive fissure between the harshness of the content and the opulence of the images. The film-makers' skilful camera work could be said to be out of tune with the content; they may be accused of orientalizing or glamorizing the migrants. I would argue, however, that it succeeds in aligning the quality of the medium with the importance of the message, without falling into the trite understanding of documentary film as a poor genre or a record of unmediated reality. In *Mare Chiuso*, documentary film becomes an interpretative genre that draws on the postcolonial to achieve its powerful political sensitivity and visual cogency.

Notes

1 As Robert Young puts it, 'the issue is rather to locate the hidden rhizomes of colonialism's historical reach, of what remains invisible, unseen, silent, or unspoken. In a sense, postcolonialism has always been about the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies' (2012:21).
2 See, for example, Fanon (1993:35–106).
3 Since the 1980s, the rapidly increasing number of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees coming not only from the former Italian colonies in the Horn of Africa

(Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia) but also from the Maghreb and other African countries, and from Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe (especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the war in Yugoslavia), has drastically changed the face of Italian demography.

4 Available at www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.pdf (accessed 31 August 2015).

5 The various improvised laws that attempted to regulate and legislate the presence, residence and right to citizenship of the newcomers have been increasingly inadequate and disastrous (Legge Martelli 1990; Turco-Napolitano 1998; Bossi-Fini 2002; Legge Pacchetto Sicurezza 2009; https://strugglesinitaly.wordpress.com/equality/en-immigration-policies-in-italy/). The sudden influx of immigrants to Italy (chaotically hosted in detention centres, refugee camps and improvised *centri di accoglienza*/hosting centres) is not a temporary emergency, but one that is destined to continue well into the future.

6 See the blog by Gabriele del Grande, 'Fortress Europe', in which he reports on 6 years of travelling around the Mediterranean along the borders of Europe. Available at http://fortresseurope.blogspot.nl/ (accessed 31 August 2015).

7 http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-109231#{"itemid":["001-109231"]} (accessed 9 September 2015).

8 See *Milano 14/2/2015 Flashmob Per i migranti di Lampedusa* (Milan 14/2/2015 Flashmob for the Migrants of Lampedusa); available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0uerxqggQ8 (accessed 31 August 2015).

9 The ferocious response of the Fascists to the Bedouin uprising in Libya involved creating new systems of ordering and disciplining. Nomads were considered worse than barbaric, and as deviant and dangerous to the Italian empire. For Generale Rodolfo Graziani, nomadism was a real danger and required special attention. To this end General Graziani took measures officially sanctioned by General Badoglio, Governor of Cyrenaica, to physically exclude the local populations and locate them in specific spaces. Between 1930 and 1933, the Cyrenaica *sottomessi* communities were forced into what Badoglio called 'a restricted space, so that they can be surveilled adequately, and isolated from the rebels' (Labanca 2005:31). The exact number of deaths is unknown and not documented, but it is estimated that during this period between 40,000 and 70,000 were killed or died of starvation. As David Atkinson argues, '[t]he camp and its barbed wired fences materialised European notions of a bounded territoriality; they finally forced the Bedouin to live within a disciplined, controlled, fixed space – in contrast to their traditional conceptions of group encampments and unfettered movement across territory' (2000:113–14). The camp was organized into re-education areas, which were meant to educate and train Libyan people for the military colonial apparatus, but they were also punitive spaces, where torture and human rights abuses occurred (De Carlo 2013).

10 A video of the footage is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgQB1b-3br94&feature=youtu.be (accessed 31 August 2015).

11 A computer expert by training, Semere was on the boat because he was attempting to flee his country where military reserve duties can last indefinitely. The opportunity for the film-makers (Segre and Liberati) to meet with migrants presented itself after the outbreak of the Libyan war in March 2011, when many African migrants escaped the Libyan detention camps where they had been forcibly held. Some crossed the border with Tunisia, and in June Segre and Liberati travelled to the Shousha refugee camp to hear their stories. Segre explains how they were allowed by the migrants to use the footage, but also how they helped the migrants take steps against Italy in the European Court of Human Rights, in an interview available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=kan6QyuRXvs (accessed 9 September 2015).

12 www.cinespresso.com/2013/10/04/mare-chiuso-in-streaming-gratuito-per-fermare-il-massacro-dei-migranti/. The film is now freely available on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=goUBCs-SkAY (accessed 31 August 2015).

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4 Citizen mediations of connectivity

Narrowing the 'Culture of Distance' in television news

Bolette B. Blaagaard and Stuart Allan

In striving to contribute to recent conceptualizations of citizen engagement with digital technologies in war and conflict reporting, this chapter initiates a return to the work of the cultural theorist Raymond Williams, especially his concept of a 'culture of distance' in his critique of television news. Against this backdrop, the chapter proceeds to provide a close reading of a first-hand video documenting an Israeli air strike on a crowded marketplace in Gaza in July 2014, during which Palestinian photojournalist Rami Rayan was killed. The footage of the incident – shot by his assistant, who had picked up his camera from the ground – was shared by ordinary citizens across social networking sites (including by author Naomi Wolf on her Facebook page), thereby attracting the attention of mainstream media. This instance of how improvised reportage underwent a citizen-driven 'spiral of amplification' (Hall et al. 1978) effectively underscores how journalistic imperatives can be decisively recast by citizen-led interventions. Specifically, such re-negotiations of the culture of distance, we argue, re-articulate the local within the global, thereby signalling the potential of citizen mediations to narrow, if not collapse, certain 'us' and 'them' dichotomies indicative of so much war and conflict reporting.

Writing at the time of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands conflict, Raymond Williams (1982) pinpointed several issues concerning the visual representation of distant conflicts in television news coverage. Underlying 'issues of control and independence; of the quality of reporting; of access and balance in discussion', he argued, was a deeper problematic, namely a 'culture of distance' (1982:13). Reminding us that the televisual picture of the world is a selective one, he pointed out that 'what is much more significant is the revealed distance between the technology of television, as professionally understood, managed and interpreted, and the political and cultural space within which it actually operates' (1982:14). It is across this distance, Williams observed, that the human devastation endemic to conflict is recurrently taken up and reinflected by television news into an 'antiseptic' presentation of reality. Hence his urgent call for new investigations to be undertaken into this culture of distance, this

'latent culture of alienation, within which men and women are reduced to models, figures and the quick cry in the throat' (1982:21).

Taking its cue from Williams' intervention, this chapter will elucidate certain themes in his writings about televisual cultures in order to extend a critical reconsideration of the current mediascape, with particular reference to citizen mediations of connectivity. More specifically, we will suggest that his conception of the culture of distance offers an invaluable perspective pertinent to the ongoing debate over the ways in which visual media shape the journalistic mediation – both professional and citizen alike – of distant suffering (Allan 2004; Boltanski 1999; Chouliaraki 2013; Kyriakidou 2015; Pantti et al. 2012; Zelizer 2007). In addressing the present volume's central priorities, then, it will be shown that Williams' mode of enquiry may be developed with reference to an emergent ethos of ethical connectivity fashioned between news organizations and their citizen publics, inviting new, alternative forms, practices and epistemologies of war and conflict journalism.

Accordingly, our exploration begins with a discussion of the ordinariness of culture in order to raise questions concerning the lived materiality of experience, thereby preparing the ground to begin rethinking Williams' critique of technological determinism with a view to problematizing how the mediation of distance is politicized. For purposes of illustration, we offer a brief case study, namely a close reading of a first-hand video of an Israeli air strike on a crowded marketplace in Gaza in July 2014, where Palestinian photojournalist Rami Rayan was one of those killed. Footage of the incident – shot by his assistant who had picked up his camera from where he lay on the ground – was shared by ordinary citizens across social networking sites (including by author Naomi Wolf on her Facebook page), thereby attracting the attention of mainstream media. This example of how one instance of spontaneous, makeshift reportage underwent a citizen-driven 'spiral of amplification' (Hall et al. 1978:76) effectively underscores the issues at stake in this chapter's discussion. That is to say, it pinpoints how the very journalistic imperatives serving to 'insulate us from reality', to use Williams's (1982) phrase, can be decisively recast, often in unexpected ways. Such renegotiations of the culture of distance re-articulate the local within the global, we will argue, thereby signalling the potential of citizen mediations to narrow, if not collapse the institutionalized visuality of 'us' and 'them' dichotomies characteristic of so much international news reportage.

The ordinariness of culture

In considering Williams' rudimentary exploration of questions that came to underpin his conception of the culture of distance, we first turn to a particularly formative moment in his theoretical engagement with the lived materiality of culture in its own right. In the 1958 essay entitled 'Culture is Ordinary', he contends that it is the very *ordinariness* of culture that needs to be analytically prioritized at the outset of related modes of enquiry.

This early essay offers a consideration of the 'common meanings' that constitute a society's culture. More specifically, at stake is the need to distinguish the contours of the ordinary processes of culture as a whole way of life so as to allow for the interpretation of its conditions of existence in the times and spaces of the everyday. It follows that for Williams the materiality of culture, that is, the lived experiences and everyday practices of social interaction, should be examined in relation to the means by which society is 'made and remade in every individual mind' (1958:4). In other words, a culture has two aspects which must be held in conjunction: it is 'always both traditional and creative; [. . .] it is both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings' (1958:4). As we intend to show in this chapter, the 'ordinary processes' of the visual cultures of the everyday are particularly pertinent in this regard.

Williams' writings over the years never took him very far from the crucial question of how culture is 'made and remade' through the ordinary, ostensibly mundane activities of everyday life. As his appreciation of the need to engage more directly with the material forms of social communication increased, he sought to link to his study of culture a more nuanced understanding of power. By focusing, in particular, on the power dynamics informing the technological development of communication institutions, he was able to identify a number of factors that influence this routine reproduction of cultural norms, values and beliefs. Technology, Williams stresses, needs to be understood as the body of knowledge appropriate to the development of particular skills as well as the practical conditions of their application or use via a range of devices (Williams 1981). From this vantage point, which broke with Williams' contemporaries' work on media effects, it quickly becomes apparent that every form of communication technology is necessarily embedded in existing social relations and institutions. For the purposes of analysis, such technologies thus need to be situated within the larger context of their institutionalization (and thus the concomitant processes of selection, investment and development) *vis-à-vis* specific interests and forces.

Across a series of articles and books, Williams extends this analysis of technology to demonstrate how broadcasting was developed into different cultural systems for reasons beyond those which could be attributed to the technology itself. A recurrent theme of his critique of technological determinism, and the cultural pessimism he associates with it, is that 'the moment of any new technology is a moment of choice' (Williams 1983:146). In sharp contrast with those accounts of technological development which presuppose that inherent elements of a given technological form determine its use, he seeks to accentuate the range of possible uses for any such form.[1] Attention may then proceed to focus on the specific mechanisms by which certain alternative 'choices', or potentially 'different routes', for this form are displaced. However, Williams does not deny that there are particular technological properties that need to be recognized in order to understand

how any given form or medium operates. The politics of technology, while not governed by certain inexorable logics or forces, are nevertheless contingent upon processes of control (and resistance) in and across contending institutions. For this reason, then, he insists on a much greater degree of specificity in making claims about how technologies develop so as to allow for a range of different futures than those that seem to be prefigured by accounts relying on a certain sense of inevitability in their prognoses. Williams does concede that it is always difficult to envisage these alternative futures once a technology has been organized in a particular way, however; indeed, in the case of television, it is the very 'normality' of this medium that makes it such an elusive object of enquiry.

The role of technology in ordinary culture

To claim a conceptual purchase on the ordinariness of visual cultures is to invite lively debate about the normative criteria underpinning evaluative judgements. Williams' inaugural lecture at the University of Cambridge, which he delivered on 29 October 1974, is suggestive of a basis for a better appreciation of his views regarding the 'value' of televisual culture. Entitled 'Drama in a Dramatised Society', this lecture highlights Williams' interest in the activity of watching televisual drama. As he declares, 'we have never as a society acted so much or watched so many others acting. [. . .] [Society] [w]atching itself has become problematic' (Williams 1974/1989:3). Drama, courtesy of television, has become 'built into the rhythms of everyday life' (1974/1989:4) such that it is now a habitual experience. That is to say, we watch 'more in a week, in many cases, than most human beings would previously have seen in a lifetime' (1974/1989:4). Hence Williams' coining of the phrase 'dramatized society' to capture something of this qualitative change. As he writes (1974/1989:5):

> Till the eyes tire, millions of us watch the shadows of shadows and find them substance; watch scenes, situations, actions, exchanges, crises. The slice of life, once a project of naturalist drama, is now a voluntary, habitual, internal rhythm; the flow of action and acting, of representation and performance, raised to a new convention, that of a basic need.

It is this 'basic need' for drama, whether it be in the form of a televisual play, soap opera, documentary or newscast, that is central to Williams' assertions regarding how we have come to watch the world 'out there' through the framed images of television. It is, he argues, a need for public events, for distraction, but also a need 'for images, for representations, of what living is now like, for this kind of person and that, in this situation and place and that' (1974/1989:6; Allan 1997). That is, the ordinary visual experience, its ordinariness and its imbrication with technology, is a form of dramatization and constant (re)production of cultural norms, values and beliefs.

This incessant demand for a 'flow of images' (1974/1989:7) from 'out there' (1974/1989:6), for 'constant dramatic representation' (1974/1989:7), is constitutive of a new form of community amongst fellow watchers. By 'out there', Williams is not referring to a particular place *per se*: rather, what is being watched on television is

> a complex and otherwise unfocused and unfocusable national and international life, where our area of concern and apparent concern is unprecedentedly wide, and where what happens on another continent can work through to our own lives in a matter of days and weeks – in the worst image, in hours and minutes. Yet our lives are still here, still substantially here, with the people we know, in our own rooms, in the similar rooms of our friends and neighbours, and they too are watching. (1974/1989:6)

This distinction between televisual representations of 'out there' and the audience whose 'lives . . . are still substantially here', and the question of what it means for 'our ways of seeing and knowing' (1974/1989:10), is a recurrent theme in Williams' work on television and one which is firmly connected to his critique of technological determinism and cultural pessimism.

At stake for Williams, in conceptual terms, is the defence of a complex understanding of the relationship between technology and culture. In 'Culture and Technology', for example, Williams sees modernism as both a radical rupture with old paradigms and the congealment of these radical movements into new forms of majority culture sustained by a technological determinism and a cultural pessimism (Williams 1989). Opportunities opened up through technology and consequent social developments are met with pessimism by powerful social and political structures and keepers of old systems, who prefer to maintain tradition and therefore rightly see new developments as threats to their majority position. Against this pessimistic and deterministic view, it follows, one needs to look at the gaps, fissures or cracks in technological culture in order to catch a glimpse of alternative futures. Indeed, the world is rarely as homogenous as portrayed by the technophobes and scaremongers. Williams identifies the cracks in dominant culture as sites of resistance in underground popular culture – not as a main feature but in subtle 'jokes and gossip, . . . everyday singing and dancing, . . . occasional dressing up and extravagant outbursts of colour' (Williams 2007:134). Technology offers opportunities for new cultural relationships, Williams writes, although by no means inevitably so. In this way, his critique is levelled not at technology's potential to alienate viewers from the objects on the screen, which he sees as far more complex than simple media effect, but at capitalism's ability to incorporate minority ideas and cultures of resistance into mainstream consumerism. Although alienation may be a consequence of this appropriation, resistance simmers beneath the surface.

The way Williams sees technology as both reproducing cultural conventions by incorporating cultures of resistance into mainstream consumerism *and* as a means to develop new potential futures allows him to establish a framework for theorizing the culture of distance. He outlines this analytical framework, particularly in relation to journalistic representations of conflict in the news, on two scores: firstly, Williams suggests that cultural forms and conventions follow the visual representations of television, which means that conflict may be dramatized in ways that typically reaffirm normative boundaries between the viewers' perception of reality and its construction (see also Blaagaard 2015a). In this way, it becomes difficult for the viewer of televised conflict to relate to the reality represented on the screen. Secondly, representations of conflict are expressed through the journalistic choices of sources to relay their first-hand experience of conflict. The sources used to illuminate and explain – to effectively frame – the issues at stake are often officials and politicians without personal knowledge of the conflict in question, or its devastating implications. On these two scores, then, news reporting of conflicts, Williams claims, produces a culture of distance – a distance not only of geography but of technological form and practice. In what follows we will explore the two issues at stake, while bringing them into a contemporary context of online and social media theories. In so doing, we will argue that the potential of citizen engagement with news imagery promises to open up cracks and fissures in mainstream media framings, thereby engendering new conditions of possibility for empathetic connectivity.

Mediation and dramatization

The first issue in Williams' framework – the disruption of journalistic conventions and reproduction of culture – is a point that resonates in more contemporary contexts of mediation. In an early elaboration of this mode of critique, Jean Baudrillard (2001), in texts such as 'The Gulf War didn't take place' and 'Simulacra and Simulations', emphasized viewers' alienation through ideas of virtuality of television representation. His postmodern idea of simulacra and virtual realities identifies a chasm or divide between *reality* and *virtuality* that is inflicting humanity. Virtuality to Baudrillard is the postmodern condition in which authenticity is lost in a continuous loop of representations and simulations. Thus, he argued, the Gulf War only took place for Western viewers as a representation, a simulation, and therefore was not 'real' but existed only as simulacra. Baudrillard therefore critiques postmodern televised culture by asserting a lack of reality and grounding perpetuated by media representations that results in a loss of meaning. To Baudrillard, the men and women Williams decried as reduced to distant models and figures are the condition in which we find ourselves. They are not representations of something or someone of substance from a distant place and someone from whom we become alienated. Rather they are 'models of a real without an origin or reality: a hyperreal' (2001:169).

In contrast, Williams insisted on the lived experiences of real people and real lives as irrepressible in the face of 'the routines which attempt to control and reduce them' (Williams 2007:134). These routines make up the concept of dramatization, briefly introduced above, that highlights how journalistic conventions move beyond the theatricality and image-consciousness of the public world and signal what he terms 'the dramatization of consciousness itself' (Williams 1974:9). This is

> a way of speaking and of listening, a specific rhythm of a particular consciousness; in the end a form of unfinished, transient, anxious relationship, which is there on the stage or in the text but which is also, pervasively, a structure of feeling in a precise contemporary world, in a period of history which has that familiar and complex transience.
>
> (1974:13)

To Williams, the extent to which viewers incorporate dramatized reality into their everyday lives warrants careful scrutiny. In this focus he is followed closely by more recent scholarship on mediation, as in the work of Roger Silverstone (2007), who develops the concepts of the *mediapolis* and of *proper distance* to understand the interrelationship between the everyday sensorial experience and mediated representations. Silverstone uses the term *proper* to mean a 'distinctive, correct, and ethically and socially appropriate' quality (Silverstone 2004:472) and understands *distance* as both 'spatial and social' (2004:473). These distinctions allow him to conceptualize distance as a moral category that requires not just proximity, which gives no guarantees of empathetic response, but rather properness in order to generate ethical relationships. He thus proposes to use the concept of *proper distance* to interrogate and direct our online and otherwise mediated existence and ethical relationship to others. For him, the concept is a necessary tool in the everyday negotiations of mediated and dramatized life. Proper distance facilitates the exploration of the possibilities and limits of mediated solidarity – a solidarity that goes beyond recognition and personalization of the other (Silverstone 2004, 2007).

Dramatization is then closely related to the idea of mediation (Silverstone 2002; Couldry 2008), which 'captures the multi-directionality of how media may be transforming society' (Couldry 2008:7). Mediation, in particular, adds to Williams' (2007) notion of dramatization by encompassing new technologies that he – although speculating about the possibilities for alternative uses of cable and satellite television systems that would enable an open source system through a common carrier (2007:135) – had no way of foreseeing, such as the saturating power of the Internet and social media. Mediation not only structures our daily lives and the rhythms with which we are served news and information, but it also works on the way we see ourselves in the world. Indeed, some scholars insist that our relationship to networked connectivity now blurs the boundaries between our understanding of what is

authentic and constructed and what is alive and robotic (Turkle 2011; see also Hjarvard 2013; Silverstone 2002). That is, notions of intimacy and solitude are redefined in an always networked and connected world. Mediation of our selves and our lives, then, amounts to a blurring of the boundaries of what is constructed reality and what is authentic and in turn what is perceived to be alive and what is perceived as robotic or technological – and indeed, if that acknowledgement of aliveness is necessary or relevant (Turkle 2011).

Throughout his work, Williams continually returns to the question of reality and mediation or dramatization. He asserts that in the case of the televised Falkland/Malvinas Islands war, which was filled with constructed models and panels in the studio rather than actuality footage of the fighting, it would be pertinent to ask, when the footage arrived, whether there is a difference between the perception of what happens in the footage and the perception of the previously shown library footage of excitingly named missiles streaking towards exercise targets (Williams 1982:15):

> The representation of spectacular destruction may already, in many minds, have blurred the difference between exercise and action, rehearsal and act. For it is one of the corroding indulgences of the culture of distance that to the spectator the effect at least offers to be the same.
>
> (1982:16)

What Williams is arguing, in our reading, is that the culture of distance discourages viewers from connecting the realization of suffering on the ground with its dramatized, hyperreal representation; the two are visually disarticulated, effectively inviting the inference that real suffering is unreal. However, again, in contrast to the thinking of Baudrillard, Williams insists on upholding a distinction between reality and mediated construction. It is when the representation tears open, such as when something unexpected happens during televised coverage, that normalized dramatization suddenly becomes evident. Williams gives the example of Black September's hostage situation during the 1975 Olympics in Munich in which 17 people were killed. He notes that 'what was shocking . . . was that an arranged version of what the world is like was invaded by an element of what several parts of the world are actually like' (1982:24). That is, the conventions were made visible by being juxtaposed in unexpected ways, reality thus jarring badly with the drama of televisual cultures.

Witnesses at a distance

The second issue at stake in Williams' analytic framework for the culture of distance concerns the journalistic choices regarding sources during the Falkland/Malvinas Islands war. As noted above, the sources were made up of politicians and experts, whose deployment in news narratives created

not only an issue of visual or geographical distance, but a distance based in the parliamentarian culture at the time. This distance, Williams argued, raised

> a direct question about the culture of contemporary democracy. Parliament is debating and we listen. Yet none of the representatives, it seems safe to say, could have been *directly* given the views on this unforeseen crisis of those they offer to represent.
>
> (1982:20)

What was needed, he maintains, was the first-hand relay of witnessing or, more precisely, the ethical imperative to bear witness as an epistemic conviction of journalism. What Williams seems to be calling for is answered in today's ubiquitous uses of mobile, digital technologies by the 'amateur' or citizen witness – sometimes described as the 'accidental journalist' – who happens to be in the wrong place at the right time to document what transpires before them (Allan 2013). Increasingly it is the case that the person first on the scene of a newsworthy event with a camera will be an ordinary citizen, thanks in no small part to the growing ubiquity of cheaper, easier-to-handle digital devices, as well as the ease with which ensuing eyewitness accounts and imagery can be uploaded and shared across social-networking sites (Frosh and Pinchevski 2009; Matheson and Allan 2009). Not surprisingly, a corresponding shift in public perceptions has taken place over this past decade, where the spontaneous, spur-of-the-moment contributions of citizens who happen to be present have become so commonplace as to be almost expected (indeed, explanations for the absence of such material would likely be noted in subsequent news reports).

Quite what Williams would have made of today's citizens' active engagement in, with and through digital media is an intriguing question. The challenge of dramatization of which he wrote so eloquently remains a pressing issue, yet now open to renegotiation in ways it would have been impossible for him to imagine. With the growing proliferation of citizen newsmaking, more traditional discourses of professional objectivity are met with new expectations of truthfulness and framing. Within the paradigm of 'I have a voice' (Chouliaraki 2013) rather than professional and impartial reporting, it is the personal and subjective imagery and storytelling that are seen as authentic and therefore truthful (Blaagaard 2013). Chouliaraki argues that journalism is performative and a practice which, on a global scale, calls communities into existence through the particular frames and narratives that guide journalistic and citizen media reporting. However, the performative power of journalism is limited to a certain set of frames within which a news story can be heard and understood. Thus, she contends, Egyptian protesters in 2011 were heard within a frame of people's power that was related to the Occupy Wall St. movement and 'Western' agency. In this sense Egyptian youths with access to education, technology and the Internet had a voice,

one which was recognizable to distant publics. The victims of the Haiti earthquake in 2010, in contrast, remained silenced and were only spoken about within a frame which promoted a humanitarian role for the Western consumers of media. A lesson to take from Chouliaraki's analysis is that media institutions have the ability to incorporate voices, and thereby new ways of expressing dissent, within a known framework that conforms to the expected normality of televisual culture. Such a conclusion speaks to Williams' critique of capitalism's incorporation of minority ideas and cultures of resistance into mainstream consumerism, which is at the core of his argument against the alienation of televised representation. Thus, the logic of mediation that governs our societies to an increasing extent very quickly assimilates the efforts of giving and presenting alternative voices, always threatening to put them into the service of capitalist power (Blaagaard 2015b).

The constant negotiations between the push of conventions and the pull of personal, local connections and ruptures in mediated, visual representations should by now be apparent. As we have already argued, mediation and dramatization call for context-aware analyses as well as analyses that derive from an embodied understanding of perception and location – be it online or otherwise. Williams' analysis of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands conflict is grounded in his embodied and generational perception of conflict awakened by an event that tore the conventions of the time apart and positioned him in a particular location: in the cartography of generation, gender, class, politics and national affiliation, from where he could understand that 'the professionalism being offered [by television] was not of fighting but of exercises and models' (Williams 1982:17). In other words, Williams' awareness of and accountability for his particular location allows him to see and to critique the culture of distance from that vantage point. As a method of inquiry then, dramatization and mediation call on an analysis that draws out and locates power relations intrinsic to an object or event, so as to allow the theorist accountability for his or her position (Rich 1985; Braidotti 2011). This is a cartographic strategy for grounding activism by activating a set of counter-memories and counter-readings, or ways of thinking against the grain of the dominant social representations (Braidotti 2011:271). This kind of 'politics of location' (Rich 1985; Braidotti 2011) is then at the opposite end of the spectrum from the culture of distance: it represents premeditated interventions in the conventions. As a mode of analysing the implications of technologies' relationship to cultural formations, a politics of location speaks to Williams' complex reading of technology as both embedded in social and political power structures and practical devices of communication and interaction.

For purposes of further illustration, we now turn to a poignant example of why the concept of a culture of distance needs to be interrogated anew in light of citizen-mobilized digital technologies, namely the video documentation of a Palestinian photojournalist's death in Gaza in July 2014. With our cartographic strategy, we wish to emphasize how the imagery, the role of witnessing, and the citizen-journalistic commentary and circulation online

challenge this conception of distance in terms of journalistic conventions of mediation as well as in terms of the voices heard.

The death of Rami Rayan

'Palestinian journalist Rami Rayan was killed today in an Israeli air strike on a market in the Shijaiyah neighbourhood of Gaza', the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) announced on 30 July 2014 (CPJ 2014a). Evidently, Rayan, a news agency photographer, was in the crowded market area to document Palestinians shopping for essential supplies during what they thought was a 4-hour 'humanitarian window' ceasefire called by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF). 'People were in the street and in the market, mostly women and kids', eyewitness Salim Qadoum affirmed. 'The area now is like a blood bath, everyone is wounded or killed. People lost their limbs and were screaming for help' (cited in Laub and Enav 2014). Gaza health officials were quoted in press reports stating that Rayan, 25 years of age and wearing a blue Press vest and helmet, was one of at least 16 people killed and over 200 wounded in the strike (also killed in Shijaiyah that day was Sameh Al-Aryan, working for Hamas-affiliated al-Aqsa TV; two other journalists, Mahmoud al-Qasas and Hamid al-Shobaky, were left seriously injured). 'Israel is showing little evidence to back its claim that it tries to avoid civilian casualties, including those of journalists, in its assault on Gaza', CPJ co-ordinator Sherif Mansour maintained in a press release (cited in CPJ 2014a). Israel's 'Operation Protective Edge' had been underway since the 8th of July, with the Palestinian death toll estimated to be 1,300 people (and more than 7,200 wounded), while 56 Israeli soldiers and three civilians had also perished (PA 2014; RWB 2014b). The next day, the Brussels-based International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) released a statement pointing out that eight Palestinian journalists and cameramen had died in Gaza since the bombardment began. 'We express our anger and condemnation at the killing of these journalists, the latest victims in this ongoing cycle of intimidation, violence and murder against media workers in Palestine', IFJ President Jim Boumelha declared; 'Enough is enough: the killing must end now and Israel must be held accountable for these atrocities' (IFJ 2014).

Israeli officials were quick to repudiate allegations that their military's killing of journalists and media workers represented a deliberate policy. During a press conference held a week earlier, an IDF spokesperson had insisted 'we do not target journalists', before adding 'but journalists do sometimes put themselves in risky positions' (cited in CPJ 2014b). Reporters Without Borders (RWB 2014a) had made public its condemnation of the Israeli authorities for human rights violations, as well as specific attacks on information freedom, from the outset of the IDF operation. 'Many journalists have been targeted by the Israeli army', the organization asserted, while '[o]thers have been arrested arbitrarily. And security forces have been conducting raids on media offices' (RWB 2014a). Pressure on the IDF further

intensified in the immediate aftermath of the Shijaiyah strikes due in large part to shocking imagery of what had happened that day rapidly emerging via social media sites. Where Rayan was concerned, his employer, the Palestine Network for Press and Media, posted grisly images of his corpse on its Facebook page. The local Al-Manara media agency posted on its Facebook page a graphic video showing Rayan with his camera amongst ambulance and rescue workers seconds before the first strike; moments later, he is seen lying on his back, dead, on the street with other victims. The agency's cameraman Hamid al-Shobaky had suffered serious shrapnel injuries in the blast, but his assistant picked up his camera to continue recording the harrowing scene unfolding around them (CNN 2014; CPJ 2014c).

The video that was produced of the incident, and which circulated on social network sites and on mainstream media platforms, is 6 minutes and 18 seconds in duration and is distressing for what it shows as well as the sounds it captures.[2] Initially circulating amongst local activists, it was soon relayed into wider international networks. Crediting Mohammed Abu Shaar with uploading it to YouTube, Joey Ayoub, a Lebanese blogger, described in a post for the citizen journalism site Global Voices what it documents. Translating the Arabic into English, he writes:

> At 3:50, we see Ramy Ryan on the floor, lying over a pool of blood. He's dead. A man is telling us 'Look, look. A journalist. Look.' while showing us Ramy Ryan's 'Press' insignia. The man then tells us angrily, 'Show the United Nations! Show the world! Show the Red Cross! Show the Arab traitors! They are all traitors!'
>
> The missiles have stopped and panic breaks. We hear people mourning their dead. From 4:20 onwards, the cameraman shoots the aftermaths of the Israeli strikes.
>
> (Ayoub 2014)

The handheld video's documentation is shaky, jarring, seldom pausing for long on any one aspect before shifting to another, and then on again. There is little sense of self-reflexive composition, in our reading, its arbitrary framing of the scene ostensibly governed by a terrified gaze. Several seconds of blue sky and smoke – from 0:30 to 1:06 – possibly mark the point when al-Shobaky's assistant retrieved the camera from him, which is all the more disturbing for the repeated shouts of 'No more', in English, from those outside the shifting, erratic frame. It is the very rawness of the footage, we would suggest, that underscores its immediacy, its appeal to co-presence at the scene and to affective response. Ayoub's Global Voices report invokes personal pronouns to anchor this purchase, such as '*we* see . . .' and 'the man tells *us* . . .', thereby inviting an emotive pull of shared (albeit mediated) experience.

Tracing the video's wider circulation across social media sites helps to further elucidate the terms on which the mediation of its significance was

negotiated, frequently acrimoniously so. One particularly contentious instance that attracted considerable attention in its own right (including from Ayoub above) occurred when the US author Naomi Wolf expressed her outrage over what the video depicted. Sharing it on her Facebook page, she wrote:

> This is the worst thing I have ever seen in my life. I dare you to watch it from beginning to end. From today. The death of Rami Ryan. Prayers, screaming, no where to hide or shelter, and not enough left alive and uninjured to care for the dead and dying. And the blasts unceasing. God forgive us. We will be expiating this for the next thousand years.
>
> (Wolf 2014)

She then added:

> You absolutely have to watch this if you are in the US being told that Hamas is 'hiding behind these people.' These people as you can see plainly for yourself are simply being hunted down like animals with nothing hiding behind or around them.
>
> (Wolf 2014)

Wolf's efforts to use her Facebook page to help gather, verify (through double-sourcing) and curate crowd-sourced news and information about the crisis sparked a backlash from the company, which suggested her account could be closed for violating its terms of service. 'We received a warning from [Facebook]', she stated – 'Probably due to the graphic nature of the images that were posted by contributors and citizen journalists, of wounded and dying in Gaza' (cited in David 2014).

The targeting of civilians in the Shijaiyah market was the second of two attacks on the neighbourhood that day, the first having taken place hours earlier when Israeli artillery shells decimated a UN school sheltering displaced Palestinian war refugees, leaving at least 16 people dead (Laub and Enav 2014). The day's atrocities focused journalistic attention – the *New York Times* headline was 'Deadly Israeli Strikes Hit UN School, Market Area' (AP 2014) – sparking international condemnation that reverberated across the global mediascape. In so doing, the repressive culture of distance Williams (1982) wrote about with regard to the television news coverage of the Falkland/Malvinas Islands conflict was decisively recast, at least in symbolic terms. Here, human devastation could not be 'managed' or 'contained' within mainstream media framings, no 'antiseptic' (Williams 1982:21) presentation of reality could be forced to respect the limits of what he called – as noted above – the 'latent culture of alienation, within which men and women are reduced to models, figures and the quick cry in the throat' (1982:21). Indeed, it could be argued that the sense of distance collapsed as citizen witnesses on the scene – along with YouTube's 338,000+ distant

viewers – experienced something akin to the feeling of being thrown into the marketplace as the missile attacks detonated.

In what Williams called cracks in the conventions, viewers of the footage were encouraged to experience proximity through social media technology, which afforded opportunities for new cultural relationships. On a further level, what we see happening at 3.50 minutes into the footage is the discovery of the deceased Rayan. Here, his status as a Palestinian photojournalist resonates in wider symbolic terms, we would suggest, due to his personal allegiance with a profession defined, in part, by its normative investment in freedom of expression and the right to report from conflict zones. In this capacity, he represents 'our' interests. In other words, journalists are not only the narrators of wars, of course; they are witnesses – the eyes, ears and factual storytellers situated 'there' on behalf of distant viewers 'here'. The death of Rayan constitutes another rupture of conventions because it challenges the viewers' idea of justice, encapsulated in Westernized appeals to the journalist's right to bear witness (Matheson and Allan 2009; Blaagaard 2013). The significance of his death, then, is positioned within the terms of a Western self-image that demands ethical response (Chouliaraki 2013), while simultaneously re-appropriating its dramatic news value into normalized televisual rhythms and routines.

Conclusion

The video footage showing Palestinians' deaths in the Gaza market that day was tweeted, embedded and blogged about many times over, yet it was the image of Rayan in his capacity as a journalist that became a key symbolic touchstone in Western news coverage. References to the harrowing scene in online reports typically forewarned the viewer that what followed was 'graphic', thereby marking a point of contrast with television news protocols resistant to inviting such a subject position for the anticipated viewer due to the enforcement of strict ideological boundaries. The relative availability of this sort of footage on various platforms was uneven, its perceived journalistic value ascertained via a myriad of factors from one news organization to the next. Real-life footage must always be contained within certain limits, as a general rule, lest it prove too disruptive or unsettling, and thereby call into question tacit norms of professional filtering consistent with 'responsible' framings. Moreover, to the extent that unruly realities must be dramatized into story-telling conventions, the real melds into the priorities shaping its representation. This when, as Williams maintained, the 'representation of spectacular destruction may already, in many minds, have blurred the difference between exercise and action, rehearsal and act'. Indeed, he continues, 'it is one of the corroding indulgences of the culture of distance that to the spectator the effect at least offers to be the same' (1982:16). Evidently, then, citizen witnessing throws into sharp relief the dangers of certain 'corroding indulgences' engendered by professionalized

conceptions of proper distance. Citizen involvement in digital war reporting thus provides possible rupture points, not least by articulating a counter-ethos intent on overcoming the appropriation of the extraordinary into the ordinary in the service of power.

Williams' exploration of the everydayness of the culture of distance, we have argued, provides us with a rich starting point for further research into the cultural dynamics of these visual – and visualizing – contingencies. By explicating his formulation of the normal television experience, and reading it against the grain, we are able to recognize that its virtue lies in its capacity to allow us to look beyond the rigid text–audience dichotomy indicative of so much media effect research on visual and other media. Moreover, by situating this complex activity within an evaluative context, Williams succeeds in highlighting a conceptual pathway through, on the one hand, a deterministic model of the audience as passive onlookers whose thinking is controlled by what they see on their flickering screens and, on the other hand, a model which celebrates an active audience freely identifying with multiple interpretations of visual textualities in a wildly indeterminate manner. As we have seen, his alternative approach resists the analytical separation of the 'mode of address' of visual discourse from its 'decoding' by the viewer. In its place is the recognition that the contradictory social relations involved in the negotiation between reproduction of convention and citizen rupture in representation must be grasped in all of their fluid, and frequently contradictory complexities. The imperatives of visuality, it follows, articulate within certain determinant, but always changing, parameters; that is, they are contingent upon the lived materiality of power relations as they traverse the contested terrain of ordinary cultures.

In rendering problematic the distance between visual technology and the political and cultural space within which it operates, Williams' mode of enquiry signals its lasting value. It is to these spaces that we have sought to direct this chapter's discussion. For in our attempt to demonstrate that in the sustained complexity of his work there is a theoretical basis for a critical reappraisal of the cultural practices that characterize everyday uses of digital visual media, it is this question of how ensuing discourses represent experience and, equally importantly, how these representations are experientially embodied that are, in our view, so crucial for future work on citizen media to pursue. Williams' prescient interventions help us to discern the lived tensions engendered by the paradoxical status of the 'mass' in mass communications systems, that is, the ways in which visual media are stretching to encompass the globe in their search for new realities to reinflect whilst, at the same time, so often serving to insulate us from reality as we watch our private screens. It is at the level of the everyday, in the 'pressures of experience, contact and discovery' (Williams 1958:4), that the exigent nature of this paradox needs to be interrogated in strategic terms.

Notes

1 For Williams, the approach advocated by Marshall McLuhan (1964/2001) is to be read as endorsing this form of technological determinism. Significantly, Williams is careful to avoid collapsing technology with cultural form in his discussion of television: the tensions produced through their interrelationship, particularly with respect to the dominant structure of 'centralized transmission and privatized reception', severely complicate a linear (zero-sum) formulation of intentionality.
2 www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqBZ-JoxhQY (accessed 20 August 2014).

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Part II

Questions of performance and affect

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5 Theatricality and gesture as citizen media

Composure on a precipice

Jenny Hughes and Simon Parry

We are living in a century in which theatrical forms of activism proliferate. From the occupations of the global justice movement to the uprisings across the Arab world and beyond, artists and performance groups have played significant roles in protest events, drawing on bodies, text, image and movement as imaginative projections against the perceived order of things. This chapter explores the theatrical protest 'gesture', taking as its starting point Giorgio Agamben's (2000) characterization of gesture as 'pure means' – refusing the separation of action into means and ends. Gestures of protest in recent times – occupying, swarming, dancing, impersonating, blogging, hacking, tweeting – carry traces of former activist modes, and extend the domains of activism from the public life of the street and the theatre stage, to the private domain of the mobile phone and laptop. We explore a range of these gestural techniques, and drawing on the ideas of Brian Rotman and Paolo Virno propose three gestural grammars of protest: gestures of exception, gestures of domesticity and the ecological gesture. We argue that these grammars figure modes of political subjectivity and relation in a world that renders life precarious and in which there is no place to stand outside.

What contribution can a discussion of theatre and theatricality make to conceptualizing citizen media practices? What figurations of 'citizenship' might emerge from such a discussion? These two questions underpin the exploration of theatrical modes of activism as citizen media in this chapter. In particular, we focus on moments of protest that contest the framing of some bodies as outside of the normative political order and its modes of citizenship. In doing so, we are responding to a historical moment that has witnessed an extraordinary proliferation of protest movements. Specifically, in making imaginative use of bodies, symbols, text, space and mobility, and often but not always directly engaging artist–activists, these movements invite a consideration of theatrical form and the application of analytical approaches from theatre and performance studies. From the occupation of Seattle by an emergent global justice movement in 1999 to the uprisings across the Arab world that led to a million citizens gathering in Tahrir Square in Cairo in 2011, to the protests that

prefigured modes of participatory democracy in Turkey in 2013 and Hong Kong in 2014, protesters have drawn on the medium of theatre to create imaginative projections against the perceived order of things, and as tactical interventions and communicative tools. Forms of protest in recent times – camping, occupying, marching, striking, moving in cells, swarming, dancing, going in disguise, impersonating, playing, staging, chanting, networking, joking, hoaxing, blogging, hacking, texting, tweeting – carry traces of former activist modes, and extend the domains of theatrical activism from the public life of the street and the theatre stage to the private domain of the mobile phone and laptop.[1]

The axiom that contemporary protests draw on theatre and performance to enhance their potency is repeated across explorations of activism in theatre and performance studies as well as social movement studies. From theatre and performance studies, recent collections by Lichtenfels and Rouse (2013) and Spencer (2012) contain important contributions on protest performances, and these, alongside theatre scholarship engaging with the Arab uprisings (see for example Azmy and Carlson 2013), build on a body of work generated by artist–activists and theatre researchers who show the concept of theatre as an activist aesthetic to be a critical concern in theatre and performance studies. This work takes account of the role of play in protest (Shepard 2010, 2011), histories of street performance (Cohen-Cruz 1998), the theatricality of AIDS/HIV activism and the global justice movement (Shepard and Hayduk 2002), and countercultural direct action in the UK (McKay 1998, 1996). The history of thinking about activism in theatre and performance studies extends back through the last century to the practices of the Situationists (Knabb 2006),[2] the radical and alternative theatre movement (Kershaw 1999, 1992), black and minority ethnic theatre movements (Elam 1997), and theatre activism associated with the labour movement and revolutionary workers' struggle earlier in the century (Samuels et al. 1985). Artists and art collectives whose activism might be understood as theatrical or performative continue to extend these histories, as evident in the media sculptures of Ztohoven, the pranks of the Yes Men and the guerrilla events of feminist collectives such as Pussy Riot, to name some of the most prominent examples (see Boyd 2012).[3] In the political sciences and historiography, tropes of theatricality, performance and performativity are also used to understand protest movements, as evident in the interdisciplinary work of Cami Rene Rowe (2013) and Kamran Afary (2009), and the historical overview of political contention offered by Charles Tilly (2008).

Our aim in this chapter is to introduce the notion of *gesture* into this field, so as to focus on the important relationship between bodies and politics – or to be more precise, 'bodies of politics' and theatricality – that underpin the protest performances examined in this work. We deliberately select the term *theatricality*, rather than *performance* or *performativity*, following Josette Féral, who has proposed theatricality as a term to describe the altered state of bodies, times and spaces that arises from a social process of negotiated perception (2002:98):

> a process that recognises subjects in process; it is a process of looking at or being looked at. It is initiated in one of two possible spaces: either

> that of the actor or that of the spectator. In both cases, this act creates a cleft in the quotidian that becomes the space of the other, the space in which the other has a place.

The terms performance and performativity have been useful in developing understandings of spatial, social and subjective phenomena as embodied and discursive constructions, as well as new understandings of political agency. Theatre and theatricality similarly focus on the performance-like character of the social, symbolic and material domains. At the same time, the terms theatre and theatricality demand that special attention is paid to the *techniques*, which might also comprise techniques in conducting life, involved in navigating and shaping such domains. This distinction acts as a guard against thin claims of political efficacy: it is not our intention here to suggest that theatre changes the world, or is ideologically progressive. It also opens up an opportunity to examine how bodies work in relation to each other in contested sites through the manifestation of gestural grammars. Such grammars heighten a sense of alterity and draw attention to the incipient potency of precise figurations of the body and bodies positioned inside events that highlight matrices of social injustice, exclusion and crisis. Here, we draw on explorations of gesture in the work of Giorgio Agamben and Brian Rotman, supported by Virno's grammar of the multitude, to explore three gestural grammars of protest: gestures of exception, gestures of domesticity and the ecological gesture. We argue that these gestural grammars figure modes of political subjectivity and relation in a world that renders life precarious and in which there is no place to stand outside.

In an iconic essay first published in 1935, Marcel Mauss classifies body techniques that sustain life through its course, from birth, through childhood, to adulthood and death. These body techniques are repeated and habitual gestural compositions learned via a process of what he calls 'prestigious imitation' (Mauss 1935/1992:459). We imitate the body techniques of those in whom we have confidence or who have authority, and our gestural repertoires are therefore assembled in relation to and are performative of networks of power that produce the social. Mauss describes how learning the art of climbing mountains produced a capacity to remain composed whilst precariously positioned on a precipice. Through repeated gestures involved in balancing, positioning, lifting and shifting his weight, he learnt how to secure his body whilst teetering on an edge:

> The main utility I see in my erstwhile mountaineering was this education of my composure, which enabled me to sleep upright on the narrowest ledge overlooking an abyss.
>
> (1935/1992:474)

In the exploration of gesture, theatricality and protest that follows here, we are interested in the double notion of composure as a process of remaining steady on a precipice, as well as composition – of authoring and crafting,

with others – bodily responses to threat. We argue that the gestural grammars we describe below exhibit this double sense, by figuring points of justification for the body that might reliably bear its weight during moments of crisis and contention.

Gestures of exception

The wave of demonstrations that followed the shooting of a young black man, Michael Brown, by a white police officer in Ferguson – a suburb of St Louis (US) – on 9 August 2014 featured protesters holding their arms in the air and chanting 'hands up, don't shoot', a striking and emotive embodiment of the reported final stance and words of Michael Brown. Stopped for walking in the street (rather than on the sidewalk), Michael Brown was unarmed, and was shot by a white police officer six times from the front, with two bullets to his head. His lifeless body lay in the street for more than four hours. Watching the protests from the other side of the Atlantic, we saw the gesture of arms held aloft repeated by groups of protestors standing, sometimes kneeling, before lines of militarized police, marching silently down streets, closing down traffic intersections, and at vigils that were held in more than 90 cities in the week following the shooting, including a mass gathering that closed Times Square in New York. The gesture was adopted by the Washington Redskins as they entered the football pitch in late August and likewise by the St Louis Rams in December, and, via a much retweeted image, by hundreds of black students of Howard University, 'staring solemnly at the camera' (Grenoble 2014). These performances of solidarity revealed proliferating ensembles of people united in anger and grief, resoundingly insisting that 'black lives matter'. With arms raised, the torsos of protesters are exposed, ghosting the original atrocity, providing a bodily canvas for the immediate disclosure of any ongoing violence, and directing a sometimes furiously expressed obligation for restraint towards those holding and firing the guns. Dispersed across sites historically associated with the civil rights movement and racial and economic inequality, these intensely charged figures call on broader publics to bear witness, demand that civil law be used for the protection of life, and at the same time lift the veil on an exceptional reality of violence and inequality.[4]

More than a year earlier and six thousand miles east of Ferguson, our attention was caught by another gestural response to atrocity – here, on 17 June 2013, a man stood in silence for eight hours on Taksim Square in Istanbul. Two days beforehand, the square had been the site of a spectacular occupation by thousands of protestors, fighting a redevelopment plan that included a proposal to build a shopping mall on one of the few green spaces in the city, Gezi Park. The man, a professional choreographer named Erdem Gündüz, stood on the square after protestors had been removed by the city's police using tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets and water cannon. Amnesty International reported that five people died and 8,000 were injured during the course of the protests, with 'strong evidence' linking three deaths to 'abusive

use of force' by the police (Amnesty International 2013:6). Gündüz stood facing a portrait of the founder of the nation state of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, which adorned the vacant Opera House (alongside protest posters and flags from the occupation). An 'icon of modernism', this prominent performance venue closed in 2008, and was itself threatened with destruction as part of the development plan (Ilter 2014:132). Casually dressed in a loose white shirt and trousers, with his hands in his pockets, Gündüz stood meditatively, eluding the prohibition on mass gathering in this space. He attracted the attention of passers by and the broadcast and social media, with images transmitted via #duranadam and #standingman quickly becoming global twitter trends. Within hours this gesture was being replicated by hundreds in Taksim Square, and across the world by people standing quietly, sometimes opposite Turkish embassies (as in Washington DC). Here, a chorus of bodies joined in a gesture of standing, a fleshy mass echo of the thousands violently evicted from the square, silently resisting the restrictions on democratic rights brought about by the decisions and actions of authorities in Turkey.[5]

In his short essay, 'Notes on Gesture', Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben proposes gesture as a third mode of practice, distinct from Aristotle's often cited distinction between *poeisis* (practice that is a means to an end, as in production) and *praxis* (a means that is an end in itself). For Agamben, gesture is a pure form of mediality wherein 'nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured or supported' (2000:57). He argues that modernist cinema, literature and dance carry a charged potential to restore the body within a society that has 'lost its gestures' as a result of scientific and technological practices that alienate the body (2000:49). Agamben sees such lost gestures as paradigmatic of a biopolitical domain founded upon a politics of exception, in which the body is precariously and permanently positioned on a precipice between inclusion and exclusion in the political order. For him, gestures are bodied and repeatable interruptions of the everyday which reveal the taking place of communication, existing somewhere between speaking and the yet to be spoken. As Lauren Berlant has explained, gestures are figurations that emerge when language cannot find a form for its object, and can create a break in time and space. A gesture is 'a performance of a shift that could turn into a disturbance . . . holding the present open to attention and unpredicted exchange . . . it makes the smallest opening, a movement-created space' (Berlant 2011:198–9). For Agamben, by materializing a pure form of mediality, gestures constitute a figurative repertoire for the mass experience and potential held outside of the political order proper, and therefore open up to an ethical domain. However, this radically open mediality is itself infused by the shifts, breaks and interruptions that it produces (Agamben 2000:59):

> The gesture is, in this sense, communication of a communicability. It has precisely nothing to say because what it shows is the being-in-language of human beings as pure mediality . . . the gesture is essentially always a

> gesture of not being able to figure something out in language; it is always a gag in the proper meaning of the term, indicating first of all something that could be put in your mouth to hinder speech as well as in the sense of the actor's improvisation meant to compensate for loss of memory or an inability to speak.

The reference to the gag evokes associations of stalling, stifling, prohibiting and suppressing, as well as choking, expelling or vomiting, and joking or improvising, as in physical or verbal comedy. The 'hands up don't shoot' gesture *gags*, in the sense that it obstructs power by insisting that all life be permitted inside the political order: 'black lives matter', there is no exception to the rule. At the same time, the gesture reveals the violence of the political domain proper by reproducing the witnessed posture of a young man killed whilst adopting the gesture of surrender. This gesture counters the civil – rather than civilized – powers on the street, corrupted by historic racism, by presenting an overarching ethical order associated with this universally recognized posture. The standing man offered a physical gag, as in a joke or prank, that powerfully wrong-footed the prohibition against gathering in the square: this is and is not a protest at one and the same time. Here, the gesture is a brilliantly pure mediality which materialized whilst immediately evacuating the protest form that it adopts. Like 'hands up don't shoot', it insists on the right of all bodies to gather and stand in public space. Importantly then, these gestures exist on the cusp between a secure and orderly figuring of experience (there is nothing uncertain about the universal gesture of surrender, after all) and the precipice – the threat, disorder and crisis accompanying social inequalities and injustices that inhabit the material world. In the same way, theatre occupies a space between presentation and representation, being and meaning, and Mauss's gestural art of sleeping upright whilst overlooking an abyss rests on a point of balance between living and dying.

In their introduction to the work of Agamben, Clemens et al. (2008) describe his preoccupation with the enigma inherent in all communication, which he explains as that component in each communicative act that cannot account for itself, that produces a gag, resulting from a perpetual fracture between the signifier and signified. As Agamben puts it, 'the enigma belongs to the sphere of the apotropaic, that is, to a protective power that repels the uncanny by attracting it and assuming it within itself' (in Clemens et al. 2008:9). This notion of the apotropaic returns us to theatricality and its production of alterity – its multiplication of doubles – as described by Féral (2002). The apotropaic can be understood here as restorative and protective, and the uncanny as the terrifying emergence of the unfamiliar in the context of the familiar where – according to Freud – a subject defends itself against terror by creating a double into which the self can be projected and protected. A gesture composes the body on a precipice by holding it in an attitude of attention – standing alone, holding arms aloft. Each gesture

reveals the precarity of the body's staking of its claim, but also materializes a bodily form that restores a sense of order. Gestures such as those discussed here call others to register their connection through imitation and replication, disseminating an intention to restore, protect and defend. As such, protest gestures call on the apotropaic potency of theatricality to support the composure of bodies engaged in gesturing towards a different world at the same time as facing the present, in all of its terrors.

Gestures of domesticity

In August 2011, two bus stops in Manchester (UK) were redecorated, the first made into a child's bedroom and the second a picturesque suburban garden. For the child's bedroom (Figure 5.1), the plastic seat was adorned with a pink duvet and pillow and glass surrounds covered in Disney wallpaper and a child's scribbled drawings. There was a framed painting of Mickey Mouse on the wall, and a window with curtains opening on to a Disneyland scene. A red rug on the pavement was interwoven with some text, taken from a leaked memo from Conservative MP Eric Pickles (the then UK Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government), which read: 'changes to the housing benefit system could see 40,000 families lose their homes'.

The second bus stop was decorated as a garden, with green AstroTurf surrounded by a white picket fence and a window revealing plants on the windowsill inside. This bus stop had a foreclosure notice fixed to it, with the



Figure 5.1 'Boom/Bust'. (Courtesy of Upper Space).

following text: 'This week over 600 families will have their homes repossessed by the same banks that caused the financial crisis'.[6] An example of street art rather than activist performance, this intervention fits Féral's description of the theatrical and Agamben's notion of gesture, in that it introduces a break in the everyday that captures our attention and lacks a proper end or means. The bus stop art intervention – called 'Boom/Bust' – was part of the *Home* project, and was created by street artists TerrorWrist[7] and Isaac Shnewton in collaboration with young people experiencing homelessness in the city. It was one of a number of public art interventions created by Upper Space, a network of artists, activists and academics who work across non-commercial art, community and activist domains. The bus stop protest as an intervention operated in a space between proper and improper politics, occupying a public site intended to facilitate movement around the city, and creating an interruption that invited passers by to consider the impact of massive public spending cuts and changes to the housing benefit system on vulnerable communities. The introduction of the notorious bedroom tax, for example, caused extraordinary financial stress for many people already living in economically precarious conditions by cutting payments to those in social housing deemed to have a spare room, a move which threatened many with the loss of their homes (Moffatt et al. 2015).

The act of decoration here exhibits a gentle and ironic gesture that renovates and revitalizes mundane spaces in the city and infuses them with ideas of home, domesticity, care for living and comfort. We found several other examples of this gesture of creating a domestic world in public space over the course of our research for this chapter. They feature among the contributions from artists, activists and researchers to a collaborative blog set up to support the research,[8] and include instances of activist performance that pivoted on gestures of eating, planting, knitting, cleaning and making tea, drawing on the everyday and routine to compose habitable worlds and in the process create spectacular public interventions. One contribution described 'yarnbombers' in Northern Ireland, for example, *détourning* the discourses of violence habitually associated with the region. Yarnbombers are masked knitters who venture out overnight and adorn street furniture with colourful and vibrant, knitted and crocheted fabric; they are linked to a broader movement of 'craftivism'. There is also a description of a piece of absurd drama performed by members of a mosque in York who confronted far-right English Defence League protestors seeking to exploit the tensions created by the brutal killing of off-duty soldier Lee Rigby in London in 2013 by Islamic extremists. Members of the mosque brought protesters cups of tea and engaged them in conversation. This polite gesture of making tea also appeared as part of an eco-activist venture that brought together performance activists from Canada, Wales, Australia and the UK in a slow activist performance. Here, herbs to make tea were grown and community groups invited to interactive performances and tea parties. Notable too is the

domestic labour of an artist–activist known as 'vacuum cleaner'. During the 3-month period leading up to and following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, he cleaned urban space – including Wall Street in New York and the commercial heartlands of London – with a recycled 1950s model vacuum cleaner. Wearing a bright yellow cleaning contractor tabard with 'cleaning up after capitalism' on the back, his durational performance repeated a gesture of care for the environment in a way that, through juxtaposition, critiques militarization as well as a consumer driven, throwaway society. These gestures – cleaning, planting, making tea, knitting, decorating – produce quotidian clefts that draw attention to a desire to remake the world in a way that exhibits care for all forms of life.[9]

Interestingly then, these gestures map onto Agamben's biopolitical paradigm of exception, in that they are figurative responses to ecological and economic crises that demand the renewal of habitual practices of sharing the resources to secure, support and sustain life. A turn to Paolo Virno's (2004) book *Grammar of the Multitude* further draws out the significance of these domestic and decorative gestures of protest. Virno uses the term *multitude* to describe the forms of life created by conditions of post-Fordism – being-many, estranged, public, virtuosic, indefinite and indeterminate, composite, relational, networked and plural. Positioned against the notion of a people, which secures itself by creating a division between a safe inside and unknown outside, the multitude is instead exposed to a reality that is constantly in a state of transformation, and here, the uncanny – a sense of being unhomed, estranged and alienated – is immanent. Virno describes common places, that is, forms of communication that are in common (rather than specialist, and so open to many rather than a few). Echoing the discussion of the protective and restorative capacities of gesture above, Virno argues that these common places are open, conspicuous, virtuosic (that is, performance-like) practices which can become the 'apotropaic resource of the contemporary multitude' (2004:37). The gestural grammars of domesticity associated with the protest actions described here are examples of such apotropaic resources and exemplify something of a politicized common place. Like 'hands up, don't shoot' and the standing man, these gestures produce a *gag* in the appearances of order, distributing alterity and inflecting all 'bodies' in their domain of reference with uncertainty. They theatricalize space and time and reveal how communication takes place in every construction – linguistic, spatial, social, political. However, they are also secured, importantly, not by a theatre of cruelty but by quiet and repeated gestures of world-making, gestures that offer a speculative transformation of spaces of estrangement into spaces of critical care and reciprocity.

But there is more to say about the contribution of the theatrical here, as these gestures do not occupy the political domain proper – they are determinedly *improper*. A theatrical gesture is more than a gesture that plays a technical role in facilitating communication, complementing other communicative practices. The gesture of decorating, for example, maps onto the notion

of theatre as an unproductive, inauthentic, non-utilitarian, decorative art form with accompanying associations of superficiality, frivolity, banality and emptiness. Such associations emerge from what Barish (1981) refers to in the title of his book as an 'anti-theatrical prejudice' that appears across historical times and spaces, at least in European and Anglo-American trajectories. It is, perhaps, the emptiness of the theatrical gesture that underlies its political potential. Slavoj Žižek has argued that political systems require not just the observance of written laws but also 'the phantasmic support of the public symbolic order' (1997:28). To enlist this support, the system has to offer choices that might be detrimental to its order and are therefore not meant to be chosen. Žižek calls these opportunities to choose the impossible 'empty gestures' (1997:28). Virno's speculation about idle talk and vacuous chatter of the multitude echoes this proposition, infusing it with political potential. For Virno, the practice of language (and we include gesture here) is '*inter-psychic*, social, public' (Virno 2004:77; emphasis in original). He moves on to reframe idle talk, dismissed by Heidegger as a characteristic of inauthentic life, as the emotional tonality of the multitude – which is also pragmatic, curious, adaptive, fleeting, performative, unproductive, lacking in foundation: 'nevertheless, this same lack of foundation authorises invention and the experimentation of new discourses at every moment' (2004:90). As such, empty gestures such as standing in a place where we are permitted to stand or decorating a bus stop might in fact, by taking the opportunity to choose the impossible, be creative of a common, if speculative place that is inclusive of plural forms of life.

Ecological gestures: Being beside ourselves

A key dimension of the multitude's affective experience is the feeling of being a stranger. This 'not feeling at home' (Virno 2004:34) emerges from an attempt to locate oneself in a constantly transforming world. In this final section, we explore the potential of the theatrical gesture to articulate *and share* this experience. The sense that global ecologies, even *geo*logies, are being shaped by human activities has caused some to term our current geological era the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2002). Composure on our contemporary precipice requires not just gestures of sharing with other humans but also with the non-human in a way that is aware of the paradoxes of any attempt at restorative human performance (Kershaw 2007). Echoing Virno, eco-philosopher Timothy Morton has called the non-human the 'strange stranger' (2010:17), recognizing the potential for life forms to become stranger as more is known about them. For Morton, intimacy with the strange stranger requires what he calls 'dark' ecological thinking (2010:17). This is a mode of thought that places the human within the ecology being investigated, such that nature/culture distinctions become blurred and constructions of nature as beautiful, warm, cuddly, sublime, wild or fearful are

problematized. The ecological gestures that we describe below perhaps prefigure what Morton calls dark ecological thinking in that they both conjure the strange stranger and create common places for living and being (rather than just thinking) by setting humans and non-humans in new relations to each other.

Ecological activism has a long history of human gestures of intimacy towards the non-human. Gestures of solidarity with other species have been figured by anti-roads protesters locking themselves to trunks or branches and tunnelling under the earth to place their bodies in the way of machines undertaking forest clearances (McKay 1996), or activists dressing up in animal costumes (Kershaw 2007:268–72). Such gestures may be criticized for their sometimes sentimental or sensationalist politics, but they can also generate uncanny disturbances of the quotidian. The artist–activist collective Ultimate Holding Company (UK) estranged intimate human/non-human relations in their 2009 *ExtInked* project, in which they tattooed 100 volunteers with botanical, zoological and mycological drawings of endangered species. One of the volunteers who was tattooed with an image of the Tall Thrift – Armeria maritima subsp. elongata (Hoffm.), Figure 5.2 – has blogged about her feeling of sadness for the general lack of interest in the plant and has subsequently planted it in her allotment (UHC Collective 2010; Parish 2012).

Here, theatrical protest gesture combines with a practice of citizen science to re-mediate botanical knowledge. Whilst fostering certain kinds of intimacy between professional scientists and non-human species, the media through which authorized scientific knowledge is produced are increasingly



Figure 5.2 'Tall Thrift'. (Courtesy of Anatomy Projects).

disembodied and tend to exclude non-scientists from their production. UHC's combination of drawing and tattooing constitutes an embodied critique of the mediation of knowledge by institutional science. The gesture of tattooing and carrying the tattoo on the body evokes interest in and creates a permanent and embodied relation to non-human life for volunteers and their networks. Here, the human is figured by the non-human and vice versa, giving form to a strange solidarity and alternative ecological relation.

In a related gestural intervention into ecological politics, artist–activists Liberate Tate have been conducting an annual series of protests against BP's sponsorship of the UK's Tate art galleries. Starting after the Deep Water Horizon spill in 2010, these have included several actions in Tate's major London venues: *Crude* (2010), where BP's sunflower logo was squirted in black paint on the floor of Tate Modern by a circle of fifty performers; *Human Cost* (2011), in which a naked man curled up on the floor of Tate Britain was covered in oil by black-clad figures; and *The Gift* (2012), in which a one-and-a-half tonne wind turbine blade was forcibly donated to the gallery by a group of activists who carried it in and left it in the Tate Modern turbine hall. Here, the theatrical materializations of oil 'make strange' the gallery spaces that are normally full of oil paintings. The gestures embody relations with far off people, places and ecologies that are in the process of being destroyed by BP's extraction processes. These actions – a circle of people stamping on tubes of paint in a deliberately ritualized yet crude gesture, pouring oil onto a human body and carrying a huge turbine blade into a gallery – all operate within artistic spaces and yet disavow their status as art. This time the gesture is a *détournement* of artistic as well as scientific media.

A key challenge of ecological politics, which UHC Collective and Liberate Tate grapple with in these gestures against mass species extinctions and runaway global fossil fuel consumption, concerns scale. The strangeness of political objects here arises partly as a consequence of their size or duration in relation to the human, as environmental change takes place on both planetary and nano scales over long periods of time. Referring to these political challenges, Morton has called the contemporary period 'the time of hyperobjects' (2013:98). Capitalism, global warming and oil are examples of hyperobjects in that they are massive, spatially and temporally distributed and, like other life forms, become stranger the more we discover about them (scientifically or otherwise). The protest gestures described here are embodied recompositions of our 'hypocrisies' – our inability to find a metalanguage or a place to stand outside – in the time of the hyperobject (2013:6). If, as Morton would have it, the world itself is 'an aesthetic construct that depends on things like underground oil and gas pipes', then ecological protest gestures critical of the institutions of science or art complicit in the construction of this world might propose other kinds of relation to the non-human planet (2013:106).

While the body is central to gesture's incipient power, in the time of the hyperobject and the multitude, the potential of gesture to be mediated through different technologies is important to the way it produces common places inclusive of the human and the non-human. The digital memes #HandsUpDontShoot and #duranadam both give form and are formed by embodied gestures. Other modes of digital hacktivism can also be understood in terms of gesture. Ricardo Dominguez of Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g lab regards his group's work as characterized by gesture and theatricality (Fusco and Dominguez 2003; Nadir 2012). Electronic Disturbance Theater 2.0/b.a.n.g lab have staged virtual sit-ins and produced mobile-phone apps such as the Transborder Immigrant Tool (TBT). The tool is both a medium for the performance of recorded poetry and an app to help migrants crossing the US/Mexico border by pointing them to water via a GPS system. The gesture originates in the digital, prefiguring its embodied connection with the migrant or other recipient.

Brian Rotman has called the modes of mediation generated by digital technologies, including successive generations of moving image media and emergent motion capture technologies, 'gesturo-haptic' (2008:27). Crucial to the politics of gesturo-haptic mediation for Rotman is the way that it facilitates the assembly and re-assembly of gesture through networks and other collectives, producing new modes of subjectivity. These developments privilege touch, movement, immersion, simulacra and collectivity and a flow of encounter, with the world that moves sideways or parallel to, and multiplies, disperses and intensifies, rather than moves forward, imitates or reproduces. Rotman argues that the metaphysics of God and Mind are disembodied 'media-effects' of the written alphabet, and if so, then a move from 'alphabetic culture' to the 'gesturo-haptic' leads to a distributed and collective subjectivity, 'a para-human agency which experiences itself as an "I" becoming "beside itself"' (2008:134). A hopeful sense of the para-human might open up a space for an inclusive political subjectivity, offering ways of imagining 'becoming' and 'alterity' that go beyond the human. The practices of Electronic Disturbance Theatre 2.0 are experiments in para-human activism and the virtual gesture. Their work is theatrical, in Féral's terms, as a cleft in the quotidian and also in the way it provokes both derision and violent opposition – typically paradoxical reactions to the theatrical gesture (Nadir 2012). Here, theatricality turns out to be a gesturo-haptic form that predates the alphabet in Rotman's gesturology and also now operates across multiple technologies.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an examination of activist theatrical gestures through three broad and overlapping categories: from gestures that make use of the human form to contest a politics of exception, to domestic gestures that open up the social, to ecological gestures that create common

places for co-existence with the non-human. It is important to restate that we are not making any special claims for gesture or theatre in terms of political efficacy here, and these three categories in no way offer a comprehensive overview of possible and existing protest figures and forms. The aim has rather been to argue for the place of gesture and theatricality in any discussion of citizen media as modes through which citizenship might be understood and practised. Our argument also resists the tendency for theatrical gestures to be ignored on account of their decorativeness or emptiness, for the theatrical to be disregarded as mere frivolity and for unhelpful dichotomies of real/authentic versus unreal/inauthentic mediation. Standing, raising hands, cleaning, decorating a bus stop, carrying a tattoo, squirting paint and pointing to water are gestures that create a disturbance and make a common place. Such gestures hold potential as apotropaic modes of representing and experiencing life in relation and therefore stake a claim for their reframing as potent contributions to protest movements past and present.

Notes

1 The research that underpins this chapter also generated a special issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* (Volume 23, Issue 3, published in August 2015). The special issue includes an introduction that reframes the argument we present here for readers from theatre and performance studies, and presents research articles and short documents that consider gesture in relation to a diverse array of protests, including histories of women's protest performance, performance art responses to incidents of sexual violence in India and the US, the theatrical civility of Critical Mass bicycle rides, documentary theatre in Cairo following the Arab uprisings, and the theatricality of student labour and social somatics as a mode of community performance activism. We thank the publishers, Taylor & Francis, for allowing us to reproduce some material from the introduction of the special issue here.

2 The Situationists International (1957–1972) were a network of intellectuals and artists inspired by the historical avant-garde and post-war Marxist oriented cultural theory, predominantly based in Paris and playing a key role in the May 1968 uprisings. They generated a series of concepts, documents and interventions that sought to *détourne* the deadening and alienating impact of capitalist systems of production and labour on everyday life.

3 Ztohoven are an anonymous arts collective based in the former Czech Republic, who come together to create spectacular hacks of public spaces, including media spaces (see www.ztohoven.com/). The Yes Men have carried out a series of pranks by impersonating corporate agents; for example, impersonating a representative of Dow Chemicals and announcing via a BBC World Television programme that Dow takes full responsibility for the 1984 Bhopal tragedy (see theyesmen.org and yeslab.org). The 'Beautiful Trouble: A toolbox for the revolution' website provides a compendium of artist–activist collectives and creative tactics for protest (see beautifultrouble.org). All accessed 27 January 2015.

4 For a fuller account of the original shooting of Michael Brown, see Amy Davidson (2012). For a critical examination of the Grand Jury decision, see Mirzoeff (2014).

5 A video of Gündüz's protest performance was available on YouTube until recently (when the account associated with it was terminated). It is notable – among other reasons – for the harassment Gündüz received from men who seem to be

undercover police early in the action. Original link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvucCQpZeHA (accessed 19 November 2014). A storify capturing the reproduction of the gesture in the square and elsewhere in the world is available at https://storify.com/ctvnews/turkey-s-standing-man-becomes-symbol-for-ongoing-p (accessed 19 November 2014).

6 For a report on the intervention, see www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/local-news/all-change-with-bus-stop-protest-869200 (accessed 4 September 2015).

7 TerrorWrist created the sign that renamed Paternoster Square, the home of the London Stock Exchange and site of Occupy London, 'Tahrir Square', in solidarity with the uprisings in Egypt and across the Middle East; see www.invisiblemadevisible.co.uk/2011/10/terrorwrist-occupy-london-stock.html (accessed 19 November 2014).

8 https://activistperformance.wordpress.com (accessed 27 January 2015).

9 See our collaborative blog project https://activistperformance.wordpress.com, and in particular the contributions by Alison Jeffers (knit), Roger McGinty, and Lisa Woynarski and Bronwyn Preece (make tea). For 'clean', see Hughes (2011:140–2).

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6 Nanodemonstrations as media events

Networked forms of the Russian protest movement

Evgenia Nim

Translated by Ksenia Gusarova

Nanodemonstrations first became part of the Russian protest campaign for fair elections in 2012. Originating in the northern town of Apatity, a wave of doll protests – demonstrations and other citizen actions staged by using Lego dolls and soft toys – swept over many Russian cities. Replacing humans, toys acted as Latour's actants, with nanodemonstrations offering a perfect example of things striking back (Latour 2000). This symbolic protest, which involved occupying minimal urban public space, quickly spilled over into virtual space and became a media event. The media, including social media, worked as a multiplier of not only visual and verbal representations of the nanodemonstration as a new form of protest but of the performance itself. The staging of nanodemonstrations, now organized as media events, soon spread to many Russian cities. Focusing on the mutual transformations of the real and the virtual, or their fusion, which when replicated manifold recalls Jean Baudrillard's notion of 'simulacrum', this chapter examines potential theoretical models and frameworks that can be deployed to analyse similar mediatized and theatrical forms of civil resistance.

Nanodemonstrations, or toy protests, became part of the repertoire of the Russian protest movement in winter 2011–2012, amid mass mobilizations against the results of the parliamentary elections held in December. The protesters believed the election results to have been falsified and the ruling party, United Russia, to have gained parliamentary majority in an unfair way. Angry urbanite protests everywhere took on playful forms, turning into ironic public performances. Unlike a revolution, 'a business whose seriousness verges on gloom' (Arkhangelskiy 2013:162), this was rather a 'laughing non-revolution' – creative, witty, intelligent, but laying no claims to actual dismantling of the dominant political system. Nanodemonstrations became prominent instantiations of this 'laughing non-revolution' and, whenever the local authorities refused to allow activists to hold ordinary human protests, flash mobs using toys were organized as an alternative. Having first arisen in

the northern town of Apatity, a surge of such toy protests swept across many Russian cities. The Siberian town of Barnaul soon gained worldwide fame as the capital of nanodemonstrations, with *Forbes Magazine* including nanodemonstrations in Barnaul on its list of 'The 12 loudest art protest actions in Russia'.[1] These actions were covered by major Western mass media: *The Guardian, The Independent, BBC, Reuters, The New York Times, NBC, France 24* and *Der Spiegel*, among many others. Hundreds of Internet users posted photos of toy protesters on their blogs and on social network pages. Following the flash mobs in Apatity and Barnaul, toy protests were held in a dozen other Russian cities: Izhevsk, Irkutsk, Kazan, Krasnodar, Samara, Sankt-Petersburg, Omsk, Penza, Tomsk, Rostov-on-Don, Ulan-Ude and Ufa. This form of creative protest was also exported to Belarus, with two nanodemonstrations organized in Minsk on 10 and 23 February 2012, and one organized in Zaslavl on 27 February 2012.

What does the phenomenon of nanodemonstrations, popularized both in concrete urban space and in the virtual space of media communication, consist of? What theoretical approaches can be used to describe and interpret it? In what follows, I consider the Russian nano-protest as a mediatized form of civil resistance. My analysis proceeds from the assumption that the mediatization of social movements, including urban protest, is a manifestation of a more fundamental process of mediatization of society and culture. The concept of *mediatization* was initially developed in German and Scandinavian scholarship (Hepp 2013; Hepp and Krotz 2014; Hjarvard 2013; Krotz 2007; Lundby 2009, 2014; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2008), whereas Anglo-American scholars (Altheide 2013; Couldry 2008; Silverstone 2005) preferred the term *mediation*, investing it partly with the same meaning as their colleagues from continental Europe. Today, as a result of the globalization of academe, *mediatization* has ceased to be 'a clumsy neologism in English' (Livingstone 2009:5); instead, its increased currency is regarded as 'part of a paradigmatic shift within media and communication research' (Hepp et al. 2015:3). The debates it has generated demonstrate the lack of unanimity in defining it as a phenomenon, leading some to argue that the explanatory power of the developing theory of mediatization is not altogether obvious (Ampuja et al. 2014; Deacon and Stanyer 2014). Nevertheless, most participants in the debate agree that the media is a growing factor in shaping social and cultural change and that it exercises considerable influence over the practices of other institutions in society. My adoption of mediatization as a general conceptual framework in the current study proceeds from the same assumptions and recognizes that *mediatization* does not supersede the basic term *mediation*, as Hjarvard argues (2008:114):

> Mediation describes the concrete act of communication by means of a medium in a specific social context. By contrast, mediatization refers to a more long-lasting process, whereby social and cultural institutions and modes of interaction are changed as a consequence of the growth of the media's influence.

As far as contemporary protest movements are concerned, mediatization does not simply mean the self-evident fact of mass media coverage of protests or protesters' willingness to employ media resources – these processes are encompassed in the basic notion of mediation. The specific meaning of mediatization lies in the way protest actions are organized with due regard to the requirements of 'media logic' (Altheide and Snow 1979; Altheide 2013) and how they are shaped to fit media formats. Using Russian nanodemonstrations as a case in point, I demonstrate that protest events are increasingly being produced and directed as drama or performance: they strive to be mediagenic and newsworthy. Indeed, I would argue, such events do not exist outside their representations in the media, meaning that the events themselves are constructed at the same time as their media representations, and through them. This is what is meant by the term 'media events' – a concept that is close to Baudrillard's simulacra (Fiske 1994). A nanodemonstration as a media event will be examined here as hyperreal, discursive and networked.

In discussing the mediatization of protest, it is important to clarify what we mean by the media. The media is traditionally understood to consist first and foremost of the technologies that allow the expansion of communication in time and space: print media, the radio, TV and the Internet. In addition, the media is a social institution embodied in particular actors and practices of production and consumption of symbolic forms. The theory of mediatization articulates the transformative nature of the media 'as a modifier of communication' (Krotz 2009:28). And since communication is the basis of human life, it can be argued that the media constructs (or even simulates) our social and cultural worlds. It is against this set of assumptions that I conclude, in my analysis of Russian nanodemonstrations, that the media is able to generate models of repeatedly reproducible events in which reality and image are merged seamlessly.

Nanodemonstrations

Chronicle of events

I now turn to the chronicle of events[2] that led to the Siberian city of Barnaul becoming known as 'the capital of nanodemonstrations' and commanding the attention of the world press. Here, as in many other Russian cities, protests took place in December 2011 against the falsification of the results of parliamentary elections. This all-Russian protest movement for fair elections was dubbed the 'Snow Revolution', the 'Russian Winter' or the 'Slavic Winter' by Western mass media.

The protest actions that took place in Barnaul were not sanctioned by the local authorities, and some of the protestors were arrested. In deciding to abandon the idea of traditional human protests temporarily following this crackdown, Barnaul activists were inspired by like-minded protestors in the Northern town of Apatity, where on 10 December 2011 a flash mob

involving Kinder Surprise toys was organized. Apatity activists created an event that they referred to as a *nanodemonstration* (наномитинг) on the social network *VKontakte*, a platform popular with young Russians. The Description section of the event explained that:

> Поскольку официальных разрешений на митинг в Апатитах нет, то демонстрантов будут изображать игрушки из киндер-сюрпризов. Они не запрещены к выставлению, их не разгонят:)
>
> Gloss: In the absence of an official permit for a demonstration to be held in Apatity, demonstrators will be represented by Kinder Surprise toys. There is no prohibition against the display of toys, and hence they will not be driven away:)[3]

The idea of a toy protest was a novelty in the history of the Russian protest movement. This, and the fact that it was easy to put into practice, partly account for its popularity. This was not just a street performance of an insurrection of toys, but a *nanodemonstration*. The neologism is an ironic play on the image of Russia as a country of nanotechnologies, an image that is actively promoted in Russian mainstream media. It builds on the widespread use of the prefix *nano-* by Russians who are critical of the government, especially of its technological and other national projects, to create new words. The caption to a poster parody that appears on the nanodemonstration website testifies to this: 'Инновации? Нанотехнологии? Получи наномитинг!' (Innovations? Nanotechnologies? Get a nanodemonstration!).

The Apatity flash mob of toys was covered by both local and national mass media. The glossary of memes created in the course of the national protest movement in 2011–2012, compiled by the popular magazine *Afisha*, includes *nanodemonstration* – the term created by Apatity activists – as a meme and describes the phenomenon as 'самая обаятельная реакция на запрет митинга властями' (the most charming reaction to the authorities' ban on protest).[4] And yet, media coverage of the toy protests that took place later in Barnaul far surpassed the level of attention received by Apatity, perhaps because the toy flash mob organized in Apatity did not attract the attention of the authorities, whereas the local administration in Barnaul noticed the action and tried to ban it. It was as a result of this conflict between the protestors and the local administration, which at times took on tragicomic forms, that a rather amusing story made its way into the news and was picked up by the international mass media.

The story began on 7 December 2011, when Barnaul activists created the Barnaul Civic Movement group (members of the group later came to call themselves 'Decembrists') on the social network *VKontakte*.[5] Following the example of their brothers-in-arms from Apatity, they posted an announcement of two nanodemonstrations being planned on the group page, with the coordination of protest actions then carried out through social networks. The first

attempt at a nanodemonstration took place on 7 January 2012 (almost a month after the protest action in Apatity), next to the Drama theatre. The second took place a week later, in the same place. Both events were attended by mini-protesters of plastic and plush; the bigger demonstration on 14 January (Figure 6.1) involved 170 toy 'participants'. Hares, tigers, hippos, mice and Lego minifigures were seen holding miniature placards reading: Я за чистые выборы (I am for clean elections), Выборы есть – выбора нет (There are elections, but there is no choice), Вор должен сидеть в тюрьме, а не в Кремле (A thief should be in jail, not in the Kremlin), Терпение не резиновое (Our patience isn't elastic), Мишек на север (Bears – to the north),[6] Всю Власть на самолет и в Апокалипсис! (Authorities, get on a helicopter and go to the Apocalypse), and so on. Next to these slogan-bearing toys a Lego-Town was installed on a sledge, with the Lego figurines on the left representing honest and active nano-Lego-citizens and those on the right representing corrupt politicians and passive voters. Organizers also printed and distributed a leaflet entitled 'Сказка о честных выборах' (A Tale of Honest Elections) among passers-by.

Both events attracted keen interest from the police, and what interests the police automatically gets the attention of the press; hence, media response was guaranteed. The local police accused the organizers of using 'new technologies' and asked the prosecutor's office to assess whether nanodemonstrations were non-sanctioned public events whose organizers may be charged with breaking the law. The prosecutor's office advised that they were public events, and that they could not be held without permit from the local authorities.



Figure 6.1 Second Nanodemonstration in Barnaul, 14 January 2012.
Source: Vkontakte; photograph by Sergey Teplyakov.

On 14 February, Barnaul Decembrists filed an application to hold the third toy demonstration, to be attended by 'игрушки из киндер-сюрпризов – 100 штук, человечки лего – 100 штук, солдатики – 20 штук, мягкие игрушки – 15 штук, машинки – 10 штук' (toys from Kinder Surprise (one hundred pieces), Lego figurines (one hundred pieces), toy soldiers (twenty pieces), soft toys (fifteen pieces), miniature cars (ten pieces)).[7] That very evening they received the anticipated denial of permission, together with a humorous gift from the mayor's office: a toy cow and a toy bull. In Russian popular imagination a cow is often associated with stupidity and a bull with stubbornness, and hence this symbolic gesture was probably meant to imply that from the authorities' perspective the activists' demands were perverse. The applicants themselves admitted that the event they applied for was intended to provoke: 'цель любого публичного мероприятия (в том числе и наномитинга) – общественный резонанс. Если бы мы составили заявку чин по чину, то такого резонанса в СМИ не было бы' (The aim of any public event (including a nanodemonstration) is to elicit a public response. If we had written the application in a traditional manner, there would have been no response from the mass media).[8] They had to follow the same absurd logic the authorities seemed intent on following: 'попытки властей ограничить права граждан на выражение своей позиции дошли до абсурда. Мы хотели превратить эти попытки в гиперболу, обнажить, какой нелепый фарс – борьба чиновников с собственным народом' (The authorities' attempts to limit the right of citizens to express their opinions have become absurd. We wanted to hyperbolize these attempts, to strip bare the farce of the officials' struggle with their own people).[9] According to the activists, the mayor's office had repeatedly denied them permission to hold *normal* demonstrations in *normal* places (that is, by humans, in central town squares) under various pretexts.

This time, then, the authorities decided to respond in a humorous fashion. Commenting to journalists on the evolving situation,[10] a representative of the mayor's office remarked that the toy picket was taken very seriously, though perhaps the application should have been sent to the puppet theatre. The mayor's office, he explained, is unable to make a decision on such an event, since the toys, especially imported ones, are not only non-Russian citizens but also not even humans. Perhaps Russian-made toys would have had some chance of gaining permission. The rhetoric of unreason continued: 'возможно, подавшие заявление люди одушевляют свои игрушки, как это делают обычно дети' (Perhaps the applicants, like children, tend to perceive their toys as living beings). The authorities finally explained, unambiguously, that toys cannot attend demonstrations – they can only be used as a form of visual propaganda. In conclusion, the mayor's office recommended that the applicants apply to other institutions (a puppet theatre, a kindergarten or a mental hospital – the reader is left to decide). The official denial of permission reiterates the same decision, but without the humour, and recommends rethinking the conditions for holding the public event.

The Barnaul activists withdrew the application and held another event on 19 February in the form of a single-person picket accompanied by toys (Figure 6.2);



Figure 6.2 Third Nanodemonstration in Barnaul, 19 February 2012: A single-person picket.

Source: LiveJournal; photograph by Ivan Krupchik.

this did not require permission from the local authorities. The police did not intervene, but they still drew up a report that charged the organizers with breaking the law. The organizers repeatedly commented that the policemen themselves were embarrassed by their role as a tool for penalizing 'Lego-protesters'.

The authorities' response to these events was in fact the main ground for constructing nanodemonstrations as media events. The local activists turned out to be lucky. Web commentators remarked that 'Очень хорошая акция получилась, особенно приятно посмотреть на глупый вид органов' (It was a good event, the police looked especially silly).[11] These micro-scale toy protests were projected as major events with the help of photo and video cameras, newspapers, TV, radio, and certainly new media. The image of a snowdrift with toys surrounded by policemen proved highly effective and impressed hundreds of Internet users in different regions and countries (*The Guardian* 2012).[12] Thousands of picture stories of Barnaul nanodemonstrations circulated across the Internet. The local Barnaul media, however, was rather more constrained in its coverage of these events – its editorial policy did not live up to its proclaimed liberal agenda in practice.

Similar toy protests soon took place in other cities of Russia – Apatity and Barnaul can be said to have started a chain reaction. Members of the public reacted to nanodemonstrations in a variety of ways. Reporting on the Internet, some characterized them as 'elegant', 'witty', 'creative', 'positive',

'masterly'. Others called nanodemonstrations 'a circus', 'a scandal', 'a Lilliput riot'. Others still concluded that toy protests might be of value to the arts, but politics require real mass actions. Whatever the verdict, what is now clear is that scholars of mediatized forms of civil protest cannot afford to ignore the phenomenon of nanodemonstrations.

Nanodemonstrations as hyperreal events

The term *media event* has been subject to various interpretations in the literature (Cottle 2006, 2014; Cui 2013; Dayan 2008; Dayan and Katz 1992; Hepp and Couldry 2010; Jiménez-Martínez 2014; Katz and Liebes 2007; Kellner 2010; Krotz 2010; Kyriakidou 2008; Ribes 2010). Of these, I suggest that John Fiske's understanding of the term allows us to conceptualize nanodemonstrations as media events (1994:2):

> The term media event is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between a 'real' event and its mediated representation. Consequently, we can no longer work with the idea that the 'real' is more important, significant, or even 'true' [*sic*] than the representation. A media event, then, is not a mere representation of what happened, but it has its own reality, which gathers up into itself the reality of the event that may or may not have preceded it.

Using this definition as our point of departure, Russian nanodemonstrations can be shown to qualify as media events in several respects.

First, nanodemonstrations, including the initial Apatity flash mob that inspired them, were planned from the start as protest actions intended to attract media coverage. In reporting the December 2011 flash mob with Kinder Surprise toys on *VKontakte*, Apatity activists described it as 'фотосессия' (a photo session) and 'постановочное действо для телевидения' (a staged action for TV),[13] which means that the event was not just 'mediated' but also 'mediatized'. Nanodemonstrations would probably have remained unnoticed were it not for the involvement of the media (both old and new), which turned them into 'sites of maximum visibility and maximum turbulence' (Fiske 1994:7). The organizers strove to attract bloggers' and journalists' attention, modelling the nanodemonstration as a newsworthy event. They succeeded in identifying the type of event that would capture the attention of the media: something dramatic, unusual, comic or absurd.

The experience of the first toy protest in Barnaul on 7 January 2012, which led to confrontation with the police, alerted Barnaul activists to the potential of a nanodemonstration as a story that is capable of going viral, at least on social media sites:[14]

> Не хватает где-нибудь в ЖЖ хорошего рассказа об акции с фото и видео. А может [уже] есть? По-моему, тема была бы достойна топа

(именно из-за полиции – что-то вроде «полиция попыталась пресечь митинг игрушек в Барнауле» :))

Gloss: We lack an engaging account of the action, with photos and videos, in somebody's LiveJournal. Or is one available [already]? In my opinion, the topic deserves to feature on the top-list (precisely since the police were involved – something like 'police tried to stop toys' demonstration in Barnaul' :))

It was exactly such headlines that began to appear a fortnight later in international mass media. Barnaul activists then actively worked on promoting the events by highlighting their absurdity: 'к 14-му [января 2012] нужны идеи как сделать ситуацию еще абсурднее' (by the 14th [of January 2012] we need ideas for how to make the situation even more absurd).[15]

Second, nanodemonstrations display features of hyperreality. Being 'in reality' a hardly discernible micro-event, the technical sophistication of the media was nevertheless able to turn nanodemonstrations into excessively real, over-visible events that are rich in detail, almost pornographic, and above all, reproducible in a manner that recalls Baudrillard's discussion of what he calls 'the procession of simulacra' (Baudrillard 1983). In other words, the media was able to multiply not only visual and verbal representations of a nanodemonstration, but also the performance itself. For, as I have already mentioned, similar nanodemonstrations soon took place in many other Russian cities, testifying to the mutual transformations of the real and the virtual or their merging – a model that repeatedly generates an identical event through media packaging.

This does not mean that mass protests are any more real in this sense: they are equally simulative, and equally reproducible – that is, they can be staged following a certain pattern, as evident in the case of the so-called 'colour revolutions' that took place in various parts of the former Soviet Union in the early twenty-first century. But mass demonstrations seem to *force* the media to pay attention to them by virtue of their size and scale, whereas nanodemonstrations *seduce* the camera by their eccentricity. Rather than being staged as a powerful social drama they are projected as curious political incidents that are equally capable of capturing the imagination of the public. Regular demonstrations involving several hundred people had taken place in Barnaul as well as in many other cities in Russia prior to the first toy protest in December, but they failed to interest Russian – let alone international – mass media. They were much smaller than the Moscow protests, where tens of thousands of protesters flooded the streets, forming a giant 'collective body' that seemed to capture all viewing angles of reporters' cameras and demand their attention. Such large-scale events are impossible for the mass media to ignore. Nanodemonstrations, on the other hand, while miniature in size, are highly mediagenic: they are easy to structure into a striking visual sequence and a gripping narrative.

Third, nanodemonstrations display features of the postmodern: they are playful, spectacular, farcical and subversive. They resist definition. Is a nanodemonstration a form of protest disguised as a game or a game mimicking protest? Any attempt at an answer is complicated by a consideration of the place, time and genre of the action. The first nanodemonstration in Barnaul was held on 7 January (Orthodox Christmas), the second on 14 January (the so-called Old New Year). This period covers almost a fortnight-long Christmas break for the whole country – a festive time of street parties, entertainment, carnival and pranks. It was on Christmas Day, on the tiny plot of land between the Drama theatre and the University, that a group of youths decided to hold the first toy performance in the city. The police soon arrived and tried to suppress this 'toy insurrection'; luckily, no one was hurt – neither youths, nor Lego protesters. It almost sounds like a Christmas tale, one of many other curious incidents that take place around the New Year period. A video of the event uploaded by the activists[16] reveals why the representatives of law and order felt confused. 'Мы пришли поиграть, а вы нам мешаете' (We have come to play and you are in the way) the activists told the police. 'Ну так если вы играете, то играйте тогда' (Well, if you're playing, then play) the head of the local police replied. As evident from this exchange, a nanodemonstration blocks any attempt at a definition framed in terms of the 'real'. It is a simulation of protest, since no one is protesting in the normal way. But it is also a simulation of a game, since no one is playing in the normal way. The activists themselves describe nanodemonstrations as 'фарс-акция, чтобы развеселить людей' (a farcical action intended to make people laugh)[17] when the gloomy machinations of both power-holding elite and their opponents become difficult to cope with. Nanodemonstrations are a parody, and 'parody makes obedience and transgression equivalent'; this is 'the most serious crime' Baudrillard argues, 'since it *cancels out the difference upon which the law is based*' (1983:40; emphasis in original). The authorities are used to dealing with the 'real'; they are impotent when faced with a simulation that marks no difference between the real and the unreal. This subversive tactic is very effective when those in power decide to block lawful, conventional forms of expressing civic resistance.

Nanodemonstrations as discursive events

The hyperreality of nanodemonstrations and their media ontology do not mean that one can argue, echoing Baudrillard's (1995) comment on the Gulf War, that nanodemonstrations did not take place. They certainly did take place and we continue to understand them if not as protest events, then as signs of protest. They are analysed here precisely as such.

Unlike Baudrillard, who suggested that the media destroys communication and meaning, John Fiske put forward a less radical argument that foregrounds the discursive dimension of media events. According to him, any media event is a *discursive event* (not a discourse about an event), and

therefore constitutes a battlefield on which the articulation of one or the other set of meanings and the pursuit of cultural hegemony are fought (Fiske 1994:2). Conceptualizing a nanodemonstration as a discursive event implies that its meanings are constructed not only by the communicator (activists, journalists), but also by the addressee, that is, the audience. It is thus important to examine how a nanodemonstration functions as a social performance whose participants code and decode its potential meanings from various perspectives. Jeffrey Alexander's work may prove helpful in this respect, as he offers a terminology for describing the structure of a social performance (2011:83–4). This consists of six elements: actors; systems of collective representation (background symbols and foreground scripts); means of symbolic production; *mise-en-scène*; social power; audience.

Alexander's theatrical vocabulary is highly relevant to nanodemonstrations. There are actors – civil activists who thought of and created the scenario of a protest action. There is an addressee – the media. There are means of symbolic production, specifically the various forms of visual propaganda deployed, the most important of which are the toys to which the role of protesters is allocated. There is also the *mise-en-scène* (the location of nanodemonstrations) and the media technologies that allowed the toy protests to attract extensive attention. In addition, police officers found themselves involved in a number of unanticipated *mise-en-scènes* as they were caught by the camera with other performers. Social power is exercised by those who are able to decide whether the performance may take place (hence bestowing or withholding legitimacy) – in this case the local municipal authorities, the office of public prosecutor and the police. Finally, it goes without saying that nanodemonstrations, as well as the whole all-Russian protest movement 'For Honest Elections' in 2011–2012, were underpinned by collective representations expressed in particular images, slogans and narratives. These collective representations, according to Alexander, are moral in nature and structured through basic cultural oppositions such as good and evil, sacred and profane, pure and impure. Thus, for example, slogans such as Я за чистые выборы (I am for clean elections; Figure 6.3) and Вор должен сидеть в тюрьме, а не в Кремле (A thief should be in jail, not in the Kremlin), discussed earlier, are among a set of collective representations enacting such cultural oppositions and able to communicate the message that the government has lost credibility and can no longer claim the role of the sacred, moral centre of society.

A toy protest as conceptualized and practised by the Russian 2011–2012 movement, then, is a mediatized cultural performance that expresses a social conflict between the voters and those in office. Its key message concerns the need to safeguard democratic values that are embodied, among other things, in free and transparent elections. This message is expressed not only in the individual slogans that appeared on the placards held by mini-protesters, but in the very organization of each 'exhibition', which was similarly based on binary cultural oppositions. For instance, the Lego-Town that the Barnaul



Figure 6.3 Wall-E holding the banner 'I am for clean elections'.
Source: LiveJournal; photograph by Ivan Krupchik.

activists installed on a sledge (Figure 6.4) was visually divided into two parts: one symbolized civil society and the other the anti-democratic state. On the left there were fair nano-judges, nano-policemen, nano-parliamentarians, and active nano-Lego-citizens; on the right there were cheats from the ruling political party and indifferent people. In the 'Tale of Honest Elections' I referred to earlier, which was printed as a leaflet and distributed by the activists among passers-by,[18] the story of the alleged falsification of the results of parliamentary elections found a happy ending when re-elections were held, this having become possible only because 'в нано-лего-государстве из нано-лего-человечков незаметно выросли нано-лего-граждане' (in the nano-Lego-state, nano-Lego-men grew into nano-Lego-citizens before anyone could notice it).

Mainstream western mass media participated discursively in the game played by the protestors and gave it credence, as evident in some of the headlines of leading European and American sources:

- *The Guardian*: Doll 'protesters' present small problem for Russian police (26 January 2012); Toys cannot hold protest because they are not citizens of Russia, officials rule (15 February 2012);
- *The Independent*: Toying with the right to protest: police try to ban Russian doll rally (27 January 2012);
- *NBC News*: Russia police investigate democracy protest by toys (27 January 2012);
- *Der Spiegel*: Puppenprotest in Sibirien: Russlands Polizei überprüft Spielzeug-Demo (28 January 2012) (Puppet protest in Siberia: Russian police investigate toy demonstration);
- *FRANCE 24 Observers*: 'No playing with toys,' Russian police tell protesters (31 January 2012);

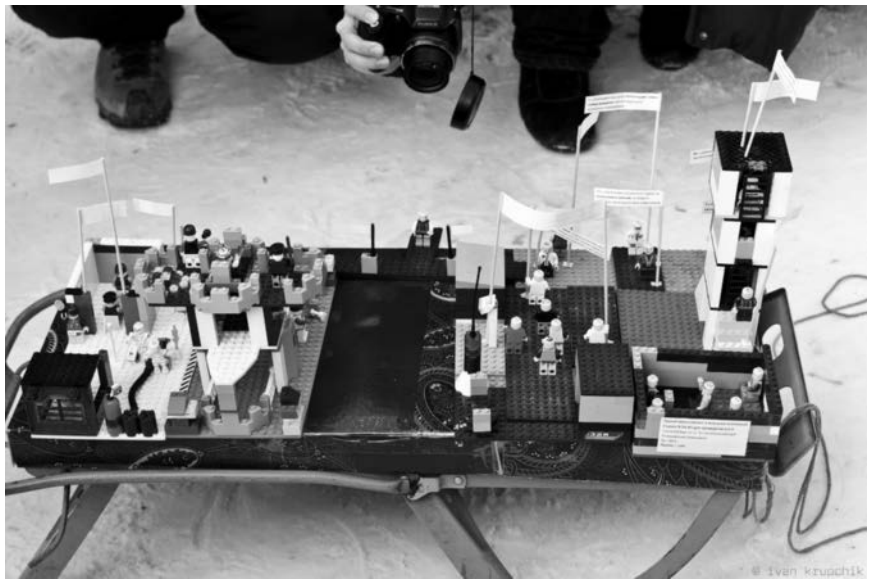


Figure 6.4 The Lego-Town.
Source: LiveJournal; photograph by Ivan Krupchik.

- *BBC News*: Russia mayor bans election activists' toys protest (15 January 2012);
- *NYTimes.com*: A Teddy Bear Revolution in Russia and Belarus (17 January 2012);
- *Reuters*: Toy rally pushes limits of Russian protest movement (19 January 2012).

Here, the toys themselves appear, directly or indirectly, as the main actors, the subjects of protest actions. There can be no doubt that the journalists realized the toys are no more than propagandist props manipulated by Russian activists, just as the municipal authorities knew they were obstructing the actions of human beings, not toys. But the mass media accepted the rules of the game set by Barnaul activists, possibly for two reasons: their sympathy with the Russian protest movement and a desire to dramatize the events.

Such protest performances were of course already easily recognized as newsworthy by Western mass media and embedded within a context that enhanced their value as such. For instance, in an article covering the Barnaul nanodemonstrations (Elder 2012), *The Guardian* told its readers that these unusual protests

> are not the first. Russia's Blue Buckets group, formed to protest officials' wanton flouting of traffic rules, have run across government cars while wearing buckets on their heads, drawing the state's ire.

> Voina, the rebellious art collective, won worldwide fame after painting a 65-metre-long phallus on a drawbridge in St Petersburg that, when erected, faced the city's Federal Security Service (FSB) headquarters.

Nanodemonstrations were thus integrated into a pre-existing theme that was already well developed in international mass media, namely, that the 2011–2012 Russian protest movement took various creative forms and was witty, spectacular and eccentric.

Toy protests are also discursive events that are embedded within a specific context of reception, drawing a response or range of responses to mediated nanodemonstrations from specific audiences. Just as 'texts are the product of their readers' (Fiske 1987:14), performances are the product of their viewers (Alexander 2011:82–3):

> Actions are performative insofar as they can be understood as communicating meaning to an audience. For the purposes of understanding such performance, it does not matter what meaning 'really' is, either for actors themselves or in some ontological or normative sense. What matters is how others interpret actors' meaning.

Between 8 December 2011 and 21 July 2012, some 190 comments were posted on the *Nanodemonstration* page created by Apatity activists on the social network *VKontakte*. Almost all are enthusiastic:[19] шедеврально (It's a masterpiece), гениально (brilliant), круто (cool), красиво (beautiful), креативно (creative), оригинально (original). Some suggest 'повторять и расширять географию' (repeating and geographically expanding)[20] toy flash mobs. Since Apatity activists came to be viewed as the initiators of nano-protests, reports of similar actions in other Russian cities soon began to appear on their page. A circle of like-minded people supportive of the idea of toy protests emerged, and in this context practically no criticism of nanodemonstrations was expressed.

Barnaul nanodemonstrations were seldom discussed within the social community of Decembrists. However, they became the subject of a heated debate on the popular local website of *Altapress Publishing House*, which positions itself as an independent regional media holding company. *Altapress* published a total of nine news reports about nanodemonstrations between 8 January 2012 and 25 May 2012.[21] The number of comments appended to each report varies considerably, ranging from several dozens to over two hundred. The organizers of Barnaul nanodemonstrations themselves became involved in the polemics, posting comments under easily recognizable nicknames or under their own names. Here we find more expressions of criticism,[22] with nanodemonstrations often negatively referred to as восстание лилипутов (a Lilliput riot), дурдом дает гастроли (a nuthouse on tour), не акция, а пшик (not an action but a puff). This negative response is understandable given that Barnaul is a provincial Russian city with traditionally little involvement in protests, let alone such unusual

political performances. Local activists involved in nanodemonstrations were not actively supported even by protest-oriented citizens. Some thus saw nanodemonstrations as a suspicious action organized by the Decembrists as a publicity stunt:[23]

> Подобные рассчитанные на дешевую сенсацию и экзотичность мероприятия дискредитируют любое гражданское движение. . . В чем их задача? Показать, что власть боится даже игрушек? Но ребята, игрушки не являются субъектом права, только люди.
>
> Gloss: Such events are intended to create a cheap sensation and appear exotic [but they] discredit any civic movement . . . What is their purpose? Showing that the authorities are afraid even of toys? But folks, toys are not subjects of law, people are.

The Guardian website, where four articles on Russian nanodemonstrations were published, drew a wide range of responses from readers. One article, titled 'Doll protesters present small problem for Russian police' (Elder 2012), attracted 161 comments. Apart from laudatory and skeptical responses, two types of comments are particularly interesting. One type relates to *The Guardian*'s editorial policy: 'This is funny, but not that much an aggravated case, to be a serious, news-worthy event' (28 January 2012, 4:59); 'Well done the Guardian for jumping on the mainstream media bandwagon and making a headline story out of nothing' (26 January 2012, 20:05). Another type of comment expresses frustration at readers' inability to understand slogans written in Russian on the toy protesters' placards (in the pictures accompanying the article), as in 'Any chance of some translations of the slogans? I'm quite happy to laugh at the moment, but it might be nice to know what the story is really about. It's a journalism thing' (26 January 2012, 20:56). Interestingly, the organizers of nanodemonstrations in Barnaul are among the commentators who attempted to translate the slogans and explain their meaning to the English-speaking audience. They did so incognito, without exposing their identity as the article's 'heroes', shifting their role from that of newsmakers to that of their own interpreters, and guiding the foreign audience towards the 'correct' reading of what had become an international news story.

There is no suggestion here that discussion of nanodemonstrations in forum comments represents public opinion. If nanodemonstrations are simulacra – or simulations – of protest, comments are simulacra of public opinion (which is itself simulative, as Baudrillard argues). Both function in a media environment and interact with each other as signs that can mean much or nothing at all for each person. We live in a complex universe where hyperreality is only one of several dimensions or orders, and the very fact that we can *recognize* it for what it is means that we are not totally immersed in it. Despite its extensive intrusion in some spheres (politics included), hyperreality still leaves room for the creation of meaning, for making sense of itself.

Nanodemonstrations as networked events

This section introduces a third dimension to my analysis by conceptualizing nanodemonstrations as a networked phenomenon. Turning to the notion of network provides a further perspective with which to approach nanodemonstrations and complements rather than supplements their analysis as hyperreal and discursive. Hyperreality and discursiveness are parameters of communication and as such have a material basis, both human and technological. In a postindustrial society, according to Castells (2010, 2012), they are enacted within a global network that encompasses a large number of functionally different networks, including networks of protest movements. Media networks, meanwhile, constitute meta-networks because it is through them that dominant values are 'programmed', and their power multiplies as other networks connect to them. In order to analyse power relationships in this setting, Castells argues,

> we must find the specific network configuration of actors, interests, and values who engage in their power-making strategies by connecting their networks of power to the mass communication networks – the source of the construction of meaning in the public mind.
>
> (2011:786)

The discourse of nanodemonstrations and the all-Russian movement 'For fair elections' (2011–2012) may be described as a discourse of 'counter-power' (Castells 2007). In what follows I focus on the organizational and technological specifics of its production, which requires examining protest networks and media networks as they interact with each other.

The organizers of nano-protests in Russian cities created an ephemeral social network whose extensive geography can be easily traced on a physical map of nanodemonstrations. The first activists to discover this new form of protest became its 'nodes', and had to be involved in media networks at least as consumers of media content. This is not specific to the Russian context; indeed, as Mattoni (2013) argues, being an activist is increasingly acquiring the meaning of being involved in 'media knowledge practices'. Protest organizers moreover developed varying skills of interaction with media technologies, the audience and media professionals, and as such were involved in 'relational media practices' (Mattoni 2013). Activists' level of media literacy depends at least in part on their education and professional activity. The three leaders of the Barnaul Decembrists were an advertising agency marketing expert, an IT-specialist from a major retailing chain, and a PhD student of the Department of Sociology at the local university. They naturally had good communicative skills, which allowed them, for example, to hold a press-conference for local journalists in order to clarify the mission of the Barnaul civic movement.[24] Thus, protest networks are built in one way or another around the 'power lines' of media networks, including both old and new media.

In Castells' network theory, power actors are nodes of global or local networks, which in turn function as networks of networks. Castells stresses that actors form human networks as organizations, movements, settlements. Networking groups such as the Decembrists are usually short-lived, above all, due to inner contradictions and lack of hierarchical structure. The Barnaul group initially comprised twenty-five people, but their membership shrunk as time went by. They existed for a year and a half (from December 2011 to May 2013), then the movement admitted its 'death'; one of the founders even published an 'Obituary of the Barnaul Civic Movement' on his blog.[25] Thus civic communities and movements are now born and die in a virtual environment. Although they often exist offline, their offline existence has to be confirmed by their presence in media networks and may at times undermine this presence. Indeed, some activists believe that it was precisely the collaboration of several ex-members of the Decembrists with political parties and their engagement in struggles for power that hastened the demise of this civil movement. In this case, the plugging of a 'soft' network of civil resistance into 'hard' networks of political power undermined its credibility. Ultimately, nanodemonstrations proved to be the Barnaul Decembrists' most successful action, with no other event they organized succeeding in attracting a similar response from the public and media.

The Decembrists' positioning as actors of a protest network and media networks simultaneously meant that they were inseparable from their toys within the media frame 'nanodemonstration'. In this sense, journalists writing about Lego-protesters unwittingly supported Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2011). Nanodemonstrations actualize the notion of *actant*, used by Latour to replace that of *actor*, who can only be human. Latour rejects the separation of the social and the material, subjects (actors) and objects (things). A nanodemonstration provides an excellent example of the idea of things striking back (Latour 2000). Toys here performed the part of Latour's actants, replacing real human bodies. They are not simply static props that express the will of the 'real' political subjects symbolically. Actant-toys are performative. They are non-human but they make humans (protest organizers, police officers, journalists, passers-by) and other non-humans (mobile phones, cameras, computers) act. A nanodemonstration can thus be viewed as an instantiation of Latour's network of relations between human and non-human actants, where non-humans and humans have equal rights. Castells' and Latour's networks are irreconcilably different, with one viewing a network as an 'object' and the other as a theoretical 'notion'. For the purposes of the current analysis, I will prioritize Castells's network theory, which stresses the heterogeneous nature of actors as nodes of any network.

Organizers and participants of social movements normally have no access to mainstream mass-media networks. In order to attract the attention of journalists, they may try to create a spectacular newsworthy event, as the

Barnaul Decembrists did and as proved successful in their case. Today, the main platform for creating media events that is readily available to civil activists is social media.

A nanodemonstration is thus a networked event in the technological sense: Internet-based communication networks became the instruments of its organization, representation and replication. Organizers of toy protests used the Russian social networking service *VKontakte*, popular with the young, as their main communication platform. It was there that the idea of nanodemonstrations was first articulated, the coordination of the events took place, reports were published and the outcome discussed. Thanks to social media platforms such as *Facebook, VKontakte, Twitter, LiveJournal* and *YouTube*, *nanodemonstration* became a media virus of sorts, simultaneously spreading across the virtual media-environment and in the physical space of Russian cities. Organizing a one-off nanodemonstration would not have required the use of social media, technically speaking; indeed, such an event could have been carried out by one person. Nor was this a case of social networks becoming 'networks of outrage and hope' (Castells 2012) that emotionally charge and mobilize huge crowds of protesters. The point is that the effects of seriality and double replication of nano-protests (online and offline) were only achievable through media networks in general and social media in particular. Social media, among other platforms, also make it possible to archive protest artefacts (Cammaerts 2012): albums with photos and videos of nanodemonstrations, official documents (applications for organizing the event and replies from the mayor's office), propaganda material made available to all, including researchers like myself. These protest artefacts were posted by activists on social networks and extensively used by mainstream media: to illustrate their articles journalists used photos taken by bloggers and videos recorded by activists and uploaded on *YouTube*. Without this visual evidence the story about nanodemonstrations would have had no chance of reaching Russian and international news media. At the same time, reports about nanodemonstrations published in mainstream media were often reposted and discussed by social network users. A partnership was thus established between mainstream media and social media networks that strengthened and extended media coverage of the toy protests.

Conclusion

A nanodemonstration is both a mediated and mediatized civil protest. It can only be reported when it is mediated. But the event exists as such because it is mediatized. Mediatization starts when mediation becomes an essential element in defining the logic, form and content of social relations.

Russian nanodemonstrations were analysed in this chapter as media events – *hyperreal*, *discursive* and *networked*. Theories of hyperreality (Baudrillard), networked society (Castells), social performance (Alexander) and media semiotics (Fiske) were deployed to reveal different aspects of their

mediatization. Hyperreal protest action is born simultaneously with its media representations and finds existence only in a media environment – as a set of visual images and narratives perceived by the audience. The simulative nature of nanodemonstrations is revealed in their scaling, seriality and the effect of double replications: they were repeatedly reproduced both in the virtual space of media communications and in the physical space of a number of Russian cities.

Being a form of cultural performance, nanodemonstrations are embedded in the symbolic process of coding and decoding meanings. They reproduced the discourse of civil society, which projects elections as the core expression of democracy. Activists positioned themselves as defenders of democracy, whereas the local authorities positioned them as offenders who use non-sanctioned forms of protest to undermine society. Mainstream Western mass media integrated nanodemonstrations into a broader narrative of the Russian protest movement, framing them as infotainment. Comments attached to news reports on nanodemonstrations represent the whole gamut of opinions but cannot stand for public opinion as such.

The discourse of civil resistance is a product of cooperation between protest networks and media networks, which engage in processes of mutual representation. Protest activists in effect become media activists, and protest events become media events. Activists have to acquire specific knowledge and skills to negotiate media logic and media formats if their performance is to succeed (that is, attract significant media response). A nanodemonstration is ultimately a networked phenomenon because it effects an interface with several networks: protest networks, social media networks and mainstream media networks.

The toy protest was a soft, creative form of civil resistance, quite in keeping with the spirit of the 'laughing non-revolution', but nanodemonstrations have now become a classic component of the Russian protest folklore of 2011–2012. Like the entire Russian protest movement 'For Honest Elections', this 'plush' protest was more moral than instrumental in nature. The mediatization of civil resistance is not specific to Russia; it is one of many manifestations of a global process of mediatization of social life. What remains to be seen is to what extent these theatrical, mediatized forms of civil resistance are capable of uniting people, influencing the government and transforming the 'real' social order.

Notes

1 www.forbes.ru/sobytiya-photogallery/lyudi/84791-12-samyh-gromkih-hudozhestvennyh-aktsii-protesta-v-rossii/photo/9 (accessed 10 April 2015).
2 My reconstruction of the chronicle of events relating to the Barnaul nanodemonstrations is based on articles published on the Altapress Publishing House news website. http://altapress.ru/topic/1641 (accessed 10 April 2015).
3 Here and elsewhere, all translations from Russian are mine and Ksenia Gusarova's, unless otherwise specified. https://vk.com/club32919022 (accessed 10 April 2015).

4 http://gorod.afisha.ru/archive/new-politics-glossary (accessed 10 April 2015).
5 http://vk.com/barnaulprotiv (accessed 1 November 2014). Barnaul activists most probably called themselves Decembrists not only because the movement was founded in December 2011, but possibly also in order to evoke an association with earlier Decembrists – the term is most often used to refer to Russian aristocrats who opposed the tsarist regime and organized the famous anti-government uprising on 14 December 1825. Russian poet Alexander Pushkin was close to these nineteenth-century Decembrists.
6 'Bears – to the north' involves several puns. 'A bear in the north' is the name of one of the most popular brands of chocolates in Russia; the bear is the logo of the ruling party United Russia; the then President of Russia was Dmitrii Medvedev – his family name etymologically means 'Bear's', 'of the Bear'; and the north is where political prisoners are traditionally deported.
7 http://sergey-shpp.livejournal.com/2012/02/14 (accessed 1 November 2014).
8 http://altapress.ru/story/80423#opinions, post 15 Feb 2012, 14:53:17 (accessed 1 November 2014).
9 www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/26/doll-protesters-problem-russian-police (accessed 1 November 2014).
10 http://altapress.ru/story/80423#opinions (accessed 1 November 2014).
11 http://altapress.ru/story/78446/opinions/page/1/?viewcomments=1#opinion-sheap, posted 8 January 2012, at 16:26:02 (accessed 1 November 2014).
12 www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2012/jan/26/russia-human-rights?INTC-MP=ILCNETTXT3487 and www.youtube.com/watch?v=amjDgmtMZBk (accessed 10 April 2015).
13 https://vk.com/event32919022, post 10 Dec 2011, 20:52 (accessed 10 April 2015).
14 https://vk.com/topic-32808450_25646587, posted 8 January 2012, 16:25 (accessed 10 April 2015).
15 https://vk.com/topic-32808450_25646587, posted 8 January 2012, 17:32 (accessed 10 April 2015).
16 www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyVDWs0mt-I (accessed 10 April 2015).
17 http://altapress.ru/story/78722/#opinions, post 16 Jan 2012, 13:25:16 (accessed 12 November 2014).
18 https://vk.com/topic-33807429_25963596 (accessed 10 April 2015).
19 https://vk.com/event32919022 (accessed 10 April 2015).
20 https://vk.com/event32919022, post 13 Dec 2011, 20:46 (accessed 10 April 2015).
21 http://altapress.ru/topic/1641 (accessed 10 April 2015).
22 http://altapress.ru/story/78446/, posted 8 January 2012, 23:04:13; 15 January 2012, 17:20:56; 15 January 2012, 19:15:52 (accessed 10 April 2015).
23 http://altapress.ru/story/80423#opinions, posted 15 February 2012, 11:13 (accessed 11 April 2015).
24 http://altapress.ru/story/79696 (accessed 11 April 2015).
25 http://dekabrist-brn.livejournal.com/6902.html (accessed 11 April 2015).

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7 The politics of affect in activist amateur subtitling

A biopolitical perspective

Luis Pérez-González

Self-mediated audiovisual content produced by ordinary citizens on digital media platforms reveals interesting aspects of the negotiation of affinity and antagonism among members of virtual transnational constituencies. Based on Pratt's (1987) conceptualization of contact zones, this chapter examines the role played by communities of activist subtitlers – characterized here as emerging agents of political intervention in public life – in facilitating the transnational flow of self-mediated textualities. I argue that by contesting the harmonizing pressure of corporate media structures and maximizing the visibility of non-hegemonic voices within mainstream-oriented audiovisual cultures, activist subtitling collectivities typify the ongoing shift from representative to deliberative models of public participation in post-industrial societies. The chapter also engages with the centrality of affect – conceptualized from the disciplinary standpoint of biopolitics (Foucault 2007, 2008) – as a mobilizing force that fosters inter-subjectivity within and across radical subtitling collectivities. Drawing on an example of how emotions reverberate within a virtual community of amateurs subtitling the controversial BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares* into Spanish, I examine how affect is generated by the practices surrounding the production and reception of subtitled material, and how the circulation flows of content through digital communication systems contribute to assembling an audience of affective receptivity.

Self-mediation, understood as the participation of ordinary people in public culture and politics by means of assembling and distributing digital media representations of their experiences (Chouliaraki 2010), is foregrounding new forms of citizen engagement with public communication as a site of negotiation between the individual and the social. The production and consumption practices that have gained traction as new forms of citizenship have continued to become enmeshed with digital media platforms in different and transformative ways have been theorized from different, yet intimately intertwined disciplinary perspectives. Journalism scholars have examined the extent to which the (often counter-hegemonic) truth claims in

self-mediated narratives are influenced by the various community and civil society structures, including radical and activist movements, in which citizen media are embedded (Downing et al. 2001; Rodríguez 2001; Atton 2002; Howley 2005; Beckett and Mansell 2008). Media sociologists, on the other hand, have been preoccupied with the consequences of the shift from an electronic to a digital networked culture. Grounded in the cultural logic enabled by media convergence (Jenkins 2004, 2006), the smudging of the line between producers and creative citizen consumers, as well as the impact of participatory co-creational practices on the socio-economic status and social recognition of media professionals (Banks and Deuze 2009), have both garnered considerable scholarly interest within this research strand. A third angle onto the theorization of self-mediation can be seen in a number of studies such as Burgess (2006) and Zelizer (2007) that focus on the deliberative and performative processes through which ordinary people articulate and express their public or mediated selves 'with a new emphasis on the affective and playful dimensions of public communication, including satire and parody, but also on the ethics of witnessing and the politics of care' (Chouliaraki 2010:228). Irrespective of disciplinary divides, it is widely recognized that the emancipatory potential of self-mediation practices in the digital culture has been enabled by the ubiquity of information and communication technologies.

This chapter focuses on practices of self-mediation driven by a desire to effect social change, locating itself within a growing body of literature that explores how politically engaged individuals build and maintain ties within virtual networks of like-minded citizens, often through social media, to manipulate and circulate media content. The cartographies that emerge from the mapping exercises conducted so far – informed primarily by 'resource mobilization theories, identity paradigms in social movement theory or network analysis' (Karatzogianni 2012:68) – foreground the role that digital assemblages of media activists play in disrupting the cultural logic of neoliberalism and contesting the commodification of media-based means of social and political critique (Trottier and Fuchs 2014; Fuchs and Sandoval 2014). On a related note, the insight that negotiating online sociality and mobilizing collective identities through self-mediated textualities entails the 'combination of intense local and extensive global interaction' (Wellman 2002:11) highlights the transnational reach of most activist collectivities. Indeed, the impact of the growing instantaneity of global media flows in today's networked mediascapes and the ensuing 'dematerialization of space' (Cronin 2003:42) on the proliferation of geographically dispersed communities of interest represents a recurrent theme in studies on the interplay between self-mediation practices and resistance (Benkler 2006; Castells 2007). And yet, most existing theorizations of these 'deterritorialized social imaginaries' (Li 2009:9) proceed from the assumption that self-mediated textualities reverberate across virtual spaces of contestation and resistance in the same language in which they were originally released.

To overcome this blind spot, I attempt to shift the analytical lens towards collectivities of amateur subtitlers, who are characterized here as agents of political intervention in public life. In what follows, these networks are conceptualized as virtual participatory sites where ordinary citizens engage in the remediation and recirculation of media content – as theorized in Deuze (2006, 2009) – to build a collective sense of affinity, as well as to explore and share aspects of their identities on the basis of shifting configurations of bonds and relationships across linguistic and cultural borders. The first part of my argument concerns the changing role of the dialectic between self-mediation and representation. I contend that, in post-industrial societies, self-mediation practices such as activist subtitling illustrate the ongoing shift from established models of representative democracy towards deliberative forms of governance. Inspired by the latter model, members of activist subtitling networks seek to escape confinement in essentialist categories of identity politics such as race or gender (Jarach 2004), develop the capacity to mobilize fluid radical constituencies and foster inter-subjectivity. But self-mediation is also undermining the role that representation has traditionally played in the production and reception of media content. I will argue that the interface between the actual and the digital, where self-mediation practices thrive, can be best described in terms of the elusive affective potential traversing it – rather than the capacity of media content to represent reality through the deployment of conventional semiotic configurations and narrative structures (Massumi 2002). Consequently, the second half of this chapter focuses on the impact of the politics of affect on activist self-mediation practices, drawing on an example of how emotions reverberate within a virtual community of amateurs subtitling the controversial BBC-produced documentary *The Power of Nightmares* into Spanish.

Politics of representation in activist subtitling

Subtitling is a form of linguistic and intercultural mediation originally conceived during the 1920s in support of the classical cinematic apparatus developed by Western film industries to facilitate the global movement of motion pictures (Nornes 2007). Under this industrial regime, professional translators were expected to adopt a self-effacing presentational style which even today amounts to little more than composing snippets of written text to relay a condensed version of the diegetic speech. Mediating the viewers' access to the narrative by providing contextual information or clarifying aspects of the plot through subtitles, on the other hand, is not encouraged. By imposing this style, the traditional cinematic apparatus attempted to keep audience members absorbed in the fiction and 'maintain an efficient, purposeful and uninterrupted flow of narrative information' (Berliner 1999:6) that would 'reduce the margin for subjective spectatorial experiences' (Pérez-González 2013:5).

This strategy reveals two assumptions that are particularly relevant to the argument I seek to develop in this chapter. The first pertains to the mapping

of audiovisual markets onto discreet national audiences, understood as homogeneous monolingual constituencies where the generative potential of ethnic, gender and class differences is diluted under the harmonizing pressure of institutional structures. The essentialism underpinning this conception of film audiences has allowed the industry to conceal 'corporeal, cultural and political-economic differences' (Saldanha 2010:290) within national constituencies of viewers, and hence enabled the commodification of films as sites of encounter between stable, idealized cultures, in their travels across multiple contexts of reception. The second assumption is that subtitlers are located in the interstices between such discrete *linguacultures*, and should only act as disinterested mediators between them.

Pratt's (1987) influential study of contact zones between linguistic communities is particularly helpful for understanding how this view of audiences and mediators has come to be so widely held – not least among subtitling professionals and academics themselves. Pratt observes that the idealization of the modern nation-state is at the heart of traditional theorizations of the notion of community in language studies and the political science literature. The view that linguacultures map onto distinct national or 'sovereign' collectivities assumes that the relationship between individuals and the communities they belong to is mediated by a 'linguistics of community' (1987:55–7). This linguistic framework obscures social hierarchies and divisions within the community. Significantly, it also minimizes the visibility of strangers – that is, individuals from subordinated groups defined by shared affiliations in terms of class, religion, ethnicity and gender – outside their marginalized constituencies, and curtails their participation in the wider, mainstream community. Extending Pratt's logic, it could be argued that sovereign communities, and the linguistic regime underpinning them, are at the heart of industrial subtitling. In this context of media production, subtitlers' practices contribute to perpetuating monetizable representations of essentialized cultures and obscuring social heterogeneity, submerging tensions between dominant and non-hegemonic voices under a veneer of linguistic uniformity. In doing so, professional subtitling tends to privilege the perspective of those in power, who can rule on what counts as 'legitimate' meaning.

Although industrial subtitling practices retain strong support among mainstream audiences, they are increasingly at odds with the needs and aspirations of an ever growing segment of contemporary informational societies. In the emerging context of digital media production and consumption, enabling idealized orderliness by adhering to a strategy of disinterested equidistance between cultures is no longer the default option for mediators, including translators. As part of the wider self-mediation phenomenon enabled by their immersion in the digital culture, engaged non-affiliated citizens have appropriated subtitling as a platform for the expression and promotion of radical concerns, including a range of activist agendas (Pérez-González 2010). Indeed, subtitling allows amateur translators to contest and resist capitalist and neoliberal discourses in a number of ways,

whether as part of stable networks of like-minded individuals (some of which combine their online activity with on-the-ground activism) or *adhocracies* formed to confront a specific challenge and dissolve upon completion of their task.[1] Activist subtitling networks typically proceed by translating their own audiovisual material or subtitling mainstream television content that was not meant to circulate outside the segment(s) of terrestrial or digital audiences that the broadcaster originally intended to reach. In both scenarios, this form of intervention in the commercial dynamics of the media marketplace concludes with the recirculation of the subtitled material through video-sharing platforms and social networking sites. Significantly, activist subtitling – which is occasionally combined with forms of 'remediation' that involve the incorporation and reassembly of audiovisual material (Deuze 2006:148) – often contests the narrative(s) articulated in the original broadcast, which lends support to Baker's claim (2013:23–4) that

> translation as such does not mediate cultural encounters that exist outside the act of translation but rather participates in producing these encounters. It does not reproduce texts but constructs cultural realities, and it does so by intervening in the processes of narration and renarration that constitute all encounters, and that essentially construct the world for us. It is not an innocent act of disinterested mediation but an important means of constructing identities and configuring the shape of any encounter.

Based on Baker's understanding of translation as an alternative space for political action and the social strand of narrative theory that informs her argument, activist networks might be thought of as sites where subtitlers and their audiences make publicly constructed attempts to engage with reality and negotiate a sense of collective identity. In these virtual assemblages, the dialectic between production and reception is not influenced by essentialist categories of identity politics and the compartmentalization of linguacultures that they entail. Subtitlers, in their capacity as prosumers or consumers-turned-producers, focus instead on mobilizing aspects of their viewers' identities around which a community of interest may coalesce. Negotiation and interaction within the network thus have an important bearing on processes of digital prosumption. Each collective may consist of members with multiple, overlapping identities, with those located within the largest area of overlap more likely to operate at the centre of these activist assemblages, often taking on subtitling tasks. By contrast, individuals with more inflected individual identities tend to retain a more peripheral position as regular/occasional viewers, depending on the extent to which their views intersect with the core of the collective identity. Drawing on narrative theory, I accounted for this dynamic in earlier work in terms of 'narrative entropy'. As some individuals move away from the gravitational core of the assemblage, I argued, 'entropy increases, with community members

mobilizing other aspects of their identity and subscribing to intersecting narratives that may differ from those favoured by their fellow network members' (Pérez-González 2010:263). Pratt's (1987) characterization of communities allows us to develop an alternative theorization of activist subtitling networks as examples of contact zones that call for a 'linguistics of contact' to bring into sharp relief 'the operation of language across lines of social differentiation'; a linguistics that would 'focus on modes and zones of contact between dominant and dominated groups, between persons of different and multiple identities'; a linguistics, moreover, that would 'focus on how such speakers constituted each other relationally and in difference, how they enact differences in language' (1987:60).

The transformation in subtitling practices that digital communication technologies have brought about is opening up new avenues for research into the politics of representation in post-industrial societies. Adopting a constructivist epistemological approach, as illustrated by the concept of 'linguistics of contact',[2] to study virtual subtitling communities can yield valuable insights into the function of this site of translation as a platform for self-expression in public mediascapes. However, there is no reason why the relevance of the findings that may emerge from this strand of research should be confined to scholarship on the interface between self-mediation and translation. Examining how ordinary citizens negotiate their identities and confer with other individuals within these fluid sociality assemblages should shed light on the generative power of agency in the digital culture and, more widely, the amount and quality of deliberation that takes place at the heart of democratic life.

As outlined earlier in this section, industrial subtitling practices align themselves with what Mouffe (2005) has labelled as competitive 'representation models' of democracy. In mediating the relationship between the producers and consumers of media content, professional subtitlers privilege structures such as the nation-state and other essentialist categorizations of identity – complete with their respective dynamics of social hierarchization along 'dominant vs. subordinated' lines. Ultimately, by embracing industrial conventions and the values they encapsulate, commercial subtitling exposes the extent to which power-based bargaining under the cloak of consensus decision-making and collective interest aggregation is affected by the 'differential capacities' (Cohen and Fung 2004:26) of social groups to access power and control public discourses – including their media-based representations. From this perspective, it can be argued that representative systems of governance can be biased in favour of the political and economic elite. Although the elite's access to and exercise of political and economic power may comply with widely accepted democratic conventions, it is their economic and social status that grants powerful individuals the capacity to self-select themselves as potential representatives in the first place. By contrast, activist subtitling groups build on the 'collective intelligence' (Lévy 2000:14) of networks to channel grievances, identify shared priorities, generate flows of inter-subjectivity and

promote critical reflexivity. In these sites of deliberative democracy, individuals draw on the affordances of digital technologies to participate in radical politics in ever growing numbers, widening the basis of the socio-political imperative to effect change and shift media control away from the elite. As Karatzogianni notes, the 'aims and desires' of these activists might still be 'of the modernist variety'. But in fighting for participation they are using a postmodern medium that empowers 'the previously marginalized or repressed, causing shifts in our understanding of identity and community, accelerating feelings and political attachments to foster unprecedented social and political change' (2012:60).

Politics of affect in activist subtitling

The collective pursuit of modernist political aims through postmodern media, as illustrated by the participation of engaged individuals in virtual activist assemblages, represents an important development that is currently being theorized from different perspectives. Fuchs (2001), for example, proposes the notion of 'self-organization' to explain how a multiplicity of partially shared identities can both thrive and be harnessed within networked communities of interest. Self-organizing communities, Fuchs argues, can be best characterized in terms of the dialectic or tension between downward processes of domination, through which socio-technological structures constrain individual actions and thinking, and upward processes of agency, whereby new individual voices and qualities gain visibility and emerge at the structural level of society (Fuchs 2002:38). From this perspective, it could be argued that activist subtitling groups – whether they take the form of stable networks or fluid and ephemeral adhocracies[3] – are self-organized communities shaped by the mutually constitutive relation between the structural dimension of technology and the generative potential of human cognition. Of particular relevance to the argument I am trying to build in this chapter is the knowledge generated through the interaction between bottom-up agency and top-down social pressure. As individuals from diverse backgrounds come together as part of a deliberation-driven community and engage in interaction through a common technological platform, their very engagement in shared communicative practices contributes to fostering inter-subjectivity, developing a sense of community and articulating a collective identity – potentially extending, for example, to the adoption of a preferred set of subtitling practices and conventions.

Self-organization theories go some way towards understanding activist attempts to resist and contest the pressures of normativizing power, but the insights they yield are often skewed towards the socio-technological side of the structure-agency dialectic (Karatzogianni 2012). Within this framework, the analysis of the systemic causes for the emergence of activist formations – ranging from extreme forms of political, social or religious oppression in certain states to the more subtle impact of 'precarity' and 'crisis ordinariness'

as ever more prominent features of the logic of global capitalism (Berlant 2011:101) – tends to take precedence over the study of the affective structures that individuals jointly build once they have joined a virtual community of deliberation. Overlooking these affective structures, where the dialectic between the actual and the digital is played out, may be detrimental to our understanding of the expressive dimension of postmodern activism, as articulated in 'the lived and deeply felt everyday sociality of connections, ruptures, emotions, words, politics, and sensory energies, some of which can be pinned down to words or structures; others are intense yet ephemeral' (Kuntsman 2012:3).

Of particular importance for the topic of this chapter is the prominence that the interplay between 'the aesthetic, the ethical, and the political as they play out across bodies (human and non-human)' has been given in recently published programmatic overviews of affect theory (Gregg and Seigworth 2010:406). In the case of activist subtitling networks, the theoretical frameworks I have critiqued in earlier sections have already articulated different angles onto the intersections between affect, the aesthetic, and the ethico-political. However, the disproportionately low interest that affect has garnered so far vis-à-vis the other two aspects suggests there is a need to redress the balance and explore its contribution in more depth. Consequently, the remainder of this section engages in a critique of key concepts that may assist with the study of how affect works in activist subtitling networks and the description of the affectivity flows that operate in these communities of digital self-mediation. Among the different conceptualizations of affect available in the literature, I adopt a biopolitical perspective to drive the next strand of my argument, in view of this framework's capacity to refine the granularity of the insights it provides into the interface between humans and computers. In what follows, Clough's (2012) account of the differences between the notions of *biopower* and *biopolitics*, as articulated by Foucault (2007, 2008), serves as a springboard and blueprint for this theoretical exploration.

Defined as the 'explosion of numerous and diverse techniques [such as the introduction of vaccines to control the births/deaths ratio or contraceptives to manage fertility rates] for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' (Foucault 1978:140), biopower is a system of governance that revolves around the moulding of subjectivity by demanding the collective compliance of individuals with the ideologies of the nation-state. Leaving aside the specific political technologies chosen to achieve power over bodies, scholars working on technology and affect have explored how the processes of subject-formation associated with biopower have affected the circulation of affective flows in society. Under this form of governance, Clough (2012:25) argues, affect is 'expected to take the shape of a racialized, hetero/homo-normative unified body, bound to the subject of language and representation'. Through the 'disciplining of the subject', which curtails the circulation of affect across populations by confining it in the 'organism' (Clough 2012:25), individuals become more malleable and can be easily

assimilated by agents of governance such as the family and the nation, whose constraining role bears many a similarity with those played by essentialist categories of political identity and the nation state in Pratt's conceptualization of the linguistics of contact.

Largely derived from his notion of biopower, Foucault's concept of biopolitics (1997) can shed more, or different, light on the role that affect plays in activist subtitling communities. In contrast to the fixation of biopower with the disciplining of subjects, biopolitical governance sets its sights on controlling the population as a whole by drawing, among other resources, on the power of computer technologies. Of particular relevance to the topic of this chapter is the importance that biopolitics attaches to big data and statistics, which are used for classificatory and regulative purposes – with 'rates, averages, norms and deviations' (Clough 2012:27) serving as a platform to decide how best to extend state power to control both the physical and political bodies of a population. Although it focuses primarily on populations, biopolitics 'comes to treat the *individual as itself a population*, complicating the individual in terms of his or her own propensities, his or her affective capacities' (Clough 2012:28, my emphasis). In terms of this chapter's topic, the pluralization of every subject's identity – or, to put it in Clough's words, the fragmentation of the disciplined organism into 'body parts' (ibid.) – brings into sharp relief the crisis of essentialist categories of identity politics and, more importantly, foregrounds the importance of (re)constituting one's public self relationally in a number of ways, for example, by celebrating shared values and negotiating differences through affective exchanges within communities modelled along the lines of Pratt's contact zones. According to Clough, the formations fostered by biopower and their capacity to restrict the transmission of affect 'are being subjected to a reformulation as the disciplining of the organism into the unified body of the speaking subject is underdetermined by an anonymous circulation of body parts and affective intensities' (2012: 25). The next section attempts to illustrate precisely how such circulation of affective intensities takes place within communities of activist subtitling.

Subtitling *The Power of Nightmares*

This section aims to explore further how affect plays out in the context of activist subtitling networks. Due to space limitations, I will not address the manifestations of affect in the semiotics (understood as the verbal and non-verbal dimensions) of the subtitles produced by these self-mediation practices. Rather than looking at the encoding of inter-subjectivity in the translations,[4] I intend to gauge the contribution of affect to the processes of deliberation that unfold within radical subtitling communities, including those conducive to the assembling of an audience of affective receptivity. For the purposes of illustration, I discuss how affective structures mediate the relationship between the actual and the virtual, where a collectivity of activist subtitlers and progressive citizens emerges during the prosumption of a

Spanish language version of the three-episode BBC documentary *The Power of Nightmares*.

Originally broadcast in October 2004, at a time when the US and its allies were positioned on the frontline of the global 'War on Terror' launched after the devastating attack on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001, *The Power of Nightmares* aimed to expose how American neo-conservatives were narrating 'the radical Islamists in the image of their [America's] last evil enemy, the Soviet Union – a sinister web of terror run from the centre by Osama Bin Laden in his lair in Afghanistan'.[5] Writing for *The Guardian* in 2004, feature writer Beckett argued that

> the central theme of *The Power of Nightmares* is riskily counter-intuitive and provocative. Much of the currently perceived threat from international terrorism, the series argues, 'is a fantasy that has been exaggerated and distorted by politicians. It is a dark illusion that has spread unquestioned through governments around the world, the security services, and the international media.' The series' explanation for this is even bolder: 'In an age when all the grand ideas have lost credibility, fear of a phantom enemy is all the politicians have left to maintain their power'.

The documentary's claim that the perceived threat of Islamist terrorism was (is) a politically driven narrative[6] proved very controversial – particularly, though not exclusively – among US viewers. Excerpts 1–3 illustrate the wide-ranging, often emotionally heated reactions of viewers posted on a dedicated page on the BBC website:[7]

> **Excerpt 1**
>
> I have not seen the moronic film. As an American I am sick and tired of the DREAMING Liberals WORLDWIDE and that includes, you Euros. You had better wake up and quit your dreaming. Reality is, there is a World Wide Holy War going on. We, the Americans did not start it. The Terrorist did, but We, since you spineless others don't have the guts to do so, WILL FINISH IT, just like all the other times we have had to save your butts.
>
> *Paul Herrmann, Kinsport, TN, USA*

> **Excerpt 2**
>
> It's hard for me to say the threat isn't there. My friend's brother died in the South Tower and my husband and I found ourselves running for our lives on 9/11 caught in that terrifying cloud as the first tower went down. Are New Yorkers scared it could happen again? Of course we are. But most of us are far more horrified at the cynical use of that day's events to undermine our civil rights, to stoke the fires of fear and xenophobia, and to wage war. Most New Yorkers feel completely alienated from the rest of this country while also being hated by the rest of the

> world. It's a lonely anxious place to be – caught between two fundamentalist agendas, Bin Laden's and Bush's and subscribing to neither.
>
> *Anna, NYC*

Excerpt 3

> There's not much I could add here without echoing others' comments, but to say that this programme should've been shown in the US for educational purposes. I'm astounded by it's [*sic*] depth – this is the most detailed exposé on Straussian utopians' intrigues in American politics I have yet seen. The American public failed to pay any attention to it and happily lets these nihilists draw their own grim future. An atavistic instinct of fear usurped the one to question the authority, which – very much like in the 1930's – can be easily dismissed as 'unpatriotic'.
>
> *Rod, Chicago, IL*

But apart from generating immediate affective reactions from English-speaking viewers all over the world, the documentary also fuelled a sustained, tenacious investment of individual and institutional actors in the (counter-)hegemonic potential of the narrative that underpinned it. For example, the occurrence of new terrorist attacks around the world months after the 9/11 events, and even after the documentary was first broadcast in the UK, provided further opportunities for conservative viewers to level criticisms against the main argument developed in *The Power of Nightmares* – which for some 'confirm[ed] the BBC as an anti-Bush, anti-Israel, anti-democracy pressure group for which [. . .] the licence-payers are forced to pay' (Andrew, Bournemouth). Indeed, having denounced the series for its 'self-indulgent narcissism', some viewers felt vindicated when four suicide bombers struck in central London on 7 July 2005 (Wallace Brockhoff, Lawrence, Kansas, USA). *The Power of Nightmares*, on the other hand, was also instrumentalized to support collective sites of affective investment at the opposite end of the political spectrum, sites that existed prior to the filming of the documentary. For example, the *Information Clearing House* – an American website founded on the belief that there is an ongoing war 'to control the American people by taking possession of [their] minds and by controlling [their] sources of information'[8] – was quick to grasp the affective potential of *The Power of Nightmares*. At the time of writing this chapter, it continues to showcase it as a 'must see documentary' and provides direct links to the three episodes, complete with transcripts for the last two parts.[9]

As I have suggested elsewhere (Pérez-González 2010), Spain's involvement in some of the policies and actions driven by the US-led 'War on Terror' has acted and continues to serve as a powerful catalyst for political protest within Spanish progressive constituencies. Members of the collective blogging site *Cuaderno de Campo* – which covers a wide range of matters, from environmental and open software developments to non-mainstream reportage

on foreign and domestic policy issues – first became aware of the significant political resonance of the 'War on Terror' with the 'affective fabric' (Kuntsman 2012:1) that binds their readership in the summer of 2006. Against the background of an ongoing episode of Israeli aggression on Lebanon, a group of regular bloggers took on the task of subtitling into Spanish a Sky News interview where British MP George Galloway vehemently defended his stance against the 'War on Terror' narrative and Israel's foreign and security policies vis-à-vis neighbouring Arab countries. Encouraged by the enthusiastic response to the posting of two blog entries that drew their readers' attention to the availability of the interview on the Sky News website and provided them with a written translation in Spanish, the group proceeded to identify a suitable freeware subtitling application and acquire the technical skills to produce and circulate a subtitled Spanish version (Pérez-González 2014a:64). In light of the vigorous and divisive debate that ensued within the virtual assemblage, the bloggers' decision to subtitle *The Power of Nightmares* for members of their online community a couple of months after completing the Galloway project is hardly surprising. As Li (2009:9) argues in reference to similar groupings,

> [t]hese newly visible media users are themselves circulating and engaging with media across political borders, market segments, and language barriers, creating deterritorialized social imaginaries that not only transcend national boundaries, but signal the emergence of new discursive spaces of audienceship that cannot be adequately described by the established models of global media culture.

After appropriating the raw footage in English, core members of *Cuaderno de Campo* moved on to annotate – in this case, in the form of subtitles – their copy of *The Power of Nightmares* before recirculating the subtitled episodes of the documentary within their online community. On 18 November 2006, a blogger writing under the pseudonym Trebol-A posted an entry (Post 1) containing an embedded, ready-to-play screenshot of the Spanish subtitled version of episode 1, complete with links to the original version hosted on two different video-sharing platforms.[10] Another post (Post 2), published on 24 November, provided members with access to the subtitled versions of episodes 2 and 3.[11] Two more posts published on 26 and 27 November reported on the re-location of the subtitled video files, following the filing of copyright infringement reports against the group (Post 3).[12] They also provided a link to a webpage where community members could access a number of files (original and subtitled episodes of the documentary) for direct download (Post 4).[13]

Following the completion of this subtitling project, which gave an airing to issues that resonated strongly with their own personal locations, in narrative theory terms (Baker 2006), readers-turned-viewers engaged in interaction with the core members of the blogging site as well as with fellow viewers,

delineating a shared site of emotional investment as they went along. Eurogaroto's comment (Excerpt 4) captures the reaction of most readers to the Spanish subtitled version of the documentary:

Excerpt 4 (Post 1 | abridged comment #6)

Eurogaroto, 25 November 2006 @ 12:31:15

Mis más sinceras felicitaciones por el trabajo que te has tomado [. . .] creo que el documental no tiene desperdicio a pesar de sus omisiones y que es muy importante que lo vean las muchas personas que ahora temen tomar un avión debido al 'terrorismo' ignorando la distorsión y manipulación que los gobiernos hacen de ese temor.

Yo he visto el documental hace uno [*sic*] mes aproximadamente y lo había publicado en Menéame con la esperanza de que alguien lo subtitulase ya [. . .] Enhorabuena Trebol-A!

Gloss: My most sincere congratulations for taking on this job [. . .] I believe this documentary is excellent, despite its omissions, and that it is important that it is watched by many people who are now scared to take a plane because of 'terrorism', oblivious to the extent to which governments misrepresent and manipulate that fear.

I had seen the documentary about a month ago and had posted it in Menéame[14] hoping somebody would subtitle it [. . .] Congratulations Trebol-A![15]

In the four posts included in the data set, multiple offers of assistance to circulate the Spanish subtitled version of *The Power of Nightmares* alternate with attempts to identify other documentaries worth subtitling, as well as calls for volunteers to assist in specific subtitling projects. From a quantitative perspective, a collective interest in the generative potential of subtitling as a form of political intervention emerges as the largest area of overlap between the emotions expressed in the comments of *Cuaderno de Campo* readers/viewers, as Mifune notes in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5 (Post 1 | abridged comment #3)

Mifune, 19 November 2006 @ 15:39:03

[M]e gusta que en Europa haya posibilidad de ver en la tele (sobre todo en un país como Inglaterra) un esbozo de lo que pasa con la sempiterna demonización del 'otro'. Y que de vez en cuando se recuerde que los hijos de puta que desde ambos lados arrasan y manipulan son en realidad los mismos pijos de 'familias bien' de Texas, Arabia Saudí, Egipto, Nueva Inglaterra y . . . La Moraleja.

En España costaría mucho incluso que la televisión pública tratara en un documental el tema de la religión y su intervencionismo político al servicio de la derecha de siempre, tal y como se trata en este documental.

> Gloss: I love the fact that, in Europe, it is still possible to discuss on TV (particularly in a country like England) the effects of the constant demonization of the 'other'. And that one is reminded every now and then that the bastards on both sides who are responsible for all this destruction and manipulation are, in fact, members of privileged families from Texas, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, New England and . . . La Moraleja.[16]

> In Spain, it would be very difficult for the public broadcaster to produce a documentary exploring the extent to which religion intervenes in politics, always promoting right-wing agendas, as this film does.

More widely, while remaining near the core of this community, the 'War on Terror' narrative intersects with a restricted set of issues – including references to political developments in the Middle East, comparisons between Islamist and Christian 'fundamentalists', and the use of fear to introduce legislation that enables the curtailment of personal freedoms.

Located at the periphery of the virtual assemblage are those readers/viewers who, while generally in agreement with the need to facilitate access to this documentary and its message for Spanish-speaking constituencies, choose to express objections to one or more aspects of the narrative presented in *The Power of Nightmares*. These include the documentary's alleged claim that the CIA plays a positive role in tempering and taming neo-con policies (Post 1 | comment #2), as well as the film's failure to expose different sets of connections – for example, between neo-con and Zionist agendas (Post 3 | comment #31), or between anti-Muslim propaganda, racism and Nazism (Post 4 | comment #11). The emergence of signs of narrative entropy in the form of clashing emotions – for example, comments posted by some readers/viewers to register disapproval of the kind of illogical thinking that resulted in this documentary (Post 1 | comment #8); to express their dismay at the fawning praise that the community showed for it (Post 1 | comments #13–14); or simply to launch scathing attacks against what they regard as fictitious spin, lies and nonsense (Post 4 | comment #1) – pave the way for episodes of affective rupture and confrontation between readers/viewers (as in Post 1 | comments #8–10; Post 4, comments #1–4), and hence mark the gradual transition towards the periphery of the assemblage.

Lying in the outer regions of this constellation of affect, individuals with inflected identities (compared with that shared by core members) chose to dwell on various disparate aspects. These pertained, for example, to the liberating potential of networked communication as a means to escape the brainwashing effect of mainstream news consumption, or the effective use of images to accentuate parts of the argument developed in the documentary. Considered as a whole, this episode of self-mediation by members of the *Cuaderno de Campo* community revealed the existence of different, often clashing, affective intensities circulating within this undisciplined organism.

Coda

This chapter has drawn on insights from affect theory to examine the intersections between emotion and the ethico-political in self-mediated textualities – instantiated here as the work of activist subtitling networks. Significantly, both citizen media and translation studies, the two disciplinary areas I have sought to bring together in this essay, are yet to begin engaging with this theoretical framework, whose logic and conceptual apparatus has tended to be confined so far to the domain of cultural studies. By focusing on the collective prosumption of media content and its recirculation across *linguacultures*, I have attempted to gauge the potential relevance of affect theory to studying the practices and connectivities at the centre of emerging transnational communities of media co-creators, and the increasingly complex negotiations of cultural identity and citizenship that they foster.

My discussion of *The Power of Nightmares* further suggests that conceptualizing citizen media assemblages as contact zones or undisciplined organisms which enable the inter-subjective construction of states of emotion, rather than as communities built around stable subjects of emotion, requires a robust understanding of the differences between *emotion* and *affect*. The dynamics of the negotiation of differences outlined in the previous section indicates that citizen media scholars can profitably draw on existing definitions proposed by authors such as Clough (2012:23), who contends that 'emotions are commensurate with a subject' while the term *affect* can be used to designate 'a bodily capacity, [. . .] a trigger to action, including the action of feeling an emotion' which would seem to escape confinement in an individual body. This conceptualization is consistent with Shaviro's, for whom 'subjects are overwhelmed and traversed by affect, but they *have* or *possess* their own emotions' (2010:3, emphasis in the original). From this perspective, we can argue that affect in *Cuaderno de Campo* is generated through the circulation and reverberation of emotions which 'open up processes of change, resistance or reconciliation' (Kuntsman 2012:2). While both citizen media and translation scholars will need to devise sophisticated methods to study how affect takes shape through the movement of emotions around the digital sphere, the latter are faced with the additional task of grasping whether and how the trajectories of such movements are refracted by collectivities of translation that manage the flows of media content on a transnational scale.

Notes

1 An overview of different types of amateur translator communities (not restricted to subtitling networks), supported by a range of examples, is offered in Pérez-González (2014a, section 11.2).

2 For the sake of presentational clarity, I use this label to designate any strand of scholarly work that focuses its analytical lens on those borderlands on the margins of communities in which it is the negotiation of differences that binds and, in some cases, mobilizes individuals.

3 Wellman argues that although such ephemeral, virtual and fluid communities are 'seen as less bounded social networks of relationships', they still 'provide sociability support, information, and a sense of belonging' (2002:2031).
4 For an overview of how affect can be realized through the linguistics and aesthetics of subtitles produced by activist and professional translators, see Pérez-González (2014b, Chapter 7).
5 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/3970901.stm (accessed 30 November 2014).
6 For a detailed discussion of the 'War on Terror' campaign as both a 'public narrative' and a 'meta-narrative', see Baker (2006:45, 47).
7 http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/4016713.stm (accessed 30 November 2014).
8 www.informationclearinghouse.info/intent.htm (accessed 30 November 2014).
9 www.informationclearinghouse.info/video1037.htm (accessed 30 November 2014).
10 www.trebol-a.com/2006/11/18/el-poder-de-las-pesadillas/ (accessed 30 November 2014).
11 www.trebol-a.com/2006/11/24/el-poder-de-las-pesadillas-ii-y-iii/ (accessed 30 November 2014).
12 www.trebol-a.com/2006/11/26/el-poder-de-las-pesadillas-y-iii/ (accessed 30 November 2014).
13 www.trebol-a.com/2006/11/27/el-poder-de-las-pesadillas-y-iv/ (accessed 30 November 2014).
14 Meneame.net is a Spanish platform that publishes news stories proposed by users. Once a story is submitted, users can promote it by voting and commenting on it until, if it becomes popular enough, it is published on Meneame's front page. This free-access platform combines social bookmarking, participatory blogging and web syndication, and is not subject to editorial filtering.
15 All translations of Spanish comments are my own. No attempt has been made to embellish or iron out the register and/or occasional grammatical and editing infelicities of the original Spanish texts, except when it has been necessary to do so in order to facilitate basic presentational clarity.
16 Mifune seems to mention La Moraleja, an affluent residential district in Greater Madrid, to hint at the involvement of the Spanish economic and political elites in the demonization of the 'other'.

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Part III

The personal and the political

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8 Media participation and desiring subjects

Sara Beretta

Media participation has been a growing phenomenon in China since the late 1990s and has given rise to a wide range of outputs – from the 'New Chinese Documentary Movement' to *egao* and *shanzhai* videos on the Internet, and from semi-journalistic reportages to satirical spoofs and cellflix sharing on social networks. Much of this output is produced by amateurs and ordinary citizens, thus enhancing plural forms of participation and activism in which netizens have played a prominent role. This chapter explores the connections between citizens' online behaviour and their offline practices and aspirations. I argue that beyond resistance, activism and participation, unofficial media production and consumption are motivated by individualist aspirations, a quest for enjoyment and for fulfilling personal desires. Technological empowerment therefore does not necessarily enhance artistic and social power but is part of a broader pattern of social change whose influence extends to mainstream media. I analyse semi-professional and amateur video productions in relation to authors' everyday life, mainly in Shanghai and Beijing, to demonstrate how engagement with social issues such as house demolition and urban alienation can also provide opportunities for articulating personal desires and aspirations.

In the course of an ethnographic study I conducted in Beijing and Shanghai between October and December 2010, a documentary film-maker I will refer to as X.J., for the purposes of anonymity, commented on his work as follows (conversation with author, Shanghai, October 2010):[1]

> 电影、纪录片就是生活的放大镜 [. . .] 我觉得拍纪录片就是好玩儿的。拍事儿。。我的目标。。最大程度是观察我的生活。[. . .] 一个东西。。。每个人看懂是不同的感觉。所以真实本身就是每一个人的真实。[. . .] 我们。。。在消费的时间发生的事情的意义都不到。那我要纪录。大城市的人跟农村的人都没有什么出别，他们都只是管见自己发生的事情，没有道德。
>
> Movies and documentaries are magnifying lenses for [examining] life. I think that making documentaries is fun. When filming, . . . my aim . . . the

> most important thing is to scrutinize my life. Things . . . everyone looks at them from a different perspective. So reality is in fact each person's own reality . . . We . . . don't grasp the meaning of events in today's consumer society. That's why I make film. There's no difference between people living in big cities and in the countryside; they are all merely concerned with what happens to themselves, there's no sense of morality.

Born in 1984, X.J. left the countryside at the age of 21 to 'have fun' and 'record life' with his digital video camera. Similarly, W.X., another young director, born in 1983, went to live with his girlfriend in Beijing after graduating. There he set up a fixed video camera to record the rows, laughter, doubts, love and all the dirty washing that is typical of the life of two youngsters getting to grips with temporary jobs and new responsibilities. W.X. describes himself as an independent director when not working as a teacher or a graphic artist. Like many other 'ordinary people without a face', as he puts it, the 30-year-old grew up in 1990s' China, a time of economic boom and growing diffusion of digital technology. And, like others, he decided to start making films, and specifically to film himself.

In what follows, I draw on 11 interviews I conducted in Beijing and Shanghai with Chinese youths, including X.J. and W.X., to investigate how the video and online behaviour of citizens is connected to the offline practices and aspirations of their everyday life. The 11 interviews are part of an extended, 14-month ethnographic study that took place between 2010 and 2013 and involved 92 interviewees in total, predominantly male (80 per cent male, 20 per cent female), and mostly born after 1980.[2] Drawing on this data, I demonstrate how the youngsters' appropriation of digital technologies, especially in the urban context, can open up new avenues of representation of both self and society, as well as resistance to certain social and power dynamics. Like Paola Voci (2010), I use the following terms – rather than *film* (*dianying*/电影) – to highlight the hybrid and 'on-scene'[3] nature of the products analysed: *images* to refer to films and video images (*yingxiang*/影像 in Chinese); *video* (*luxiang*/录像); and *DV* (Digital Video). I do so in an attempt to enlarge the scope of such visual products and practices beyond the world of cinema, and to foreground their impact on social dynamics and the lived experiences of ordinary people.

Given its heterogeneous nature, I will first situate the phenomenon of independent video production in the urban context, moving between the circuit of independent cinema and the amateur and semi-professional consumption and production of digital video images in the large cities and on the Internet, and focusing on the perspective of the post-1980s' generation. Semi-professional and amateur videos will be analysed in relation to the everyday lives of those who produced them to demonstrate how engagement with social issues, such as housing demolition and urban alienation, can also provide an opportunity to express personal desires and aspirations. The analysis is based not only on videos and websites, but also on everyday

practices, mainly in Shanghai and Beijing, to investigate how the participating and desiring subjects discussed by Lisa Rofel (2007) are empowered *and* controlled in the post-socialist context (Liu 2002; Rofel 2007), considered as both a resource and a threat.

In *Desiring China*, Lisa Rofel (2007) observes that during the 30 years that followed Mao's death a post-socialist ethos emerged that is characterized by the transformation of the Chinese people from self-sacrificing subjects to desiring subjects. During the Mao era, individual difference was erased and private communication became public. In the post-socialist period, however, processes of marketization and commercialization have openly stimulated individual desires. The industrial modernization imaginary is now interlocked with a commercial one, leading to what Rofel describes as 'a commodity oriented modernization imaginary and discourse' (2007:111). Hence, homogeneity has given way to polyvocality, one of the main principles advocated by the early independent documentary movement in China. Collectivity has given rise to individuality, and public discourse has facilitated the expression of private desires. As Rofel points out, the media legitimate and even promote the desire for high-end commodities, for individual freedom, love, sex, power, fame and privacy. Recalling Foucault's notion of the panopticon, individuals in post-socialist China, and the rest of the world, are even more tightly controlled – now by the interplay of technology and desire – than they were in the past. Instead of political institutions shaping individuals through discipline and punishment, technology and unbound desires now entrap individuals and construct them as split subjects who experience the otherness of the self discussed by Liu Xin (2002) on a daily basis. Kleinman et al. (2011) also speak about a divided self, one trapped in the divide between public and private, personal interests and social responsibility. The consumer culture that emerged in the 1990s is expressed in both individual discourses and the official discourse, and is sensitive to the influences of the market, the Web and the society in which individuals live, all of which focus on social recognition and personal success rather than the common good. Analysis of these discourses and associated practices and representations can offer insights into some of the multiple ways in which power acts through the narratives that circulate in a specific social space, linking the practical with the imaginary[4] (Rofel 1999:14) and, more importantly, foregrounding the possibility of provoking cracks in the dominant narrative world.

The study: videos and subjects

When independent cinema emerged in the 1990s, the possibility of using video images for individual expression and for creating the polyphony discussed by Chu Yingchi (2007) seemed a utopian project confined to young intellectuals. In today's changing social, political and economic landscape, easy to use and accessible digital video cameras and small screens offer everyone the chance to individually consume and produce images. The potential of

such digital media, now an integral part of our daily lives, thus needs to be rethought given its accessibility and widespread appeal, and the myriad ways in which its output is produced and consumed by social actors (Ginsburg 1994; Miller 1995; Larkin 2004; Horst and Miller 2005).

The advent of independent cinema coincided with a growing market economy, which by the end of the 1980s had provided greater opportunities for exercising both professional and personal freedom. Between the late 1990s and the early 2000s, the strengthening and diversification of the communication and entertainment markets led to a progressive narrowing of the gap between unofficial images (i.e. independent film-making) on the one hand, and private, amateur video production and official, state-approved production on the other. Young film-makers straddle the boundary that separates the two worlds. The job of documenting, of leaving a trace, was one that was purely the domain of independent experimental directors and avant-gardes, but today it has become a form of participation that digital video cameras and mobile devices have brought within everyone's reach. And so it happens that many of those who take part in independent film festivals or produce and share their videos on the Internet are motivated not by an aesthetic, artistic interest in the cinema, but by the desire to tell a specific story, or to tell their own story (Aufderheide 1997; McRobbie 2007). Producing unofficial videos can thus be seen as a form of social participation, a political act in the context of what Wang Hui (2006) has defined as China's 30-year process of 'depoliticized politics', whereby the market, which today equates with the State, has come to dominate society. Globalization and the market have destroyed traditional social relations (Yang 1994; Wang 2006), with the accompanying process of depoliticization creating a situation in which 'the space for political debate has largely been eliminated' (Wang 2006:698).

Although I was initially interested in independent films and documentaries that are explicitly political and oppositional, the focus of my attention shifted during my first fieldwork trip to Shanghai (March to June 2010). I became more concerned with the connection between semi-professional and unofficial amateur videos – both difficult to categorize as either fiction or documentary – and the subjects who produce and consume them. I thus decided to analyse the relationship between video products and how they are produced, circulated and consumed, irrespective of the extent of their engagement with politics.

The ethnographic work I conducted was multi-sited (Marcus and Myers 1995; Hannerz 2003), mobile and virtual (Hine 2000); it took place in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, Kunming and on the Internet between 2010 and 2013 and extended beyond the world of cinema to examine the dialogue between the videos and the society in which they are embedded, as expressed in the lived experiences of my subjects. I treated the video images I selected as a space of cultural production, a starting point for understanding their producers' subjectivities and relationship to video production. To make

sense of the material, I drew on both cultural and anthropological studies that engage with the active role of media consumption (Hansen 1993; Appadurai 1996; Ginsburg 1994, 2002; Abu-Lughod 2002; Yang 1994, 2002; Naficy 2003; Schein 2006, 2008) and production (Turner 1992, 1997; Marcus and Myers 1995; Ginsburg 1997; Marks 2000; Naficy 2001; Larkin 2004; Schein 2006). The research began with textual analysis of video products archived in Beijing and Kunming,[5] alongside contextual analysis that consisted of fieldwork on video production and consumption sites, mainly independent film festivals in Beijing and Nanjing. As I interacted with producers and spectators, I developed a self-reflexive practice which enabled me to adapt my methodology and the focus of my fieldwork over time. I gradually left the so-called independent cinema world and engaged in a critical reading of video images, discourses and practices, focusing on subjectivities (Ortner 2006) and the way they are performed (Turner 1992; Geertz 1983/1988; Butler 1997). I decided to work with post-1980s' subjects, both female and male, living in an urban context – Beijing, Shanghai – and involved in video production as semi-professionals and amateurs. Beyond interviews and questionnaires in formal and informal contexts such as film festivals and film schools, I followed my informants as they conducted their daily lives. My reading of visual products and practices was thus informed by first-hand research on subjectivities and focuses on social actors involved in everyday practices.

Unofficial video production in China

In addition to official images streamed by the media in the public and private domains, other images are seen and shared by young enthusiasts and aspiring artists on smartphone and computer screens. Yu (2009) uses the term *micro-cinema* and Voci (2010) uses *smaller-screen realities* to refer to the myriad genres that break through the boundaries of the cinematic world, are incorporated into popular practice and become a form of media participation available to ordinary citizens. Unlike the independent documentaries produced in the 1990s and the early 2000s, which portrayed the anti-heroes shunned by society (often the directors themselves, and their friends), what distinguishes the subjects and videos of these 'smaller-screen realities' is the personal, often autobiographical nature of the narratives, which are aimed at self-exploration and enjoyment. Technological empowerment therefore does not necessarily enhance artistic or civic engagement but is part of a broader pattern of social change whose influence extends to mainstream media.

Given the global dynamics that have swept China since the early 2000s, it is useful to draw on work that critiques Western capitalism, particularly in reference to visual production, without, however, overlooking the historical and cultural specificities of China (Debord 1967/1995; Lu Tonglin 2011). This body of work suggests that independent cinema's focus on individual stories challenged the grand narratives elaborated in the official

productions of the early 1990s, but today it has come to serve the interests of the consumer society: what we see in a personal story now is not an intimate portrait of a lived experience, but a different recounting of history and memory that promotes individualism in line with current economic policy. Economically desirable, individualism nevertheless also seems to pose a political threat, as evident in the Chinese government's ambivalent response to unofficial micro-narratives and video images. Documentaries and videos that criticize various aspects of contemporary society, in the meantime, are more widely available today than they were in the 1990s and early 2000s, are more diversified and are popularized by public and private TV channels (Lu 2003; Chu 2007; Berry et al. 2010). Nevertheless, the most controversial and sensitive works remain confined to national and international film festivals, kept out of reach of all but a relatively small group of intellectuals. Indeed, since 2011 the Beijing government's strategic stance on festivals that showcase independent cinema – especially the Yunfest (*Yunzhinan jilu yingxiang luntan*, Yunnan Multicultural Visual Festival, in Kunming) and the Beijing Independent Film Festival of Songzhuang in Beijing – has been to either ban them totally or to interrupt activities on the day of inauguration, when the largest number of visitors are likely to attend, and then allow private screenings in the days that follow. In other words, the government restricts the screening of the works to industry professionals: directors, critics, scholars and the odd student.[6] Its apparatus of control seems to target the diffusion and circulation of the videos, rather than their production.

While the self-proclaimed independent directors of the 1990s told stories about the fringes of society, the young directors and amateur enthusiasts who are passionate about producing videos and who attend film festivals today produce short films and experimental and animated videos that are more diversified in both form and content. Alongside a blossoming documentary movement that appeals to our social and political conscience, young aspiring directors and enthusiasts are developing a type of production that focuses on 'lighter' themes (Voci 2010), at least at first glance. Voci identifies 'lightness' as a peculiar characteristic of videos produced and consumed on digital mobile devices. Such videos are 'volatile cultural products' (2010:15). Despite their connections to mass media and popular culture, they do not set out to be popular, but are rather intended for individual consumption, are often irreverent, and with no (declared) commercial aim. As Voci argues, 'these movies contribute not only to the broader expansion of China's public sphere, but also, more specifically, to the continuation and development of exhibitionism and, most importantly, to alternative *light* but deeply meaningful ways of seeing' (2010:15).

The visual products discussed here are similar to Voci's 'light videos', in that they are individual, hybrid and interstitial (both in cultural and filmic terms). Like Voci, I would argue that 'smaller-screen movie-makers and viewers are not abstract or isolated individuals [and that] their identities

and the shared cultural space they inhabit cannot be contained, understood or explained by their *real* social identities and recognized stable attributes' (2010:201). And yet, my ethnographic research put me in contact with *real* subjects: enthusiasts, amateurs, authors and consumers, all belonging to the same generation and sharing an interest in video recording. Ethnographic research allows me to analyse the videos in relation to the practices of the producers, amateurs, enthusiasts and users, all of whom share the fact that they belong to the same generation and love filming. Correspondences and incongruences between the video representations and the actions of the subjects are meaningful when both are understood as performances, and when the analysis encompasses both practices and settings. The similarities that can be seen between the life represented in the video and the everyday life of the subject thus reveal motivations and themes that go well beyond mere entertainment and self presentation.

The so-called D-Generation – the 'digital generation' of authors who emerged in the early 2000s, including the post-1980s – has been raised on a diet of film, in terms of both consumption and production, thanks to widespread piracy that has enabled the unauthorized copying and informal circulation of self-produced videos. The social transformations that accompanied the reforms of the 1980s also swept through the world of visual production, moving it from the domain of state enterprises to that of private production companies, from the medium of film to digital platforms, and from cinemas to personal consumption, all enabled by new digital and portable technologies. While the first independent film-makers were mostly trained at the prestigious Beijing Film Academy, still considered a benchmark by aspiring directors, most of the D-Generation were immersed in film culture from a very early age and have acquired their skills informally, enabled by the black market (Sundaram 1999; Larkin 2004), whose affordable charges did not only broaden the base of the cinematographic public but, more importantly, gave young people access to banned productions.[7] Further, the Academy was joined more recently by small private centres whose offer of training courses and access to film archives – mainly pirated copies – attracts a growing number of young people with an interest in video-making. The resulting landscape recalls Miriam Hansen's discussion of cinema as a heterotopia that 'converges with the concept of an alternative public sphere – as a medium that allows people to organize their experience on the basis of their own context of living, its specific needs, conflicts and anxieties' (1991:108).

Stories of everyday life

Like many young people who live in big cities, the young men and women I interviewed and shadowed for this ethnographic study did not watch television but looked for information and amusement on their mobile devices.

They used Weibo (China's version of Twitter), Weixin (the most widespread and popular instant messaging and content-sharing service), the black market and the Internet. They escaped censure by 'jumping over the wall' (*fan qiang*/翻墙), using VPN systems, download links and private redirection sites. Like many young people around the world, they nurtured a strong desire to not only consume images, but also produce them, in particular in video format. These young people had been inspired by stories such as that of the blogger Zola (Zhou Shugang), whose coverage of the so-called nail-house incident in 2007 made him an Internet celebrity,[8] and who then shot to international fame when Steve Maing made him the protagonist of his *High Tech Low Life*[9] documentary. They were also empowered by independent film schools, both offline (such as the one in Songzhuang, Beijing) and online, which cater to those wishing to study the production of video images and are attended by both aspiring directors and others, like Wincee, who merely want to express themselves.

Zhang Haiying – who refers to herself as Wincee with friends – and I met in 2010, when I was working with the organizers of an independent film festival during a research field trip to Shanghai and was asked to help translate the subtitles of her short documentary. I was having trouble translating some of the Shanghainese expressions in the dialogue and so asked to be put in touch with her. This was how I discovered that she was not actually a director but a coordinator in a children's language school in Shanghai. She told me that she had signed up for an online film course because she wanted 'to give an account of old Shanghai and its inhabitants' after the new urban development plans forced her family to relocate. She edited the scenes of interviews she conducted with various people, and her view of 'old Shanghai' was turned into the short documentary *Wrecked Cities in China* (*bei pohuai de chengshi*/被破坏的城市). The story depicted in the video is about how the city has changed; it is told by many voices, including that of Wincee herself, from the various small communities of the different districts that constitute the city. It is not an act of protest, like Zola's reportages or the many documentaries on the theme of demolition and relocation or Ou Ning's *Meishi Street*;[10] it is rather a personal journey of exploration. Wincee's video captures the experiences and viewpoints of those who chose to resist and protest against inadequate compensation; in the words of one of her protagonists (Old man 1), as expressed in the English subtitles[11] (Zhang 2010):

> As I know, the price per square metre here has arisen [*sic*] to 100.000 RMB. However, it is less than 14.000 RMB now. The compensation, given by the government, could not afford [*sic*] an apartment, no matter where it is. Do you think the compensation is reasonable? It is exploitation, it is robbery. [. . .] I have to struggle. If you have no reaction, the government will pay you less and less and treat you worse and worse.

But there are also voices that lament the degraded conditions of the old *shikumen* and that express a position in favour of the move to new buildings, as evident in this set of subtitles (Old man 2) from the same video (Zhang 2010):

> We have no idea. CCP said it planned very well . . . but our citizens only hope houses could be pulled down as soon as possible, no matter [whether] living in suburbs or urban [*sic*]. We could live in [a] new apartment at least. It is enough for the rest of the life. I am already 65 years old with white hair. Our country is in poverty, but the life of our citizens is much more difficult. The price of the apartment is too high to be afforded by our workers.

Wincee is not a film director and her aim was not to join the residents' protest, but as she moved through the districts of old Shanghai and listened to and recorded people's stories during a period of intense uncertainty, she became aware of the changes that were taking place in that part of the city. She also came to realize that she was part of these changes and was suffering their consequences, hence the desire to create a record of her own and other people's experiences. Three years after our first meeting, and despite having dropped out of the online course, Wincee was working on a documentary that told stories of the everyday lives of friends and colleagues who had migrated from other regions to Shanghai in search of work and fortune. She was careful to tell me that the aim of this new project was not to effect change but to be a part of the city and to leave a mark on it. Wincee thus engaged, and continues to engage, with social issues, but like most short-film and micro-movie makers, she was initially driven by individual need and desire. For her, making videos was a means of engaging with a public issue from a personal perspective, a channel that satisfied her need to participate as life continued on its everyday path, far from the usual avenues of political or social activism.

Digital video production, then, allows ordinary citizens like Wincee to engage with social issues from a subjective angle, which means that different views and different experiences can translate into different representations. The city of Shanghai takes on a rather different guise in a video by Mai Mai, a graphic artist who works in advertising. Unlike Wincee's amateur enquiry and unlike journalistic documentaries such as *Street Life* (*Nanjing Lu*/南京路, Zhao Dayong 2006),[12] Mai Mai's *Four Cowards* (*danxiao guimen*/胆小鬼们, 2011) is a first-person narration of the alienation he experiences in his native city. It offers an account of the city not from the perspective of outsiders, but from that of its own bourgeois citizens.

Four Cowards begins by taking us into an apartment where two women are sitting on a sofa, one wearing sunglasses and a hat, the other wearing a mask that covers her face. The elderly lady, who we discover is the mother,

tells us excitedly about meeting strange creatures that come into the house through the pipes and windows. The filmmaker–narrator's voice then takes us on the subway, where a group of young people run through the train carriages, attracting the attention of passengers with their bizarre gestures: Ben, an American, prances around singing to himself and pretending to play the guitar; an improbable jazz trio play in the middle of the carriage; Olaf, a German, makes loud, grating sounds using microphones tied to hand grips, as does Junky, who uses electronic pedal boards. The passengers in all the carriages where the performances take place are both annoyed and curious, and use their mobile phones to film the strange goings-on. At the end we meet M (Mai Mai), who plays an acoustic guitar that emits no sound because the chords have been removed; the passengers focus their attention on him and his 'white hands that indicate cowardice and tension' (English subtitles; Mai Mai 2011). He is a shy young man who was advised by a friend and *feng shui* expert to wear a hat to exorcise the unease and anxiety that afflict him. So why did he take part in a raid on the subway? Why suffer the glaring looks and the inquisitive camera lens? To put himself to the test – he later tells Y, a youngster who finds peace when she embraces the camera in crowded places after a day of work in a former abattoir turned luxury shopping mall. M asks Y to pretend she is a TV reporter and film his family for him, a family that we discover is battling multiple alien invasions; Y, in turn, asks M to film the people on the Bund, Shanghai's riverside path, an act that enables him to 'find relief in the middle of a crowd for the first time' (English subtitles; Mai Mai 2011). Here, M's lens stops to peer at a beggar: 'Who is it? Is he scared? Where will he go? Does he know he's being observed?' (English subtitles). What M ends up capturing, guided by Y, is a secret meeting involving Y's father and a woman. M, on the other hand, had asked her to film his mother and sister, as the English subtitles explain:

> Because they watched television all day and had contacted several reporters to tell them their story in the belief that their life would change. But no one took any notice of them and they thought they were done for.

As the two return home, M asks Y to stop the car so that he can chuck the film recording into the river. 'But I can't stop here, the other cars are all going too fast', she responds, 'I have to drive at the same speed and distance from the other cars' (English subtitles; Mai Mai 2011).

In *Four Cowards* each character interprets their own self, based on documented facts and everyday life. As he told me at our first meeting in Nanjing in October 2011, Mai Mai's screenplay is an ironic and cynical reflection on one's personal anxieties, on relations in the city and the influence of the media. His life outside the video world he created was marked by the same anxieties and fears, relating to work, a newborn son, the music and the frenzy of urban life (second interview with author, Shanghai, April 2012). Like many of his peers, Mai Mai used the medium of video as an amateur to

present himself, to show himself in the first person, observing and commenting on himself and on passers-by from an irreverent and critical perspective, reinterpreting everyday life as a game that involves playing with reality and fiction. Making a video was initially intended simply as a way to pass the time; taking part in the China Independent Film Festival of Nanjing was an afterthought (interview with author, Nanjing, October 2011).

Film recording, in this case using video, is today a practice that enables social actors to document and communicate the experiences and violence of everyday life. Filming is a practice of participating in and inhabiting the world according to Tim Ingold, who draws a distinction between inhabiting a space and occupying it, explaining that an inhabitant 'participates from within in the very process of the world's continual coming into being and . . . in laying a trail of life, contributes to its weave and texture' (2006:47). Storytelling similarly maps relations as journeys across the land of life experiences, like the threads of a web. Telling a story involves retracing a path through the world that others have also inhabited, each in their own way (Ingold 2006).

Conclusion

Wang Hui suggests that 'the search for new forms of political subjectivities must be accompanied by a redefinition of the boundaries of politics itself' (2006:699), and that this can be achieved by re-energizing public space and foregrounding individual lives. I would argue that the 'voice of the image' (Guo Jing 2005) constitutes one vehicle through which the boundaries of politics can be redrawn, as attested, in particular, by the proliferation of first-person films, of independent schools that 'educate the eye', and of various forms of online participation. Exploring the practices and discourses of subjects involved in the production and consumption of various media and technologies – as in the work of Ginsburg (1994), Miller (1995), Horst and Miller (2005) and Abu-Lughod (2002) – enables us to look beyond the image to explore what is happening in the lived experiences of participants. The lives of those who made the videos I have discussed in this chapter, and the lives of others like them who produce amateur or semi-professional images, feature work and rest, time hanging out with friends and hours spent in front of the computer in which 'depoliticized politics' and its devices, whether it be the coming together of State and market interests or the restrictions placed on individual freedom, are perceived and lived as fact, as a structure of experience. What all these lives have in common, in addition to an interest in video practice and the fact of being part of the same generation, is a search for a sense of belonging and recognition, which translates into a desire for individual expression aimed not at changing society but at trying to find a place within it.

Today's citizens are consumers shaped by society's promotion of individual attributes and individualism in the context of modernization and

the capitalist economy. They enjoy material benefits that were not available to their parents. Nevertheless, thanks to the imaginary worlds to which the 'ubiquitous, threatening, enabling, empowering' technology has given them access (Strathern 1996:519), these same subjects are able to question the very structure that confines them, and to find what Hamid Naficy (2001) calls interstices for narrating the world and narrating themselves. In this sense, the video image offers a detailed look into the quotidian and into society; a prospective and particularized view, that – to use the words of Qiu Jiongjiong, professional artist and self-taught film director – is like 'looking at a leopard through a pipe' (*guan zhong kui bao*/管中窥豹; interview with author, September 2011, Beijing). What emerges from the analysis of data in the current study is that the quasi-obsessive, self-centred perspective that appears to be adopted in light videos and is evident in the way their makers talk about them is part of a quest for recognition, an expression of an aspiration, an exploration – rather than a presentation – of the self. Notwithstanding the fact that technology and unbound desires can entrap and control individuals, investigating how subjects respond to this context may also reveal that alongside changes in social and political contexts, new interpretative strategies that complicate the picture have also been developing.

Notes

1 Conversations were conducted in Chinese; all translations are my own.
2 A small number were born in 1978 and 1979.
3 'On-scene', or 'on the spot' (*xianchang*), is defined by Robinson (2010:180) as 'the term for location shooting, a practice codified by Chinese directors, both feature and documentary filmmakers, in the early 1990's. It is closely associated with the new realist aesthetic of *jishi zhuyi* – "documentary realism" – that these artists were seeking to develop as an alternative to the by then discredited *xianshi zhuyi*, or socialist realism, that has characterized studio-based Chinese documentary practice up until the late 1980's'. See also Zhang Xianmin and Zhang Yaxuan (2003), Zhang Yingjin (2004) and Paola Voci (2010).
4 I follow Rofel (1999) in adopting the term 'imaginary' to refer to the social and individual aspirations analysed by Appadurai (1996).
5 I consulted the following film archives: CCD Workstation, CIFA (Chinese Independent Film Archive), Iberia Center for Contemporary Art, Li Xianting Film Fund and Fanhall Center in Beijing, and Yunnan Multi Culture Visual Festival Archive in Kunming.
6 The Beijing festival, for example, was interrupted abruptly in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 (fieldnotes), with the government coming down particularly hard on the final awards ceremony of the 2013 edition, when contemporary artist Ai Weiwei received his award for the documentary *Ping'an Yueqing*/平安乐清. It also banned the summer term of the Li Xianting Film School (Songzhuang, Beijing) in 2014, where conflict then erupted between the participants and the local police.
7 In 2009, the cultural industry and the State launched a strong anti-piracy campaign that had a profound impact on the activities of the main video-streaming websites, such as Youku, TuDou and Ku6, and the vendors of pirated films.

8 A nail house (*dīngzi hù*/钉子户) is a Chinese neologism coined by developers to refer to homes belonging to people who refuse to 'make room for development', a euphemism for accepting demolition and reconstruction. The dramatic case of Wu Ping's nail house in Chongqing was covered by a young Hunnanese, the first non-journalist blogger Zola Zhou. He moved to Chongqing to report on the event, on his blog and often using merely his mobile phone, and soon gained the support of Chinese netizens, who distrusted official media. See www.zuola.com/weblog/sitemap (accessed 3 January 2013) and http://hightechlowlifefilm.com/; http://dgeneratefilms.com/critical-essays/struggles-of-chinese-evictees-turned-into-video-game (accessed 3 January 2013).

9 A documentary that follows the journey of two of China's first citizen reporters as they travel across the country, chronicling under-reported news and social issues. See www.imdb.com/title/tt2151988/?ref_=nm_ov_bio_lk1 (accessed 14 January 2015).

10 In the documentary *Meishi Street* (Ou Ning 2006), the sequel to *San Yuan Li* (Cao Fei and Ou Ning 2003), independent film-maker Ou Ning reports on the governmental project to redevelop the old Beijing area south west of Tiananmen Square in preparation for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games. The film's originality lies in the many shots taken by Zhang Jinli and other Meishi Street residents, in which Zhang Jinli captures the response of his neighbours to the devastating demolition of their homes, their discontent with the way the government handled the demolition and resettlement project, and with the compensation plan devised by the government in collusion with property developers. The camera lens allows Zhang Jinli to express his resistance and raise awareness of the importance of recording the street's history. In this context, placing the camera in the hands of protagonists can be seen as a way of allowing multiple readings of current realities.

11 The English subtitles were provided to me by Wincee and are reproduced here as received, without correction.

12 Zhao Dayong is an independent documentarist and one of the early participants in the digital revolution. His 2006 *Street Life* (*Nanjing Lu*/南京路) gave voice to the inhabitants of Shanghai's streets, specifically the garbage collectors who barely scrape a living. Zhao's work is a sort of counter melody to the Shanghai imaginary, showcasing the lives and stories of desperate migrants who are alienated and excluded from the dream of the cosmopolitan city. See http://dgeneratefilms.com/film-reviews/a-mad-dance-on-shanghai-streets-zhao-dayongs-street-life (accessed 5 August 2015).

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9 Participatory urbanism

Making the stranger familiar and the familiar strange

Stine Ejsing-Duun

Although urban areas are planned structures, they afford physical spaces for various types of expression and participation that are not anticipated in the original plans. One way in which citizens can influence the contours of the urban landscape is through leisure practices, but they can only do so if they are aware of the impact of their behaviour on their physical surroundings. This chapter explores some of the ways in which citizens engage in leisure activities in order to co-create urban space. It demonstrates how locative media allow participants to negotiate the structures designed by those in power and alert citizens to their influence. The chapter also explores aspects of the merging of urban and digital spaces to document experiences that relate to ownership of urban space and offer participants a fresh perspective on their surroundings. Locative media projects, I argue, are political artefacts that impact the relationship between participants and their surroundings, and designing them thus demands attention to how such artefacts position participants and non-participants in the project. The chapter outlines a participatory and political approach to designing locative media that aims to make the familiar strange as well as making strangers familiar.

Urban areas are planned structures that cannot easily be changed. They do, however, afford physical spaces for various leisure practices, from street art to parkour and from urban gaming to flash mobs. Thus, while citizens who inhabit urban areas cannot directly influence their structures, they can influence their contours through such leisure practices. In this chapter I focus on how citizens' engagement in locative leisure activities may allow them to co-create urban space. This participatory urbanism is a form of exercising democracy on a daily basis, enhancing awareness of the structures within which we live as well as making participation in the public arena possible. Engaging in locative media projects creates leisure experiences in the urban landscape that allow participants to relate to the structures of that landscape. In what follows I present an approach to the design of locative media that foregrounds their potential to promote political awareness and participation, in part by making the familiar strange and the stranger familiar.

But what are locative media projects? Picture this scenario: Three women walk around a parking lot in the Sydhavnen area in Copenhagen on an overcast September day in 2014. One holds a mobile phone in her hand. She circles around, looking at the map on the screen while the other two follow her moves. On the map, she can read the location of the mobile phone and the location of a 'scenic vista', a point of interest marked as a black dot. She tells her friends she found the spot and the three women huddle together to look at the screen, which presents them with the following message: 'Turn your nose to the air and sniff the Wi-Fi. Text a friend and tell her what the Wi-Fi smells like'. They laugh and sniff the air. They make suggestions and agree to describe the smell of the Wi-Fi in a text message to another group playing the same game. The text reads, 'Hi, it smells like vanilla, cinnamon and soot!' A message on screen then suggests the group walk a certain distance, slowing their pace by dragging a foot behind. The three women do this, laughing and talking about how others would see them at that moment.

I was part of this group of women, acting as their teacher; the other two were students who had just started a graduate programme. The group was playing a locative media game called *Indeterminate Hikes+* as part of their university course and used it to explore the surroundings at the campus of Aalborg University in Copenhagen. This example allows me to explain locative media concretely – as a genre of urban projects that use computing, mobile technologies, physicality and location to develop playful scenarios, interactive events and games that explore the concepts of participation and space, especially urban space (Flanagan 2007). Locative media events can help de-familiarize common representations of space and disrupt habitual patterns of its use. They invite participants to renegotiate the structures designed by those in power and alert citizens to their influence. Locative media projects that allow individuals to play with the idea of surveillance are a good example: here, participants' attention is directed to CCTV cameras in urban areas, which we tend to ignore in our everyday lives. In some locative media events, participants can map and play around the zones under surveillance (Ejsing-Duun 2011).

As Winner (1980) reminds us, technologies are not innocuous; they can include and exclude groups of people and as such are tools of power. For locative media projects to promote participatory urbanism, they must invite citizens to become participants. Extending this invitation and considering how participants are positioned within the frame of the event are both challenging and crucial for creating a platform for urban participation and exploration. Designers must reflect upon how participants are positioned, how they are invited and what kind of participation is called for. If these aspects are not taken into consideration, we may end up with locative media that either do not have any impact or, even worse, that discriminate. Thus, the main question I will attempt to address in this chapter concerns how locative media projects can better involve citizens in locative media experiences so that they can become more aware of the structures in which they live as well as more involved in the public arena.

In attempting to address this question, I will draw on two locative media projects that have existed for a number of years, been used by many participants, and can be played anywhere, though they gain meaning from the specific location in which they are played. These are the application (app) *Indeterminate Hikes+* and the annual *PARK(ING) DAY* event. The discussion is informed by a theoretical framework that revisits Debord's (1955/2008) contribution to the development of psychogeography. Psychogeography was developed by Situationist International and focuses on the effect of the geographical environment on people's emotions and behaviour. The methods it employs, which are playful and follow an activist agenda, inform discussions of locative media projects by designers and researchers. Playful activism and psychogeography also inform the two locative media projects analysed in this chapter. The approach adopted here is further informed by the work of Flanagan (2007), who discusses the potentials and pitfalls of psychogeography and locative media, inflecting playful activism with new media perspectives. Locative media should not only produce playful events, but also influence our daily use of urban space. I thus draw on de Certeau's (1988) theory of everyday practices in the urban landscape and Simmel and Hughes' (1949) concept of sociability in urban space to address the social aspects of being in the city. Finally, locative media projects are designed interventions in time and space and can intervene in the development of urban space by making the familiar strange, a method described by Wortham-Galvin (2013), who proposes to use these urban interventions to create new sustainable structures for citizens.

Playful activism

Encouraging playful intervention in urban space is often associated with the writers, anarchists and artists who established Situationist International in 1957, and who practised in and around Paris until 1972. The Situationists were preoccupied with the negative impact of modern capitalist society, which they characterized as follows (Plant 2002:1):

> an organisation of spectacles: a frozen moment of history in which it is impossible to experience real life or actively participate in the construction of the lived world . . . the alienation fundamental to class society and capitalist production has permeated all areas of social life, knowledge, and culture, with the consequence that people are removed and alienated not only from the goods they produce and consume, but also from their own experiences, emotions, creativity, and desires. People are spectators of their own lives, and even the most personal gestures are experienced at one remove.

They attempted to fight this alienation through a revolution based on the 'creation of temporary situations that would offer a brief moment of transcendence from boredom' (Flanagan 2007:3). In this they were inspired by the

aristocratic figure of the 'flâneur', a man of leisure who walked the streets of Paris as if they were his. He walked aimlessly and thus personified the right to inhabit the urban space. But the flâneur did this as an end in itself, without taking issues such as ownership and power into consideration. An intensely political group, the Situationists transformed the aimless meander of the flâneur into playful activism. They developed psychogeography as an approach that examined 'the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (Debord 1955/2008:23). Their method focuses on the individual's psychological relationship to everyday space, as a way of countering alienation. Debord, a prominent member of the group, developed psychogeographical methods for uncovering the reasons for particular ambiences in specific areas and challenging dominant assumptions about them. He regarded these assumptions as embedded in our practices in the urban landscape.

Assumptions about the ambience of certain types of location treat these places as possessing an identity and thus having a static meaning – for instance, poor areas are seen as gloomy. But places do not have a static meaning: they are continuously reworked through the practices of those who use them. For de Certeau (1988), the city is a text, written by people walking its streets. Pedestrians are practitioners in this sense, but as they walk the streets they tend to relate to the designed structures and existing rules without seeing the intentions behind the design. Thus, they relate to a space that they cannot see – or read, they 'make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms' (de Certeau 1988:93). Only by climbing a tower and looking down on the city can we 'read' it and appreciate that it is created by us, the pedestrians (de Certeau 1988). However, by being up there, we are at a distance from the city and cannot 'write' it as we do when walking the streets, choosing one route over another, leaving traces. 'Reading' is interpretation at a distance, whereas 'writing' means being situated in the context while creating it. These are two separate modes, according to de Certeau. By using the city, being possessed and embraced by it, pedestrians are *doing* the city rather than thinking it. *Space* is the planned and consciously created structures, whereas *place* is created through practice enabled by the structure. Space and place can thus be seen as analytical categories that inform each other. Dourish (2004:4) relates space (strategic practices) and place (tactical practices) to design and use:

> Strategic practices are the practices of design, whereas tactical practices are the practices of use. To the extent that design is an exercise of power over the forms and functions of technology, de Certeau points out that these take their shape only through the ways in which they are subsequently appropriated.

By creating structures, urban architects, politicians, and designers of locative media projects enable opportunities, whereas participants choose and actualize

the opportunities. If these opportunities are not seen as a consequence of design, but merely as something 'natural', users of the city cannot understand it critically.

The Situationists' approach disrupts the assumptions and habits of citizens and allows them to relate to the structures of power through playfulness. Debord (1958) describes one method developed by this approach, known as *dérive* (French for drifting), a means of rapid, playful walking stripped from everyday motivations for walking and moving. This is preferably done in small groups of people who together adapt to the ambiance of the urban landscape. Another method involves using a map of a different area than the one where a person is currently walking, to 'express not subordination to randomness but total insubordination to habitual influences' (Debord 1955/2008:26).

This form of radical activism needs to be revisited to promote citizen participation in a contemporary context. First, although Debord recommends walking together and talking about the experience, there is a lack of emphasis on sociability. Second, while the Situationists encourage appropriating urban landscape through playful presence, including walking the streets in estranging ways, they do not discuss the need to not only read the surroundings in a different fashion but also to write them differently – to disrupt the structures of the city and create alternatives. Third, the Situationists have been criticized for their focus on themselves and for their class-specific view: 'after all, who really has had the ability to claim unrestricted movement', Flanagan asks, 'to have time to follow one's curiosity – who is able to wander and drift?' (2007:4). In what follows I address these criticisms by promoting sociability in relation to playful activism and proposing a method that helps make the familiar strange as a form of disruptive intervention, before presenting the two locative media projects and demonstrating how they involve participants from all walks of life.

Play and sociability: Making the stranger familiar

Huizinga (1993:21) defines play as 'an activity connected with no material interest, . . . no profit can be gained by it'. In this sense, play is unproductive and non-functional. However, the playful experience is not merely personal. Indeed, Huizinga goes on to assert that play 'promotes the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means' (1993:21). In the context of locative media projects, it is essential that sociability is understood as the pure feeling of togetherness. Thus, this kind of sociability differs from that pursued by the Situationists, which is a political sociability aimed at revolution. Instead, the sociability needed for contemporary locative media projects, I would argue, is a way of being together. When people play, they are together in the moment and their way of being is cheerful. As Simmel and Hughes explain, this cheerful sociability is

'the play-form of association' (1949:255), which means that, combined, play and socializing are central to social life. This might be hard to accommodate in the city: living in the city promotes a blasé attitude, one that protects urban citizens from the constant stimuli of the surrounding world and leaves them less attentive to their surroundings (Simmel 1950).

Blindness to one's own impact on the surroundings and a blasé attitude to the world and its structures are social and psychological responses to being in the modern city, responses that can be changed. This is why Debord (1955/2008, 1958) argues that 'atmosphere' is not inherent in a location. The atmosphere is a physical expanse, one that surrounds us and that we participate in creating through our moods (Böhme 2013). It exists between people and develops in time and place. In this sense it is social rather than spatial and must be examined as such, and negotiated by citizens. Jensen and Lenskjold suggest that this can be achieved through social friction, defined as a process 'which separates different expressive behaviours and contexts from each other' (2004:2). Social friction – or disruption – draws the attention of participants to their own and other citizens' practices in the urban landscape. The familiar everyday space is rendered strange to allow us to relate to space not as a constant but rather as a reminder of what de Certeau has already stressed: that space is not fixed, but rather in process, incomplete and continuously being reproduced by those using it. Social friction offers a way in which 'people [can] continuously re-work the relation between themselves and the city' (Jensen and Lenskjold 2004:2). The practitioners who collectively create places must be targeted to change or simply make this process of reproduction transparent, and participants in locative media projects must be invited to experience urban spaces directly through playful exploration as actors rather than passive spectators (Pinder 2005). By engaging in a locative media event, participants can relate to each other and to their surroundings. To disrupt the familiar, locative media events need to point to the differences in participants' relations to urban space and allow them to negotiate their assumptions about their surroundings and thus make the perspective of strangers familiar.

Play and disruption: Making the familiar strange

Playful locative media events can overwrite the meaning of everyday places, with potentially negative consequences. Flanagan, for example, argues that one problem with 'locative media and pervasive games is that many of these new, mediated experiences refer to and appropriate space while divorcing it from its meaning, history, and significance' (2007:4). This is not surprising given that play tends to create enclosed social situations, as Huizinga (1993) points out. Separating space from its meaning can clearly lead to alienation. It may, on the other hand, also be used as a disruptive method that allows players to experience the familiar surroundings anew, if one accepts that places can have different meanings co-created by those who use them. At the

same time, inviting players to appropriate space may encourage a repressive attitude towards other citizens.

As instances of participatory urbanism, locative media events have to be carefully designed to effect specific types of disruption that 'make the familiar strange' in order to 'allow us to recognise ourselves, our ways of living, our conflicts and our traditions by rendering them legible, neither hidden nor – as is even more often the case – assumed and generalised' (Wortham-Galvin 2013:36). An underlying assumption here is that our practices in the urban setting are statements that are open to interpretation. To bridge the gap between these practices and the structures of the city and achieve better understanding of our surroundings, Wortham-Galvin argues for a gradual process of creating permanent change. She suggests that 'writing' the city must be supported by urban intervention projects that are 'communal, hands-on and sometimes critical, . . . ephemeral additions to the built environment, not permanent ones'; projects that 'eschew the slow moving and often costly bureaucracies of professionalised urbanism (proffered by planners, architects, landscape architects, preservationists and their like), for flexibility, rapidity, dynamisms' (2013:23).

Carefully designed, locative media events can thus serve as forms of urban intervention. They can provide a temporal interface between the participant and the urban landscape, rendering our practices and the space in which they are used readable and making the familiar strange and open to negotiation. As such, locative media can temporarily overwrite the structures of power and disrupt the habits of citizens. This is an everyday participatory approach to building the structures within which we live.

Two locative media projects

Indeterminate Hikes+ and *Park(ing) Day* both support events that allow participants to relate to and participate in specific locations through a technological platform. In the case of Indeterminate Hikes+, the platform is an application (app) that guides the participant's behaviour on the street. Park(ing) Day, on the other hand, relies on a global open-source initiative on the Internet. Local events are planned via social media and face-to-face meetings, and local 'PARKs' become global events once they are shared through social media, during and after the event.

Indeterminate Hikes+

Indeterminate Hikes+ is a mobile media mapping app developed by new media art duo EcoArtTech. It can be experienced as a participatory public event led by EcoArtTech guides or as a self-guided tour supported by the app (Nadir and Peppermint 2013); my earlier account of the walk by three women described the latter. The event is designed to transform 'everyday landscapes into sites of psychogeographical diversity and wild happenings

through a series of walking tours'.[1] The intention is to encourage participants to pay attention to everyday space as they would an awe-inspiring landscape, and thus rediscover the familiar. The app does this by mapping an arbitrary route between a starting point and an end point, which the participant chooses, and gives participants tasks at various locations along the route. EcoArtTech refers to psychogeography as a means of transcending boredom. One participant, Indeterminate Hiker Nicole Sansone, describes how the app allows her to experience this everyday space anew:[2]

> Indeterminate Hikes are revelatory in their indeterminacy: the more indeterminate the hike, the more likely you are to discover things about yourself and your relationship to your harried lifestyle. You begin to discover things about your neighborhood that have been quietly hiding in plain sight for years and years.

Locative leisure events happen in the cracks of everyday spaces, allowing participants to transcend the structure of urban space and the familiarity of their own practices; in this sense they disrupt the given. Indeterminate Hikes+ is a good example of a locative medium that allows users to negotiate their relationship to and understanding of places in their immediate surroundings. It does so by creating situations in which participants are invited to explore their perception of a place – for example, by attending to the smells around them. Designers of locative media events can thus direct the attention of participants toward certain features of everyday reality (Ejsing-Duun 2011) and invite them to act within an alternative power structure. Indeterminate Hikes+ also invites participants to explore how their practices influence their experience of a given location, as when they are prompted to drag one foot behind to slow down their pace. Here, the two parts of the interface are the participant and the urban space, with Indeterminate Hikes+ acting as the mediator that can make them meaningful to each other. Participants slow down and explore urban space as a spectacular location, rather than treating it as an irrelevant backdrop as they rush through their everyday lives. Indeterminate Hikes+ thus promotes engagement and participation in shaping everyday surroundings and develops in participants a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the contours of spaces to which we are normally blind. Judging by the quote from Indeterminate Hiker Nicole Sansone, Indeterminate Hikes+ succeeded in achieving its aims. At least this particular participant evidently negotiated the relationship between her life and her surroundings in a way that reduced her sense of alienation and made her more aware of her role in co-creating the urban space.

Although Indeterminate Hikes+ offers a self-guided tour that can be played by several participants, its design and platform do not restrict it to multiple participants. However, the interface is available to one user at a time, as only one person can hold the phone and enter reports. In this sense, it works like a psychogeographical map that can only be shared in a small

group involved in exploring the relationship between themselves and their surroundings. Park(ing) Day, on the other hand, is inherently social and cannot be played without strangers joining in.

Park(ing) Day

Park(ing) Day is an 'annual open-source global event where citizens, artists and activists collaborate to temporarily transform metered parking spaces into 'PARK(ing)' spaces: temporary public places'.[3] It takes place on the third Friday in September and has been held since 2005 throughout the world. The creators of the project, the interdisciplinary studio Rebar, have described it as open-source media and explained how to reproduce it in a shared, online manual (Rebar 2014b). Rebar encourage participants to consider what is missing in their neighbourhood before embarking on the project, and advise them to create a platform for rethinking and re-imagining the potential of the urban landscape. So far, participants have created 975 park installations in more than 160 cities on 6 continents, according to the most recent statistics from 2011.[4]

The Rebar manifesto explains that Park(ing) Day is tactical urbanism; 'the tactic disrupts the doxa and temporarily projects a new set of values onto a space' (Rebar 2014a). The doxa, a concept borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's work, means in this case that we take the structure and priorities of the urban landscape for granted – the landscape appears to us as neutral (Rebar 2014a). Rebar's tactic is to introduce temporary or modest revisions of urban structures, such as remixing environmental signs and symbols that look official, temporarily altering the meaning assigned to them by the doxa. Still, Rebar encourage organizers of such events to stay within the law, providing 'an honest, generous public service, a temporary generative territory for unscripted social interaction, where experimental forms of playful and creative human social behavior are cultivated and allowed to emerge, unmediated and unshackled by commercial imperatives' (Rebar 2014a).

Rebar stress there should be no hidden goals – no hidden agenda. Communication must be honest. 'Generous' action frames social situations between strangers in public spaces through which new cultural values, free from commercial agendas, are produced. This is consistent with the basic assumption that making the familiar strange means treating the city as an open, public process of participation created through usage and engagement. As a result, the city is made by those who use it and is built on a micro level without an overall master plan, through a myriad independent practices. As de Certeau explains, pedestrians' 'intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together' (1988:97). In other words, the movement of pedestrians shapes the city, though pedestrians are normally blind to their impact on the city because of their close proximity to it. By inviting participants to temporarily appropriate a parking lot and use it for a playful purpose, Park(ing) Day can help shape a behaviour that disrupts the

participants' view of the 'natural' landscape and initiates reflection on their relationship to space and place (i.e., the structures and practices of the city). This could prevent people from unconsciously reproducing the city within the dominant structure through their use of it. One example of such reproductive behaviour is avoiding a seemingly unsafe area and thereby contributing to its depopulation, making it more exposed. Another is driving a car to any destination and thereby participating in converting the urban landscape into a desert of parking lots. Nevertheless, the way Park(ing) Day encourages participants to appropriate space can have both positive and negative effects.

The situations Park(ing) Day aims to create are framed as playful and creative, but are otherwise not scripted (Rebar 2014a). In this sense, it aims to engage participants in the social negotiation of urban space. This differentiates it from Indeterminate Hikes+, which allows each participant to actively relate to each location within a script. In both cases, locative media projects can provoke our experience of space and place – of structure and practice. They can work as liminal interfaces between the participant and the surrounding world. Thus, when participants use Indeterminate Hikes+, their awareness is directed towards details in the surroundings. The app encourages participants to create situations and to send reports en route to friends who do not have to be involved in the event. Park(ing) Day also works as an interface between participants, place and space. But in addition, it makes participants' engagement in urban space open to and readable by each other, and can thus reveal our assumptions about and behaviour in urban space.

These two cases frame social interactions in different ways. Park(ing) Day facilitates random meetings that allow participants to relate to the way the structure of the city affects sociability and defies a blasé attitude to our surroundings. The Indeterminate Hikes+ app, on the other hand, does not create situations for strangers to meet and negotiate their relationship with the urban space; it focuses on making the familiar strange – but not the stranger familiar. I now turn to the question of how locative media projects can better invite and involve citizens in the exploration and negotiation of their relationship with urban spaces and places.

Involving participants

Designers of locative media projects make choices that position participants in a certain way: each project design requires certain *resources*, decides *who* to exclude and include, *frames* the relation between participants and their surroundings and shapes their approach towards space. In this sense, the design embodies specific forms of power and authority and needs to be assessed critically if it is to provide a truly participatory platform that empowers citizens. In this context, I use the term 'democratic media' to refer to media that empower participants by encouraging critical awareness of

the structures within which citizens live and participation in giving them meaning. Democratic media should be designed in such a way that it does not create new blind spots, for example by discriminating against certain groups or promoting hidden agendas. Winner (1980) argues that we fail if we only evaluate technologies in terms of tools and uses and if designers do not consider the meaning of the design and the arrangement of artefacts. Whatever the intentions of designers, any choice relating to technology has significant consequences for the form and quality of human associations (Winner 1980), i.e., for sociability. Thus, it is crucial to keep 'questioning fundamental assumptions about the nature of interaction between people and technology and the role of the designer in mediating that interaction' (Dourish et al. 2004:1). Designers of locative media, like other creators of technological tools, need to determine how and whether their designs involve some participants and exclude others, and further, how technology restricts as well as opens up ways of understanding our surroundings.

Both Indeterminate Hikes+ and Park(ing) Day claim to address issues of ownership and involvement in urban space. However, locative media projects are often only played by those who have access to resources and who are invited, but invitations do not circulate easily. Participation depends on what resources are available, whether one experiences the activity as open, and whether one experiences it as meaningful to participate in within the frame provided.

Resources

Participating in locative media events often assumes some access to technology. The Indeterminate Hikes+ event involving three women, described earlier, could not accommodate anyone without a smart phone on which to download the relevant app. As such, Indeterminate Hikes+ is not designed to invite others to become part of the debate spontaneously. Park(ing) Day is often planned and announced through social media, but participation in the event can also take place spontaneously. As Rebar note, while the primary recipients are local citizens passing by the park, there is a larger group that will become acquainted with the event through online documentation. They argue that the experience of this second group is likely to be more important to the goals of the initiative because 'by communicating that such an exchange took place, the work influences people's notions of what is possible and acceptable in public space, far beyond what was communicated at the moment the work is made' (2014a:5).

The idea of promoting change through the negotiations that take place around an event diverges from the Situationists' agenda, since in this case it is not the situated personal experience of the relationship between an individual and the urban landscape that is assumed to alter citizens' view of that space. Instead, being exposed to other citizens who challenge the existing structure can provide a different perception and thus influence the practices

that shape the contours of the city. This empowerment of citizens is central to how locative media projects can promote everyday democracy, understood here as participatory urbanism. In Park(ing) Day, for example, the organizers create what they feel is missing in the area where the temporary park is located. They do this as they materialize the 'park' and invite passers-by to interact playfully with other participants. The passers-by in turn reveal their understanding of how the park and the event comment on the city through the way they treat this invitation – through their actions. All this is then subject to editing and is re-presented to non-participants in digital space. The various stages of this mediated experience all require access to some sort of technology and relevant documentation, depending on what channels are built into the design and available to the user.

Who?

Even when the design is based on low technology and is intended to be open to wide participation, the relation between those framing the activity (the designers), those who participate (participants) and those who interpret the event (the potential participants or outsiders) calls for further consideration. The manual for Park(ing) Day encourages organizers to consider the choice of location in relation to who will be able to join: 'People you are trying to serve: downtown office workers, tourists, the down and out, or the high-rollers? When will they be around to see and use the space?' (Rebar 2014b). But it does not address the issue of sociability – how the organizers, participants and potential participants/outsiders relate to one another.

I was involved in planning a Park(ing) Day event in Washington, DC in 2009. Much of the event's planning took place via Twitter. A few of the planners knew each other, but most did not. As the day approached, we met at the corner of 14th Street and S Street in the U Street corridor area of the city. We started rolling out the grass and setting up plants and furniture. A boy holding his mother's hand passed by. He turned to those building the park and asked, 'Are you building a playground for us? We have none.' This spontaneous response to seeing people building the 1-day park shows that setting up a space for leisure activity problematized how public space is created and allocated in that particular area, even though the boy who asked the question did not actually join in. Urban planners involved in designing this particular area would benefit from access to this type of information about citizens' desires.

The organizers of the 2009 Park(ing) Day event in Washington, DC wanted to involve as many people as possible. There were muffins, badminton, books and Scrabble. At first no one joined, despite the free muffins and games. The reasons could be practical, to do with the time of day, for instance, or the fact that non-participants could not afford spending a workday at the event. However, another explanation might be that we were outsiders – unknown in the neighbourhood. Most of the planners were Caucasians in their late

twenties; this was not intended, and the organizers were not aware of it until they met at the location on the day. The group of organizers who turned up inhabited a corner of a traditionally black, middle-class neighbourhood. One powerful outcome of setting up the temporal park was that organizers realized what their presence meant to those who inhabit the neighbourhood. The Park(ing) Day event was set up to draw attention to citizens' relationship to the urban landscape; however, what it succeeded to do was to alert participants to the fact that this temporary park constituted a performance, and perhaps even a provocation in the neighbourhood – an alien encounter. The intervention revealed the existing social differences between people, but in the end, because the park was well attended, the intervention also provided an opportunity for sociability between strangers. The organizers' blind spot with regards to issues of ethnicity and social background did not remain undetected, and the event helped to expose structures of practice and perception in Washington, DC.

The Washington Park(ing) Day event, which was inspired by psychogeography and the work of the Situationist International, confirmed Flanagan's (2007) insight that the Situationists' perspective is steeped in a class-specific view of human beings. Still, this particular event also made it clear that engaging in the urban landscape is a meaningful activity. The impact of the event on passers-by and people who joined in was not explored, but for the organizers at least, being outsiders in the neighbourhood, learning about issues from passers-by and doing so in a playful manner was a productive educational experience that was not anticipated in the design of the event.

Framing

Setting up a playful event in urban space is bound to affect more than those who are directly involved in it, since locative media projects are often designed to include citizens who do not participate voluntarily. Since the frame of play is one of negotiation, participants may draw in others who had not intended to participate (Ejsing-Duun 2011). This raises ethical issues in relation to establishing who is part of the event, where it is located, and when to hold it, because participants may approach people and situations in a way that compromises the rules of the everyday world (Ejsing-Duun 2011). For example, alternative traffic signs could be placed around the park within the Park(ing) Day frame, or participants could act in a way that would normally be regarded as inappropriate – as in walking down the street dragging a foot behind in Indeterminate Hikes+. Non-participants need to be able to relate to these performances and make sense of them.

During play, participants in locative media events experience the existence of a protective frame between them and the world (Apter 1989), and should be confident that they will not come to serious harm by engaging in the event. To ensure the safety of participants, Rebar (2014b) suggest that

organizers keep the park shielded from traffic and anticipate possible conflicts between Park(ing) Day's framing and city laws, since these events are not intended as expressions of protest (Rebar 2014b). The intention is merely to engage citizens in the development and use of urban space so that they can contribute to this development. In this sense, as explained earlier, the modern locative media project is different from the Situationists' approach, which was aimed at revolution.

Indeterminate Hikes+ does not explicitly address the question of how to deal with issues that might arise in the course of using the app. For instance, I used the app with a group one night where one of the locations marked as an Indeterminate Hikes+ scenic vista for us to visit was located on the grounds of a private company. Getting to the vista meant trespassing private grounds and passing surveillance cameras. On this occasion, the trespassing did not have any consequences. However, the protective frame was challenged and could have led to serious consequences as the participants appropriated private space as their playground.

The two locative media projects discussed here offer examples of how players appropriate urban space as a playground. Flanagan (2007) warns that locative media could become a form of middle-class, capitalist, 'tourist' entertainment that turns urban centres into destinations rather than structures that serve residents. This critique is confirmed by the 2009 Washington, DC Park(ing) Day's experience, where white, middle-class participants engaged in a black neighbourhood. However, Flanagan's criticism is complex. On the one hand, Flanagan treats space as something that has *a* meaning, one that can be treated as constant and should be protected. Treating space as an artefact with an inherent, essentialist meaning that it can be divorced from, and that needs to be protected, leaves no room for citizens to introduce changes or contribute to the developing meaning of urban spaces. We need to ask how this meaning emerges. On the other hand, when participants who engage in Indeterminate Hikes+ look for beauty in the cracks of the city, do they see the more problematic elements, such as surveillance, do they note the practices of those who inhabit that space or do they merely focus on their own exploration? The answer depends on the design of the locative media project and whether participants choose to use the space for exploration, as in the Indeterminate Hikes+ event, to immerse themselves in an environment, pay attention to its culture and try to become part of it, which was the intention in creating the park in Washington, DC, or whether they choose to relate to the environment in a ritualistic manner, which might have been how the Park(ing) Day event in Washington DC was experienced by some participants. Rebar attempt to frame Park(ing) Day as an act of generosity in which participants do not appropriate space but work to create opportunities for interaction between strangers in the public realm. As such, the event is not only intended to make the familiar strange but also to make strangers familiar and thus promote sociability.

Conclusion: Locative media events as a means of social empowerment

I set out to explore how citizens become involved in and negotiate ownership over public space through locative media events and by using urban space as a democratic medium. To do so, I revisited some of the theoretical literature that informs discussions of locative media in order to make it more democratic, in the sense adopted here, where democracy is understood as a form of everyday participatory urbanism that requires awareness of the structures in which we live as well as participation in the public arena. The idea, I argued, is no longer to work towards a revolution, but to change our collective political consciousness and promote empowerment through social experiences and negotiation. The city is created by its citizens' collective actions in urban space, and we must therefore place more focus on sociability and others' involvement. Locative media should not be aimed only at the 'political flâneur', the believers, but should rather seek to enhance the ordinary citizen's awareness and participation, and to create structures that are capable of embracing all citizens.

Locative media events can give participants the power to appropriate space, to make an overt claim to the streets. A locative media event might provide a tool for challenging assumptions about space and thus bring fresh aspects of it to light; it might celebrate personal freedom and create distance to power structures by empowering citizens and making them aware of these structures. Whatever the intention, it needs to be worked into the fabric of the locative media project, and consideration must be given to how participants are brought into the experience and who is being empowered. Thus, designers of locative media projects for sustainable social and spatial change need to consider the following:

1. Who is invited?
2. What resources does participation require?
3. How does the relation between primary and secondary participants frame participation?
4. What premises are read into the design (bias, prejudice, moral standards, etc.)?
5. What kind of behaviour does a locative media project shape in space and how will it influence other users of the space?

This list makes clear that locative media projects address key issues that influence interaction among citizens, as well as citizens' interaction with urban space. While much consideration has been given to the latter, i.e. to the relationship between citizens and urban space, this chapter advocates paying attention to how locative media also deals with issues of sociability.

Locative media projects have been criticized for divorcing space from its meaning, encouraging forms of participation that focus on the appropriation

of space, and for possibly including only certain groups of citizens and excluding others. Nevertheless, as I have attempted to demonstrate, locative media projects have the potential to become more politically alert and effective modes of participation, provided they address the pitfalls mentioned above. Effective participation can be achieved by addressing habitual modes of being in the city critically, and by making familiar structures in urban space strange so that participants – and sometimes even non-participants – can read and influence them. This approach can also be used to inform the design of the structures in which we live, if the blasé attitude that often exists in a modern urban landscape can be challenged, since it views space as an outcome of social negotiations and participation.

Notes

1 See www.ecoarttech.net/project/indeterminate-hike/ (accessed 20 September 2015).
2 See www.ecoarttech.net/ih-participants/ (accessed 29 September 2015).
3 See http://parkingday.org/about-parking-day/ (accessed 29 September 2015).
4 See http://parkingday.org/archive/ (accessed 26 January 2016).

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10 Ironic 'resistance' in Chinese citizen media online

Astrid Nordin

Chinese netizens have developed various strategies to circumvent government censorship of the Internet, giving rise to a subculture known as *egao*. One aspect of this ironic *egao* culture is the play with homonymous or near-homonymous words that can help an individual get through censorship software whilst simultaneously critiquing and ridiculing the censorship. This chapter draws on a range of online materials to discuss this form of ironic engagement in Chinese citizen media online, and the assumptions with which scholars approach its study. Where much previous scholarship has attempted to pin down this form of expression to mean only one thing, particularly focusing on whether or not it constitutes a form of political resistance, this chapter argues instead that what is most interesting about many examples of *egao* is their undecidability as simultaneously either/or and neither/nor. It suggests that making the a priori assumption that these phenomena have to mean only one thing, *either* resistance *or* not resistance, will hinder rather than help researchers in understanding their complex role in the political play of Chinese citizen media.

The online generation of Chinese citizens, or 'netizens', have developed numerous strategies for criticizing and avoiding the heavy online censorship regime to which they are subjected in their use of citizen media (Nordin and Richaud 2014; Nordin 2014a, 2014b; Lagerkvist 2010). A number of these strategies have coalesced in the subculture known as *egao* (恶搞), which literally translates as 'evil doings', or more loosely as 'spoofs'. *Egao* denotes a cluster of expression online, which includes music videos, mockumentaries, cartoons and animations, as well as the more everyday deployment of humorous homonyms that have become a special punning feature of this subculture and that were banned by the Chinese government in December 2014.

Much previous scholarship has attempted to pin down this form of expression to mean only one thing, particularly focusing on whether or not it constitutes a form of political resistance (Diamond 2010:74; Inkster 2010:60; Tang and Bhattacharya 2011:7.2; Tang and Yang 2011:680, 682, 687; Wiener 2011; Xiao 2011:52). Many of those who have studied the

phenomenon have celebrated it as such, particularly by characterizing it in terms of Bakhtinian carnival. I argue instead that what is methodologically most interesting about many examples of *egao* is their undecidability as simultaneously either/or and neither/nor. I suggest that making the a priori assumption that these phenomena have to mean only one thing, *either* resistance *or* not resistance, will hinder rather than help researchers in understanding their complex role in the political play of Chinese citizen media.

In what follows I proceed with this argument by first outlining how previous literature has discussed *egao* in terms of a fairly uniform understanding of resistance and politics, covering both the majority who have claimed it is a form of resistance and the minority who are sceptical of such a claim. I then use the marginalization in current scholarship of gender and the feminine (by which I mean both the female body and traits traditionally associated with it) as an example of the kind of blindness that may be collectively induced by being overly attached to the 'resistance' label. Looking at the gendered effects of some influential *egao* also shows how the resistance/not resistance binary may be hard to uphold, even vis-à-vis the Party-State. I further develop this argument by suggesting that, in addition to gender, the attitudes of and emotions expressed by young producers and consumers of citizen media have also been marginalized in scholarly enquiry, predicting that further study of these emotions is likely to continue destabilizing the popular idea that *egao* constitutes some straightforward form of resistance.

Focusing on the punning nature of the homonymous wordplay that has been an important feature of *egao* culture, I move on to demonstrate how these puns, by their very nature, mean several things at the same time, which leads to a complexity of meaning. Finally, the conclusion points towards potential overlaps and strategic alliances between the linguistic strategies deployed by Chinese netizens in online media, and scholarly approaches that similarly emphasize the undecidability of language. Such approaches can pave the way for potential alliances between academics and the producers and consumers of citizen media, as well as enable us to better appreciate the complexity of this aspect of Chinese citizen media – and perhaps indeed citizen media more generally – beyond the resistance/not-resistance binary.

Egao as resistance/not resistance

Egao is the prevalent name for a form of online culture that has grown popular in China and received international attention since around 2006. It uses dark humour, irony and satire, often to mock and ridicule power holders. A significant part of this culture draws on puns and wordplay to simultaneously mock and escape the censorship regime (Nordin 2014b). This practice has almost universally been understood as a form of resistance, contestation or subversion, as I have already explained.

In the literature that engages closely with this phenomenon, resistance is typically understood as rooted in the often-noted discrepancy between

official Party-State language and an 'alternative political discourse' (Meng 2011:3) or 'hidden transcript' (Perry 2007:10; Meng 2011:39; Esarey and Xiao 2008:752). Meng Bingchun characterizes *egao*'s 'collective attempt at resistance' (Meng 2011:44) in terms of a 'virtual carnival' (2011:45, 46). This common approach is based on Bakhtin's interpretation of a wild, grotesque carnival in medieval and renaissance Europe as offering a space for subversion. One volume accordingly characterizes Chinese cyberspace as a quasi-separate space of the carnivalesque (Herold and Marolt 2011). Within that space, carnival suspends rules in a time and space set apart from normal constraints (as described in Herold 2011:11, 12), a free and unrestricted antithesis to normal life (Herold 2011:12). Li Hongmei similarly reads *egao* as carnival, a space that marks 'the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions' (Bakhtin 1965/1984:10, cited in Li 2011:72), where 'power relationships can be temporarily suspended' (Li 2011:72). Tang Lijun and Syamantak Bhattacharya (2011) have also understood *egao* as carnival, but take it to further reflect a 'widespread feeling of powerlessness, rather than offering the general public any political power'. They nonetheless see in *egao* 'the potential to generate a chain of related satirical work, which can create a satire movement and subject power to sustained shame and ridicule'. Interpretations of *egao* as carnival thus tend to conceive of the phenomenon as a form of resistance to 'official' (Meng 2011:46) or 'established' (Li 2011:71) order.

Taken together, these studies of *egao* have contributed a wealth of examples of online wordplay, which has typically been rendered as a form of or attempt at resistance. The only notable exception is Johan Lagerkvist, who asks whether *egao* is 'a *weapon of the weak*, or . . . a rather feeble expression among well-heeled and largely apolitical urban youth' (2010: 51). Lagerkvist describes *egao* as '[p]ermeated with irony and an ambivalence that occasionally resembles, or indeed is, resistance', but is sceptical about this resistance because '[t]he crux of the matter is only what larger influence you have on politics, if that is at all desired, if your critique is too subtle' (2010:146). Thus, he argues, we must not be satisfied with simply taking irony as intrinsically subversive or aligned with a radical politics (2010:156), but

> [i]nstead of viewing the *egao* phenomenon as politically subversive, at least in the short term, it may make more sense to view it as the growth of an alternate civility, more indicative of social and generational change, building up ever more pressure against the political system – in the long term.
>
> (2010:158)

From this perspective it makes more sense to understand irony in China as a way of venting anger in a manner that is not necessarily intended as revolutionary, at least in the short term. It is 'neither performed to be, nor perceived as, a direct threat against the Party-state' (Lagerkvist 2010:159).

However, despite largely disagreeing with those who invoke Bakhtin to explain *egao* as carnival, and with others who hail *egao* as a democratizing form of resistance, Lagerkvist still maintains the idea of resistance to Party-State politics as a standard bearer of sorts for judging *egao* and pinning down its significance (see also Nordin and Richaud 2014).

The gender trouble of *egao*

Most commentators, then, have portrayed *egao* as a form of *resistance*, and the few who have not have largely argued, within a binary framework, that it is *not resistance*. Both attitudes share the assumption that there is a more or less well defined idea of what 'resistance' means, and use it as a standard bearer when evaluating *egao*. What I would argue, instead, is that this binary, where *egao* needs to be *either* resistance *or* not resistance, constitutes an unhelpful a priori assumption, and that the most interesting insights into *egao* can only be achieved by ridding ourselves of this frame of reference.

This argument can be elaborated through a discussion of the gendered nature of much *egao*, drawing on the work of Cara Wallis, who has warned against the tendency to fetishize any form of 'resistance' in authoritarian contexts (2015:2). Wallis analysed three particular *egao* creations: the music video 'Song of the grass-mud horse' (*caonima zhi ge* 草泥马之歌),[1] the manga-style meme 'Green Dam Girl' (*Lvbaniang* 绿坝娘), and a song accompanied by pictures and entitled 'My Elder Brother Works for SARFT/My Elder Brother is a Bare But' (*Wo Ge zai Guangding/Guangdian* 我哥在光腚 / 广电), where 'SARFT', which stands for the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television, sounds a lot like the word for 'bare but'. She accepts that active audiences can read these in diverse ways and does not challenge the idea that 'their subversive character challenges the state's ideological and technological dominance' (Wallis 2015:2). At the same time, she argues that the language and visual style of these three examples of *egao* – which are also types of viral phenomena more broadly – reinstate China's pervasive structural gender inequality. They do so by deploying 'a masculinist discourse and visual style that position the female body and the feminine as the site of subordination, penetration, and insult' (2015:1).

In my own analysis of *egao*, I do not take the 'feminine' to mean some fixed or predefined construct, but a performance that delineates 'social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, hierarchy and privilege, acceptability and unacceptability' (Evans 2008:362). In the Chinese context, Harriet Evans has demonstrated that dominant representations of gender render it in binary terms that tend to cast the female as weak, vulnerable, reluctant, slow and passive (2008:366), 'denied the power of agency given to the absent male spectator' (2008:370). Alongside the essentialized gender meanings of public culture in contemporary China, there is an increasing diversity of both femininities and masculinities that blur, diffuse and reject the binary associations of heteronormativity (2008:371). However, Evans argues,

'by and large the image of the active, strong, protective male and the passive, weak, and dependent female continues to rule' (2008:375). She has moreover shown that the current 'limits of gender' in representations of the sexed body is a result of both market forces and China's ideological history (2008:366).

The violent imagery of sexual assault on the female body arguably recurs in all three of Wallis's examples. The 'grass-mud horse', the most famous of her examples, is a homophonic pun that when read out loud sounds virtually the same as the insult 'fuck your mum'. The figure of the grass-mud horse has indeed become a symbol of resistance to the government's online censorship campaigns against 'pornography' and 'vulgarity'. What Wallis points out is that the gendering of the 'vulgarity' expressed through the 'grass-mud horse'/'fuck your mum' insult is also what makes it effective. Plainly speaking, there is no popular and widespread call to fuck anybody's dad. Celebrating the 'grass-mud horse'/'fuck your mum' pun as resistance without recognizing the misogynistic nature of this expletive renders the reactionary gender politics it entails invisible. All of Wallis's three examples show how our laughter in *egao* is underpinned by a construction of binary gender norms that objectify and sexualize the female body, and render the feminine as passive, weak and dependent.

Wallis discusses three examples, but the pattern she detects in them is widespread in *egao* culture. A further indication of the violence of reinforced gender binaries that are rendered humorous in this part of Chinese citizen media is evident in the list of ten Mythical Creatures that appeared on Baidu in 2009.[2] The most famous creature on this list was the grass-mud horse (in a version that predates and presumably inspired the song that Wallis analyses). The remaining creatures primarily pun on expletives and genitalia (Nordin 2014a). The Dafei chicken (*dafeiji* 达菲鸡) is a strange bird that likes exercise and sounds like slang for 'masturbation'. The lucky journey cat (*jibamao* 吉跋猫) lives in a damp and dark environment, and sounds like slang for 'pubic hair' (*jibamao* 鸡巴毛). Also on the list are the Qianlie crab (*qianliexie* 潜烈蟹, which sounds like 'prostate'); the singing field goose (*yindaoyan* 吟稻雁, which sounds like 'vaginal infection'); the stretch-tailed whale (*weishenjing* 尾申鲸, sounding like 'menstrual pads'); as well as the stork-cat ape (*guanliyuan* 鹳狸猿, which mocks the administrators who censor the *Baidu* site and who subsequently deleted the entry of the ten Mythical Creatures). These examples clearly poke fun at both male and female anatomy. However, as we will see in the following examples, the most derogatory and violent explanations are associated with the entries that reference the foreign female body and challenge binary heteronormative gender.

The quail pigeon (*chunge* 鹑鸽) is homonymous with 'Brother Chun' (*chunge* 春哥), the nickname for female singer Li Yuchun. Li became famous after she won the national singing competition *Super Girl* in 2005. Her nickname stems from her androgynous appearance. According to the entry in the ten Mythical Creatures, the quail pigeon originates from the Republic

of Yemen. The pun plays on the catchphrase 'Brother Chun is a real man' (*chunge chunyemen* 春哥纯爷们). *Ye* (爷) which indicates masculinity, is used by young men in China's Northeast as an impolite personal pronoun. *Chun* (春) can also be slang for sexual arousal (*fa chun* 发春, or literally 'spring has arrived'). Li's androgynous appearance, which is arguably a factor in her success as a career woman, is here turned into an object of ridicule and sexualization. Another entry in the ten Mythical Creatures list also makes reference to this sexualized and ridiculing rendering of Li as 'Brother Chun'. The Franco-Croatian squid (*fakeyou* 法克鱿), which sounds like 'fuck you' in the English language, is said to be a delicacy consumed with corn in East Asia in a dish dubbed 'Corn Franco-Croatian squid' (*yumi fakeyou* 玉米法克鱿). 'Corn' here refers to fans of Li, who are known by this term (as 'Yu fans', *yumi*). It is further said that another name for this dish is 'Non-mainstream Franco-Croatian squid' (*fei zhuliu de fakeyou* 非主流的法克鱿), because these squid do not inhabit major rivers. Therefore, it is said, scientists dub them as squid with 'deviant behaviour'. In this example, it is no longer just mothers who should be 'fucked' (as indicated by the grass-mud horse example), but also the primarily young fans of an androgynous-looking female singer. These fans are ridiculed because they publicly appreciate the transgression of gender-stereotypical looks. Such appreciation is moreover deemed to be a form of deviant behaviour and is thus doubly denigrated.

A further example of denigration of behaviour that is not deemed traditionally heteronormative is the entry for the 'chrysanthemum silkworm' (*juhuacan* 菊花蚕). This term sounds like another insult which means something like 'bugger'. It can further refer to a 'worm' that enters an anus, for which the term 'chrysanthemum' (*juhua*) is vulgar slang. It is also homonymous with 'broken chrysanthemum' (*juhuacan* 菊花残), which references possibly painful anal sex. And it is a vulgar idiom for hopelessness in the wider society. The worm of the entry is said to feed on chrysanthemum flowers. The humour is again supposed to derive from ridiculing sexual behaviour that is deemed 'deviant', and which is commonly assumed to primarily have women or gay men at the 'receiving' end. There is an implication that this 'deviant' practice may be painful to the person with the 'broken anus'.

A final, and perhaps most explicitly violent, entry is that of the small elegant butterfly (*yamiedie* 雅蠛蝶), which derives its name from the Japanese for 'stop it' (*yamete* やめて). The term makes reference to rape scenes from imported Japanese pornography. This example highlights, more so than others discussed above, the extent to which direct reference to rape and violence against the female body is something we are expected to laugh at in *egao* culture. It treats as entertaining the ultimate commoditization of the female body by a globalized market in a China that is undergoing 'reform' and 'opening up'. As such, it highlights the complicity of this rendition of gender with the gendering market forces Evans has described. Moreover, reference to the rape of specifically Japanese women feeds into the widespread

anti-Japanese sentiment that is very much cultivated by the state through its 'patriotic education' (Callahan 2010). These efforts include the official recognition of holidays such as the 'National Humiliation Day' that commemorates Japanese war-time atrocities, including the 'Rape of Nanjing'. The leisure consumption of both 'National Humiliation Day' and associated consumer products, and porn that depicts the rape of Japanese women, feed into the state-led effort of revenge humiliation. For the Chinese Communist Party-State, both these forms of consumption in turn bolster the economic growth as well as nationalist sentiment that are key to its legitimacy since reform and opening up.

Numerous examples could be given to show how these characters, and others like them, are hailed as a form of 'resistance', but simultaneously feed into a wider gender politics in China that accepts the systematic objectification of and violence against the female body in sexualized ways, whilst reinforcing gender stereotypes that cast women as passive and less valuable. These sexualizing, objectifying and belittling depictions of the female body and the feminine in much of *egao* culture 'inadvertently support both the state and the market (which cannot always be separated), which both perpetuate the commodification and, in some cases, marginalization of women' (Wallis 2015:224). I share Wallis's sentiment here, and the examples I add to her analysis above indicate that this imagery may be even more violent than her already powerful examples recognize. Moreover, it is not only the female body that is depicted as the object of violence in this culture, but (perhaps unsurprisingly) also male bodies associated with 'the feminine', as described by Evans, most notably gay male bodies. Derogatory sexualization in *egao* also extends to other bodies and types of behaviour that are deemed to deviate from dominant heteronorms. Finally, the example of the small elegant butterfly, with its reference to Japanese rape porn, highlights more explicitly the role of *egao* in promoting ideas that are central to the legitimization of the Chinese Communist Party-State.

Bringing these observations back to scholarship on Chinese citizen media and our assumptions in approaching these online phenomena, the point is clear and uncomfortably unsurprising. As Wallis argues, 'the uncritical celebration of these media – that is, the way visible gender essentialism is invisible in public discourse around them – reveals the limits of gender in China and the tendency to fetishize any form of resistance in authoritarian contexts' (2015:224). Certainly, the marginalization from scholarly enquiry of women, and others associated with the 'feminine', is not new to online humour in China, or specific to the study of citizen media there or elsewhere (Shifman and Lemish 2011). Nonetheless, I would suggest that adapting an a priori separation between 'resistance' and 'not resistance' in our observation of these phenomena risks strengthening the propensity to 'fetishize' that Wallis detects. Faced with the binary choice, we do not want to disempower the producers of *egao* by taking away the 'resistance' label they have been allocated. In order to legitimize studying these phenomena in terms of

resistance, it is then tempting to turn a blind eye to problematic, reactionary, conservative or oppressive aspects that may be simultaneously present in them. This is made easier by the relative neglect of that to which we turn a blind eye – 'the feminine' – in some dominant strands of our disciplines.

Producers' and consumers' feelings about *egao*

The relative neglect of the feminine in some strands of our disciplines and our methodological approaches is linked to another neglected aspect of the negotiation of meaning of *egao*: emotions. Despite the tendency to label *egao* as resistance, few studies have examined in any detail the attitudes and emotions of the supposed agents who produce and consume this type of mockery and word play on a daily basis. Most scholarship to date has focused on data from those who are highly pro-active in making elaborate spoofs (Li 2011; Meng 2011; Tang and Yang 2011; Xiao 2011; Wallis 2015), or those who are directly involved in implementing online censorship (Pang 2008). However, the type of playful reiteration and wordplay that is under discussion in this chapter is also deployed by ordinary young people in China on a less spectacular everyday basis. Being censored online has become a common experience of young Chinese, and their deployment of wordplay to negotiate censorship is also part of the *egao* phenomenon. For these young people, including university students who mostly live inside their campus, Internet access is provided by the establishment, thus rendering students' online activities traceable. We need to venture beyond a Bakhtinian understanding of *egao* as a carnival that relies on masked identities if we are to understand the emotions surrounding Chinese Internet use in a context where anonymity is impossible.

More research is still needed in this area, but elsewhere I have begun to examine these emotions, together with my colleague Lisa Richaud (Nordin and Richaud 2014). Based on 41 semi-structured interviews conducted with Chinese students from different universities in Beijing in 2009–2011, we argued that the repoliticization that *egao* mockery is said to effect also involves a simultaneous depoliticization, reflecting the complexity and ambiguity of the relationships our interviewees negotiate. Although we made no claims about the way informants truly felt about their engagement with citizen media online, the way they *claimed to feel* about their experience was articulated in terms of 'both-and' and 'neither-nor'. As such, these accounts of the experiences of at least some young people engaged in the production and consumption of *egao* indicated that they do not communicate their own feelings in rigid either/or terms. Informants reported simultaneous feelings of anger and amusement. For example, one informant told us: '第一次和谐非常不爽！因为，这，这个，这个，这个，岂有此理!' (The first time I was harmonized, it was very unpleasant! Because of this, this, this, this nonsense!). 'Being harmonized' here refers to the experience of being censored online, which is common and frequent among Chinese youth. The informant relays a common emotional dimension conveyed through words

connoting physical or psychological discomfort or pain, and feelings of anger in the face of censorship. At the same time, the same informant added that this behaviour on the part of the government was very comical. He found censorship ridiculous, since it could not eradicate the people's will to express themselves. Such references to being censored online as something funny were also echoed by other students; another informant told us: 'It's mostly that it's a little funny (*haoxiao* 好笑). I might have had the feeling that it's a little bit absurd (*huangtang* 荒唐)'.

A first form of reaction provoked by these reported feelings of discomfort and amusement is disgruntled compliance: young people simply stop trying to write about sensitive issues or stop using sensitive words. A second form of reaction in the face of censorship of citizen media involves finding ways of sidestepping the hurdles that stand in the way. Some informants used metaphors and humorous *egao* puns as an alternative, because '我们不能写正常的词儿啊，是啊，就那么多敏感词，我们都不能写啊，我们只能把它变一下，变成其他的' (We can't write normal words, there are so many sensitive words that we can't write, we can only change them, turn them into other words), one informant told us. In particular, informants described how they made use of alternative words that expressed what they meant to say in humorous ways and that simultaneously mocked the Party-State and its efforts at censorship. These words are the 'hidden transcript' of which other scholars have written (Perry 2007:10; Meng 2011:39).

However, we found no indication that our informants viewed the Internet and its world of *egao* as a 'free and unrestricted' space (Herold 2011:11, 12). On the contrary, our informants singled out the sphere of online censorship as a stark example of government interference in their daily lives. Informants described their practices as a way of *circumventing* constraints, not abolishing them. Furthermore, while the online world marks some change in 'normal' prohibitions, it is not perceived as one where 'all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions' are suspended (Bakhtin 1965/1984:10, cited in Li 2011:72). It is precisely the absence of clear rules or rationale in online censorship that makes navigation simultaneously frustrating and humorous – and that enables the offline hierarchy between authorities and citizens to continue unchallenged online. Our informants did not conceptualize their online experience as a 'quasi-separate sphere' (Herold and Marolt 2011). The restriction on expression online was not experienced as 'the antithesis of normal life' (Herold 2011:12), but rather as a continuation of the same by other means.

Where, then, does this leave the claim that *egao* should be understood as a 'collective attempt at resistance' (Meng 2011:44)? One informant explained why *egao* and its associated wordplay cannot be conceived of in terms of either resistance or not resistance:

> 因为，首先，它并不知道是吧，所以你，比如说你向一个人抗议，那你，你要让他知道 . . . 但我们政府啊，也知道大家都反对他，所以也没什么抗议不抗议的，他也那么厚着脸皮地待着。

> Because, first, it [the government] really doesn't know, right? So you, for example, you oppose someone, then you have to let him know . . . but our government also knows that everyone is opposing it, so this is not about resistance or non-resistance [or protest or non-protest], the government still has the cheek to stay in power.

The same informant, like Lagerkvist (2010:159), expressed the view that *egao* is best understood as a way of venting anger:

> 因为我觉得这个反而是个发泄渠道，你比如说 . . . 大家不满，他一不满，那就通过这一种很有趣的词，很 . . . 很幽默，很恶搞的词，哎，一下子就是，就是大家聊着自己的，痛苦的生活聊得还特开心，也没什么特神奇的，特神奇的事儿呢。所以说这个，这个，看你如果说特严肃的话，你可以说，大家都是阿Q呢，哈！
>
> Because I feel that this, on the contrary, is a way to vent, you, for example . . . everyone is dissatisfied, as soon as he is dissatisfied, through this sort of, very funny words, very . . . very humorous, very *egao* words, hey, suddenly that is, that is everyone, discusses his own, painful life, discusses it in a particularly happy manner, there is nothing particularly strange, no particularly strange thing. So to say this, this, look if you say it particularly seriously, you can say, everyone is Ah Q, ha!

The tragicomic character of Lu Xun's 1921 novella *The True Story of Ah Q* is famous for his 'spiritual victories': when he falls victim to oppression, violence and ridicule, he comes up with elaborate ways of deluding himself into thinking he has 'won' or is superior to those who victimize him. He thus sees victory or pride in what is actually serious defeat. Another informant also referred to Ah Q to problematize the idea that *egao* might amount to resistance:

> 用共产党的语言调侃 . . . 抗争也可以啊，算是一种很浅薄的抗争。就是，比方说，倒是，倒是有一些阿Q的感觉，有，有一点点，只是说,但是大家还是在通过这个方向啊，进行自己的抗争，因为你，你并不能去改变什么，所以你就说一些调侃一下，然后就可能去产生一点的作用。
>
> Using the Communist Party's language for mockery . . . Resistance doesn't make any difference, it seems like a kind of superficial resistance. That is, for example, actually, actually there is a bit of the Ah Q feeling. There's a little bit of, 'merely saying', but everyone is nonetheless following this direction, carrying out their own resistance. Because you, you really can't go change anything, so you make a few jokes, and then maybe there is a little action.

Again, then, it is clear that several informants understand *egao* and its associated wordplay as unlikely to lead to a social movement or a revolution, and do not conceptualize it as a form of radical politics. The repeated

reference to the persona of Ah Q is helpful in understanding the informants' views of the role of *egao* in a more sophisticated manner, beyond resistance or not resistance.

The story of Ah Q has been read in different ways, with different understandings of his political significance. Gloria Davies (1991) has examined the dissonant voices that critiqued Lu Xun's work at the time of its publication. She tells us that Marxist dogmatists attacked the story because 'the only kind of literature worth engaging in was what they referred to as "revolutionary literature" or literature that could fit unambiguously within the normative framework of Communist ideology', whereas Ah Q was 'unable to show the path towards a better future' (1991:59, 63). Davies shows instead how the 'heterogeneity of meanings generated by the text itself eluded attempts by Lu Xun's critics and defendants alike to utter the final word on Ah Q' (1991:60). The story 'uplifts the reader', but provides neither relief nor absolute positive value to revolution (1991:69).

Given the various accounts of *egao*, there seems to be good reason to understand the phenomenon in a similar way. Our study of the experiences of the producers and consumers of everyday *egao* (Nordin and Richaud 2014) suggests that it inspires a range of emotions: amusement, ridicule, anger, pride, contempt, sadness, and so on. *Egao* uplift, but offer no way out – they merely curse and snigger. Ah Q, a man without personal history or even a real name, 'produced an ineluctable desire on the part of his contemporary readers to give meaning to his existence, to invest in the name Ah Q a reality' (Davies 1991:73). The same treatment has befallen *egao*, with scholars and pundits striving to understand its meaning, pin down its (potential) significance. Some foreground the potential to influence politics, to contest the legitimacy, accountability or policy of the government as the yardstick against which *egao* should be measured. Others are more interested in whether *egao* has the potential to cultivate grassroots communities, collective resistance, or collective empowerment. For Davies, the function of Ah Q was "making strange" what is commonly regarded as familiar and mundane' (1991:70, 71, 76). It appears that our informants similarly did not see the point of their deployment of *egao* as resisting or not resisting, but rather as negotiating a space and in the process 'making strange' aspects of their reality that have become mundane and taken for granted, like censorship.

Although the sample size of this preliminary study was relatively small and the results cannot be taken as conclusive, there did seem to be a tendency, within that sample at least, to conceive of this practice as simultaneously painful and amusing, resistance and not resistance. Most informants did not describe *egao* simply in terms of either of these categories. For the university students in our study, *egao* was simultaneously about laughing at censorship and laughing it off. The conclusion for the purposes of this chapter is therefore simple: if those who engage in these practices on an everyday level do not conceive of them in either/or terms, it seems unduly restrictive

on the part of those who research the phenomenon to assume such a priori dichotomization of a complex experience.

'Making strange' through the double meaning of homonymic *egao*

I have suggested that the tendency to confine *egao* within the binary of resistance or non-resistance has blinded many commentators to some aspects of the practice that do not support our wish for 'resistance' to take place in China. I discussed two such marginalized aspects of *egao*: its frequently reactionary gender stereotyping and the complexity of emotions amongst those who practice it in their everyday negotiation of Party-State censorship and official language.

As mentioned by one of the informants cited in the previous section, many *egao* terms pun directly on such official government language and slogans. As exemplified in Wallis (2015), the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) becomes 'bare but' (*Guangdian/Guangding*) and the government-backed censorship software 'Green Dam Youth Escort' becomes 'Green Dam girl' (*lvba huaji huhuang/lvbaniang*). In the zoology of *egao* mythical creatures that has emerged alongside the grass-mud horse pun, the grass-mud horse's principal nemesis is the 'rivercrab' (*hexie* 河蟹). The word for 'rivercrab' in Chinese sounds almost exactly the same as the word for 'harmony', which is deployed in the Party-State slogan 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会) that underpins the online 'harmonization' to which another informant referred above. In Chinese, a crab is a violent bully and in various depictions, including the 'Song of the grass-mud horse', the 'river crab' is seen with big claws cutting off the 'grass' or expression of Chinese netizens (the grass-mud horses).[3] The direct appropriation of Party-State language that is widespread and exemplified by these terms gives such humorous homonyms their special punning character. As homonyms, they can be understood as meaning several things simultaneously. A reference to Chinese 'river crab society' is simultaneously a reference to 'harmonious society' – it is simultaneously both and neither purely one nor the other.

This position as simultaneously either/or and neither/nor makes typical *egao* puns in Chinese citizen media undecidable. This teaches us something about *egao* commentary itself – that the meaning of these expressions is not necessarily best understood as one single thing, but that the simultaneous play on different meanings is intrinsic to them. Because these terms draw directly on Party-State language, they have a complicated and parasitic relation to official discourse. In playing on official language, *egao* puns simultaneously reinforce and mock Party-State expression. They are not separate from that language, but derive from it. In this sense, they reassert the language of the Party-State rather than simply opposing it head-on. As we have seen from young people's own accounts, humorous homonyms allow them to navigate and sometimes get through state-led online censorship, but do

not necessarily seek its abolition. Indeed, although this brand of linguistic creativity enables the circumvention of constraints, it simultaneously suppresses sensitive expressions. Despite producing an alternative discourse, actors' powerlessness remains in the impossibility of *naming*, as they continue to be subjected to the rules of 'authorized language' (Bourdieu 1991:107). In not speaking the language of power, creators of Chinese citizen media are confined to their own processes of meaning-making, typing 'river crab' for 'harmony'. As we have seen, much of this culture also reinforces a gendered hierarchy and the tendency towards objectification and marginalization that is part and parcel of Chinese state and market functions. It therefore seems an oversimplification to refer to *egao* punnery as simply a form of resistance.

At the same time, *egao* teaches us something about official language too. Party-State slogans do not simply belong to the Party-State, and its representatives do not have absolute control over the meaning of such slogans. Terms like 'harmonious society' are made strange precisely through their redeployment in *egao* form. Like Ah Q, the humorous homonyms do not constitute a positive alternative for resistance, a path to a joint political movement, but they make official language strange through redeploying it in alternative ways. They therefore help us see how the meaning of official terms is not fixed or impermeable. *Egao* puns strategically open up official expression to possible alternative readings, making its multiple layers of meaning visible in a chain of terms like 'harmony', 'harmonization' and 'river crab'. If we begin our study of either *egao* terms or the official language they are said to 'resist' with the a priori assumption that the former either does or does not resist the latter, we risk becoming blind to their multiple simultaneous functions and can miss what might be most interesting about these phenomena.

Conclusion

I have suggested that many who have taken an interest in the punning *egao* culture that is currently popular in Chinese citizen media have done so because it is said to constitute a form of political resistance, and have argued against framing it in these terms and for foregrounding its undecidability and multiple meanings. This argument is informed by the work of Jacques Derrida (2003/2005). Derrida, and others inspired by his work, read texts closely in order to uncover possible simultaneous meanings that are already there, in order to 'make strange' our common understanding of terms. His strategy of reading against the grain is similar to the strategy of producers of Chinese citizen media puns like 'river crab', which discursively reverses the hierarchy between harmonizers and harmonized as commonly conceived in the process of online 'harmonization', and then displaces the binary through the invention of the new 'rivercrab' term. It is not unreasonable to suggest that there is a nuance and complexity in the strategy of *egao* punnery that does not seek to provide a 'greener grass' or a clear path

forward, and that in 'making strange' reveals a certain synergy with some of the reading methods we deploy in the humanities. An appreciation of this complexity may provide an opening for more alliances between creators of Chinese citizen media and scholars who wish to learn from them. The potential benefits, pitfalls and desirability of such an alliance remain, of course, open questions which may be pursued in future research. At this point, what these puns in Chinese citizen media may most importantly remind us of is the need to be wary of the all too easy assumption that they constitute resistance in some simple sense. Comforting as the certainty and fixity of meaning may be, it does not provide a productive or realistic perspective on this phenomenon.

Notes

1 All translations of Chinese examples are my own.
2 Although they have been removed from *Baidu*, a description of the original entry of the ten Mythical Creatures exists in English on the blog *Danwei* (Martinsen, 2009). These and other *egao* homonyms are moreover listed and described in English in the China Digital Spaces' *Grass-Mud Horse Lexicon* (Xiao Qiang 2015). For academic commentary on the ten Mythical Creatures, see Li (2011:79) and Nordin (2014a, 2014b).
3 For more detailed analyses of the 'rivercrab' and its relation to the grass-mud horse, see Nordin (2014a, 2016).

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Part IV

Processes of appropriation

Whose agenda?

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11 The securitization of citizen reporting in post-Arab Spring conflicts

Lilie Chouliaraki

Digital platforms have been celebrated for enabling citizens to bring their own witnessing accounts into global visibility. But how is citizen voice from war zones embedded in Western news platforms and how does it act as a form of journalistic witnessing? How does citizen witnessing portray civilian suffering and what forms of responsibility and action does it make available towards this suffering? This chapter addresses these questions through the new conceptual lens of citizen voice as a 'securitization of news': a discursive practice of digital journalism that prioritizes the reporting on human suffering as a cause for concern and possibly action for the West over the reporting of other (strategic, military or political) perspectives on conflict. My comparative analysis of two of BBC's convergent news streams from Libya and Syria demonstrates that differences in BBC's digital incorporation of citizen voice across streams produce variations in the securitization of news across contexts; and that such variations have important implications for the discourses of responsibility and action that each piece of news articulates. The findings throw into relief the hierarchies of place and human life that continue to govern the institutional flow of global news.[1]

Voice is today a crucial part of contemporary war and conflict reporting. Its power stems from its capacity to witness conflict from the perspective of civilians and, potentially, to raise the demand for responsibility or even action in their name. Whilst civilian testimony has been part of the repertoire of war reporting since the First World War (Goode 2009), the new visibility of citizen voice fully resonates with the contemporary ethos of 'humanitarian' wars, which now places this voice at the heart of the UN doctrine of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P): 'the responsibility to protect implies an evaluation of the issues *from the point of view of those seeking or needing support*, rather than those who may be considering intervention' (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001, paragraph 2.29; emphasis added). The emphasis on listening to 'those seeking or needing support' marks, from this perspective, an emerging 'institutionalisation of empathy and altruism' in the management of contemporary conflicts – a

process inherently linked to the historical shift from traditional warfare, based on a conception of 'sovereignty as control' over territories or groups, towards wars that today rely on 'sovereignty as responsibility for human rights and individual security' (Marlier and Crawford 2013:406).

While the institutionalization of empathy in the UN confers a new legitimacy on citizen voice, it is the rise of new media that amplifies and echoes this voice in the global media landscape. Digital platforms such as twitter, mobile phones and email have been hailed not only as a new chapter in war and conflict reporting but also as a turning point in the power relations of news production, in that they enable ordinary people to claim some control over the news agenda and so to 'deeply affect the news, in which the margins grow in power to shape the center' (Russell 2011:1238). In the post-Arab Spring conflicts in particular, where the exclusion or persecution of professional journalists has been pervasive (Salama 2012), citizen testimonies became a necessary dimension of Western conflict reporting so that, as Wollenberg and Pack argue, 'even the NATO decision to intervene on humanitarian grounds [in Libya] was influenced by this powerful new mechanism made up of the alliance of social media and pan-Arab channels' (2013:197).

Questions, however, arise: To what extent is citizen voice incorporated in Western news platforms and how is it articulated through journalistic witnessing? Is witnessing the only contribution of citizen voice in war and conflict reporting? How does citizen witnessing portray civilian suffering and how, in so doing, does it contribute to the transnational institutionalization of empathy? In other words, what forms of responsibility and action does citizen voice make available towards the suffering of civilians? I attempt to explore these questions here, and begin by theorizing citizen voice as a constitutive dimension of war and conflict reporting. Drawing on securitization theory (for example, Duffield 2007), I then proceed to provide a novel conceptualization of citizen voice in terms of the 'securitization of news' – a discursive practice of digital journalism that, in the context of 'humanitarian' wars, prioritizes the suffering produced by conflict as a cause for concern and possibly action for the West. I subsequently employ this conceptualization in a comparative analysis of BBC's convergent news on two post-Arab Spring conflicts, Libya and Syria, so as to show how differences in the incorporation of citizen voice in its digital news platforms produce variations in the securitization of news across contexts. These variations, I conclude, bear important implications for the discourses of responsibility and action that each piece of news articulates, throwing into relief the hierarchies of place and human life that continue to govern the flow of global news.

Citizen voice in war and conflict reporting

The theoretical context

The unprecedented potential of digital media to globally disseminate citizen voice granted, it is in fact changes in the conduct of warfare that have

elevated civilian testimonies to a necessary, rather than optional, component of contemporary war and conflict reporting. This is because suicide bombings, city skirmishes and drone attacks have moved warfare into urban spaces and, in so doing, rendered civilians both the main victims and the primary eyewitnesses of conflict: 'the proportion of all war casualties that are civilian', as Spiegel and Salama report, 'has increased from about 14% in the First World War to 67% in the Second World War, and to 90% in the 1990s' (2000:2204). As a result, citizen voice has become instrumental not only in contributing to what was earlier referred to as the institutionalization of altruism, but also in introducing a new authenticity in war and conflict reporting (Marlier and Crawford 2013).

This claim to journalistic authenticity has prompted major news institutions to appropriate citizen voice in their own renewed vision of journalism as a collaborative project. At the BBC, the lesson drawn from disaster and terror reporting, for example on the 2004 tsunami and the 2005 London attacks, is that 'when major events occur, the public can offer us as much new information as we are able to broadcast to them. From now on, news coverage is a partnership' (Sambrook 2005). It is, in turn, this 'partnership' between people's voice and mainstream digital platforms that Deuze defines as convergent journalism – the online presentation of a 'news story package' that incorporates more than one media format, including 'the spoken and written word, music, moving and still image, graphic animations, including interactive and hypertextual elements' (2004:140). Driven by techno-commercial as well as professional interests, the rise of convergent journalism is nonetheless primarily invested in an ethico-political discourse, that of 'giving voice' to the public (Beckett 2008). For it is these convergent platforms – of the BBC, CNN or Al Jazeera – that ultimately mediate citizen voice in the context of mainstream broadcasting and thus enable this voice to become global, to participate, that is, in the 'global network structure and enter the battle over the minds by intervening in the global communication process' (Castells 2007:244).

Yet, whilst everyone agrees that citizen voice is today a constitutive aspect of convergent war and conflict reporting, there is disagreement as to its political and moral implications: to what extent does citizen voice contribute to the institutionalization of altruism? What discourses of responsibility and, potentially, action towards victims of the conflict does such institutionalization put forward for media publics? And how, if at all, can citizen voice challenge the geopolitical relations of power, as they are reflected in Western conflict reporting? Two antithetical positions dominate the debate over these questions – the optimistic and the pessimistic.

The optimistic position draws on the democratization of journalism argument in order to theorize citizen voice as the catalyst for a new visibility of suffering in the news (Allan 2013). Citizen voice, the argument has it, breaks with the dominant pattern of war and conflict reporting, the state-driven propaganda that closely regulated the representation of war violence in the name of national interest (Herman and Chomsky 1988), by introducing the

perspective of suffering people themselves, as they experience the war zone. This perspective relies on the testimonial ethos of the ordinary eyewitness, who produces heart-rending narratives, 'designed', as Cottle puts it, 'to humanize, sense-ize and bring home the plight of distant others' (2013:13). An exemplary manifestation of the power of the eyewitness is the clandestine footage from the 2007 Burma protests and the 2009 Iran election riots, which, in instantly disseminating visual testimonies of violence in Rangoon and Tehran, inspired a global activism of solidarity with local populations (Mortensen 2011). More recently, the eyewitnessing of civilian suffering has played a key role in the reporting of post-Arab Spring conflicts, whereby Twitter, Facebook and mobile phone footage acted as the people's 'partisan advocates' (Wollenberg and Pack 2013:193), bypassing state propaganda and capturing the global imagination: 'what national and international audiences see', as Kampf and Liebes put it, 'are pictures of the suffering of innocent people . . . which means that viewers' spontaneous demand is to stop the suffering straight away' (2013:9).

If this 'spontaneous demand' to act lies at the heart of the positive argument, the pessimistic position is sceptical of such optimism. Rather than celebrating the moralizing potential of citizen voice, the pessimistic view links the rise of this voice to the expansion of corporate media and their need to re-legitimize journalism in the face of a declining consumption of news (Scott 2005). The rise of citizen voice constitutes, in this context, a 'demotic' rather than a 'democratic' turn in convergent journalism, in that trading professional validity for personal authenticity prioritizes the immediacy of experience over fact-checking and expert analysis (Turner 2010). There are two aspects to the pessimistic diagnosis. On the one hand, whilst claiming to reflect a new plurality of information and opinion, convergent journalism recreates the traditional hierarchy of journalism by carefully distinguishing professional contributions from amateur ones. For instance, drawing on an analysis of CNN's iReporting platform covering the violence of the Iranian elections in 2009, Palmer shows how the citizen's 'unpaid labor simultaneously bolsters the power of the CNN brand while also illuminating the social hierarchies long associated with traditional journalism' (2013:368). On the other hand, as citizen voice is co-opted by major news corporations for market purposes, convergent journalism compromises the expertise of a retreating foreign correspondence service and privileges instead sensationalist snapshots that 'sell': 'convergence in journalism', as Scott puts it, is not about the democratization of information but about 'a new strategy in the economic management of information production and distribution', whose 'raison d'etre is profit' (2005:101). War and conflict reporting is an inevitable victim of such commercialization, in that, as Kampf and Liebes (2013) show in their analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, citizen voice from the battlefield provides just that ordinary 'feel' that can turn facts into sentimental entertainment; in place of old actors with relevant expertise, such as generals or politicians, they argue, 'new actors occupy centre-stage and tell of their

own personal experiences in melodramatic and heartrending language' (2013:12). The consequence is that journalism no longer offers an overview of events nor provides the resources for judgement necessary to understand the war: 'armed conflict', they conclude, 'is increasingly covered in ways that stress the micro-level individual experience rather than the macro-issues of the collective social good' (2013:12).

Suspended between these two positions, either celebrating the moralizing potential of convergent journalism or regretting the demise of the news into a 'journalism of emotion', the argument on citizen voice remains unresolved. As a consequence, it also fails to address the key empirical question of how the convergent reporting of different conflicts may itself vary across contexts, depending on the ways in which such voice is remediated in mainstream Western platforms. Following Robinson's claim that 'research into the impact of media and communication processes needs to be done with due attention to the multiplicity of non-media processes that shape political actions and outcomes' (2011:6), I therefore propose a comparative approach to the role of citizen voice, one which views the convergent news on post-Arab Spring conflicts as primarily a political process dependent not only on the use of digital media, but also on the different geopolitical interests of the West and other international stakeholders. Before presenting the case study on each conflict, however, let me first introduce a conceptual framework for the analysis of citizen voice in convergent news based on 'securitization'.

War and conflict reporting as securitization: The analytical context

Citizen voice as a politics of pity

The reporting of contemporary wars in terms of the humanitarian ethos of protecting civilians entails, let us recall, a news structure that relies on the representation of suffering as a cause for responsibility and potentially action. This thematization of suffering in the reporting of war and conflict enacts, in this sense, what we may call a politics of pity: a politics of news representation that aims at gaining public legitimacy by construing the conflict as a scene of action between sufferers, their persecutors and their saviours (Chouliaraki 2006). In centring upon the human toll of a conflict, pity foregrounds questions of death, victimhood, injury, displacement and torture whilst backgrounding or even concealing questions of interest, alliance, rivalry and domination. The term 'politics of pity' refers, in this sense, to the representational work of the news narrative (in mainstream, convergent or citizen journalism) to strategically construe the victim of a conflict within specific regimes of meaning, as deserving security or not, and, in so doing, to reproduce specific relationships of power between those who need and those who offer protection. For in placing the responsibility for securing human life consistently on certain states rather than others, as Duffield points out,

'human security is embodying a distinction between effective and ineffective states' (2007:122), distinguishing, thus, between effective states of the West, with a right to intervene, and ineffective, non-Western ones, as candidates for intervention.

This discursive work of pity in construing a conflict as a humanitarian emergency can be defined as a 'securitization' of news – a process 'aimed at convincing a target audience to accept, based on what it knows about the world, the claim that a specific development is threatening enough to deserve an immediate policy to alleviate it' (Balzacq 2005:173). The news becomes, then, a site of securitization, insofar as the proposal to act (or not) in the name of civilian security depends upon the systematic use of discursive resources of the news to invest the conflict with moral meaning and hence confront its publics with the demand for action. Rather than assuming, therefore, that journalism simply reports on pre-existing events, the politics of pity suggests instead that journalism exercises a *performative* force upon these events, construing them from particular points of view, at the moment that it claims to simply represent them (Chouliaraki 2013). By the same token, journalism also bears a performative effect on the publics it addresses, insofar as these publics are, time and again, invited to engage with the news' politics of pity and to take a stance towards the proposals for altruism that the discourse of the responsibility to protect puts forward for them. In focusing on Western journalism, therefore, my question becomes how BBC convergent news securitizes Libya and Syria as humanitarian conflicts and, in so doing, what forms of responsibility it proposes to the publics it addresses.

Witnessing and deliberation

My starting point is that the securitization of the news depends on the act of witnessing, on reporting on what has been seen and felt by those present at the scene of action. For it is, as Oliver (2001) puts it, the eyewitnessing of a conflict as a spectacle of human suffering that, in turn, makes it possible for Western publics to bear witness to the conflict and engage with it in morally acceptable and politically legitimate ways. In the First World War, for instance, the British justification for the war strategically moved from the German violation of the international law of neutrality, in the invasion of Belgium, to the German atrocities against Belgian women and children, which rallied people around a humanitarian cause. This 'representation of German atrocities', as Gullace argues, 'provided British propagandists with a vivid and evocative set of images that could be used to explain the arcane language of international law to a democratic public increasingly empowered to support or reject its enforcement' (1997:716).

Its power to move and moralize granted, however, witnessing can only legitimize efficacious modes of action when it is further authorized by international stakeholders that not only deem suffering civilians as worth acting

upon but also judge the conditions of the suffering to be possible and desirable to act upon. This is because the question of security is not a fixed moral 'truth' but, as Hansen (2006) argues, is always entangled with the power relations of the international order and therefore becomes an object of deliberation among interested parties, as they seek to negotiate altruistic versus other, more self-interested forms of responsibility. The securitization of news, it follows, depends as much on testimonials of suffering as on authoritative voices that assign particular discourses of responsibility to the stakes of a conflict, be these the voices of the UN, international NGOs or national governments (Watson 2011). In the war of Yugoslavia, for instance, authoritative voices participated in an intense deliberation around two kinds of responsibility – the responsibility to protect civilians and the responsibility to defend Western interests – as national and international actors sought to both respond to 'the media reports of Serbian atrocities' and simultaneously 'legitimize the deployment of a large peacekeeping force working under rather dangerous conditions' (Hansen 2006:125). Unlike, then, the First World War, where suffering civilians were used as mere news propaganda for British interests, the politics of pity in Yugoslavia, the first 'humanitarian' war (Roberts 1999), renders security an inherent part of the very construal of the conflict itself and the driving force behind its course of action – airborne intervention. How, then, do the discursive acts of witnessing and deliberation come together to construe the two post-Arab Spring conflicts? What politics of pity does each piece of conflict reporting enact?

To address these questions, I next focus on a comparison of the Libya and Syria news in BBC's convergent reporting. The choice of BBC reflects my interest in identifying the ways in which a major Western broadcaster securitizes conflict reporting. Libya and Syria are chosen because they were both protagonists in the surge of civilian uprisings against the authoritarian regimes of North Africa and the Middle East in early 2011, and their populations were subsequently subjected to state violence, mass atrocities and crimes against humanity. They differ, however, in terms of the response of the West vis-à-vis these crimes. Already in March 2011, Libya was subjected to Western intervention – a response that, in the UN Secretary General's words, reflected 'clearly and unequivocally, the international community's determination to fulfil its responsibility to protect civilians from violence perpetrated upon them by their own government'.[2] Yet, despite its ten-fold higher casualty rates to date, Syria did not elicit a comparable response – the strongest Western reaction so far being the UN-supervised destruction of its chemical weapons, following a serious case of chemical warfare in August 2013. In light of such significant variation in the West's application of the R2P (Responsibility to Protect) doctrine, discussed earlier, I ask how the BBC used citizen voice, and its discourses of responsibility and action, to reproduce or challenge this variation of responses in its convergent reporting. I begin with BBC's Libya report on Saturday 26 February 2011, and continue with that of Syria, on 10 June 2011.[3]

Libya and Syria: The empirical context

The BBC's convergent reporting offers daily live online updates of the Libya and Syria conflicts, by using a hybrid news structure made up of various media platforms, including twitter and email messages, eyewitness links, with footage and 'have your say' links that invite people's testimonials and views. This hybrid structure de-homogenizes the news story: rather than being woven through narrative, sources are now connected through the temporal logic of what-comes-first, whilst simultaneously allowing for multiple modes of user engagement: reading, clicking and navigating, and skimming through images (Chouliaraki 2013). How does each piece of news on Libya and Syria manage this hybridity into a particular politics of pity around each conflict?

Libya

The Libyan narrative is tighter and denser than the Syrian one, reflecting an easier flow of information on the ground. Consequently, it also offers more detailed update entries, which, however, remain open-ended, as events are randomly reported and never reach closure.

Witnessing

There are 113 instances of eyewitnessing in the 148 update entries of the Libyan online broadcast. These can be categorized under two headings, civilian and professional eyewitnessing. Civilian witnessing refers to twitter messages or mobile phone footage sent by civilians or civil organizations, as they report on what they see or hear on the ground – for instance:

> **16.39** Ibn Omar tweets: 'Roads from #tripoli to #azZawiya are filled with military and tanks, the west of the city (sourman [*sic*] area) is under control by Khweldi'.

Professional witnessing refers to twitter messages or reports sent by journalists on the ground, as they either quote civilians' experience of the conflict, what we might call indirect professional testimonies – as in:

> **18.41** John Griffin in Benghazi writes: 'Locals here in Benghazi are complaining of increasingly limited access to fresh food, medical equipment and, in particular, drinking water'

– or report on their own experience, what we might call direct professional testimonies, as in:

> **08.06** Sky News correspondent Alex Crawford says that in the last few minutes, the rebels have repelled the attack by government forces.

Out of the 113 updates of eyewitnessing, the largest number of entries (54) are indirect professional testimonies, that is journalistic reports on civilian experiences, followed by direct testimonies of journalists (51) and by the ordinary witnessing of civilian tweets (6). The BBC thus reverses the Al Jazeera practice of conflict reporting as civilian witnessing (Wollenberg and Pack 2013) to prioritize instead the professionalization of testimonies through indirect witnessing – journalists reporting on civilian accounts of their experiences. Whilst, practically speaking, this emphasis reflects the large number of journalists on mission in Libya, it simultaneously resonates with the epistemological shift in online news reporting from a conception of truth as journalistic objectivity towards a multi-vocal conception of truth that relies on personal experience, re-mediated and validated as this is by professionals (Allan 2013).

Through this shift towards multi-vocal news, BBC's online footage on Libya managed to articulate a powerful politics of pity, which consistently used the figures of victim, perpetrator and benefactor to elaborate a strong discourse of responsibility for the protection of Libyan civilians. This is the case in civilian testimonies, for instance:

> **09.44** Libyan Youth Movement tweets: 'Tanks were used this morning and fired at residential buildings on the city of Zawia but yet again Gaddafi fails to control #Libya #Feb17'.

which uses the distinction between people and army to establish the two sides of the conflict in terms of an unequal and immoral battle – Gaddafi's tanks fire at residential buildings – and simultaneously to reinforce the identity of the Libyan Youth Movement as a force of resistance, in 'yet again Gaddafi fails to control #Libya'. A similar distinction is articulated in indirect professional testimonies, as in:

> **07.44** 'I am watching neighbours dying unarmed in front of their homes' another resident of Zawiya tells The New York Times. The resident says the militias are using tanks and heavy artillery, attacking from the east and west gates of the city. 'I don't know how many are being killed but I know my neighbourhood is being killed'.

The benefactor is here absent, though evoked in subsequent entries, but the juxtaposition between victim/civilians and perpetrator/army is repeated in a starker form in 'neighbours dying unarmed' and 'neighbourhood . . . being killed' versus 'militias . . . using tanks and heavy artillery'. The following example of a direct professional testimony follows the same pattern of evoking pity:

> **15.08** Sky News correspondent Alex Crawford, at Zawiya hospital, says that within the last 10 or 15 minutes government tanks loaded with soldiers have been rolling in . . . She says there was heavy artillery

> bombardment lasting about 10 minutes. Since then, the sound of gunfire has died down. Casualties have started arriving at the hospital with serious injuries, including a young boy of about 10 whose body was peppered with bullets, she adds. There are also reports that government forces have been taking away bodies on the streets to minimise the numbers of known casualties.

The juxtaposition between 'government tanks' or 'forces' and 'casualties . . . including a young boy about 10' reinforces, here, the distinction between perpetrator and victim, by singling out the case of the child casualty, whilst the reference to the removal of 'bodies on the streets', suggesting that the government knowingly commits crimes against its citizens, further strips the regime of moral and political legitimacy.

In summary, the Libya conflict in BBC's online live news is mediated by a range of witnessing claims – civilian witnessing, professional direct and professional indirect witnessing. All these types of witnessing gravitate towards the sharp distinction between perpetrator, the Gaddafi forces, and victim, Libyan civilians, with the category 'rebels' figuring as the benefactor. In so doing, the testimonies of suffering in BBC news securitize the Libyan conflict through a discourse of denunciation – a discourse that, according to Boltanski, presupposes a 'redirection of attention away from the depressing consideration of the unfortunate and his sufferings and in search of a persecutor on whom to focus' (1999:57).

Deliberating

For witnessing to operate as a politically efficacious act, however, the accusation against the persecutor needs to be combined with deliberation – with arguments that legitimize intervention in the name of the international community. What kinds of deliberation are included in the BBC news on Libya? In line with the popular/professional distinction employed in journalistic witnessing, deliberation, too, can be defined in terms of its source status, with popular deliberation referring to comments or appeals by citizens in and beyond Libya and professional deliberation referring to commentary by international organizations, such as the United Nations or national governments. The total of deliberative entries is 30.

Popular deliberation (10 entries) is about moral argument through people's dramatic appeals for international action in Libya:

> **20.54** Kobby in Denver, writes: 'It saddens me that the world looks helplessly as Gaddafi slaughters his own people. I wish we could send anti-tank and aircraft bombs to the rebels. The world should not wait until people are slaughtered in Libya as it happened in Rwanda before acting. Freedom must reign!'

The use of emotional language ('It *saddens me* that the world looks helplessly', 'people are *slaughtered*'), the expression of desire ('*I wish* we could send. . .') and the proliferation of categorical imperatives ('The world *should not* wait', 'Freedom *must* reign!') are some of the linguistic features that build on the discourse of denunciation, already established through witnessing, to promote a humanitarian argument for intervention. A similar politics of pity is enacted in the following entry:

> **20.45** Samira Kawar in London writes: 'The international community should come to the aid of the brave people of Benghazi in every way possible. Governments and NGOs, including voluntary organisations, should send food and medical supplies. That is the least that Libyans trying to overthrow their tyrant of a leader deserve'.

Convergent journalism's claim of giving voice to ordinary people is exemplified in this statement, which explicitly addresses the 'international community' as a potential benefactor of the Libyan people, whilst, at the same time, enacting a familiar politics of pity by activating the figures of perpetrator, in the 'tyrant leader', and the (dignified) sufferer, in 'the brave people of Benghazi' in need of 'food and medical supplies'.

Professional deliberation principally includes UN statements about the status of refugees in Libya (20 entries):

> **13.48** African workers trapped in Libya are the most vulnerable of the foreigners scrambling to flee the country, the UN refugee chief has said. 'There are hundreds of thousands of African workers in Libya, and very few have shown up at the borders', Antonio Guterres told Al Jazeera in an interview. 'We have received phone calls from people in a desperate situation, afraid of leaving their homes'.

Similarly to popular deliberation, such statements also moralize the news, this time by expanding the domain of possible suffering civilians to non-Libyan citizens ('African workers . . . the most vulnerable of the foreigners'; 'desperate situation', 'afraid to . . .').

In summary, BBC's convergent journalism on Libya combines a discourse of denunciation, through witnessing, with appeals for humanitarian intervention, through deliberation. Whilst popular deliberation raises the question of international action, professional deliberation expands the scope of sufferers to encompass non-Libyan refugees. The securitization of BBC's convergent news lies, then, in its capacity to both narrate the Libya conflict from the perspective of civilians under threat and to invest this perspective with moral argument as to why it is important to act on their suffering. In this manner, it effectively promotes the 'responsibility to protect' discourse and contributes to legitimizing an international military operation, in the name of saving lives.

Syria

The Syria news coverage also combines professional with citizen voice but consists of fewer updates than the Libya one. Its articulation of witnessing with deliberation claims, consequently, plays out a different politics of pity and activates a different process of securitization.

Witnessing

As with the Libya news, BBC's Syria online broadcast is also made up of instances of civilian and professional eyewitnessing (78 entries in total). Such testimonies, however, consist principally of indirect, rather than direct, witnessing (36), due to the Syrian government's banning of Western professionals from entering the country. This difficulty of reporting on the ground is a major difference between two areas of news coverage, resulting in the Syria news being more heavily dependent than the Libya one on citizen reports from Damascus but also on Syrian state TV and other Arab media.

Civilian witnessing (13 entries) reports on violence against civilians in the course of massive protests:

> **13.59** Yousif in Hama writes: 'Last Friday major massacres were committed in Hama that claimed the lives of 70 and wounded tens of citizens. At first the media have denied the massacre and spoke of a limited number of deaths according to public sources. It also spoke of the presence of gangs who committed vandalism. All citizens of Hama know that the demonstrations were totally peaceful. Protesters were carrying roses when protesting. There has been no vandalism at all'.

As in the Libya news, the principal distinction in this entry is between civil activism and state violence, casting civilians as the victim and state army as the persecutor; this is established through the juxtaposition of, on the one hand, a vocabulary of violence, in 'massacres', '70 lives claimed', 'tens of citizens wounded', and, on the other, a vocabulary of civil protest, 'demonstrations were totally peaceful', 'protesters were carrying roses'. This familiar politics of pity articulates a discourse of denunciation that, similarly to that of Libya, vilifies the state and treats protesting citizens as victims – with the contrast between state propaganda, in 'denying the massacre', and defiant resistance, in 'protesters were carrying roses', further consolidating the moral superiority of the latter over the former.

Indirect professional witnessing partly echoes this discourse in a small number of entries (3), as in:

> **13.47** Reports now say Syrian security forces have shot dead two demonstrators in the southern village of Bosra [*sic*] al-Harir. Anti-government activists say a third protester was shot dead in the capital, Damascus.

However, in the majority of entries (33), indirect professional witnessing also reports from a multiplicity of other sources, which modify the discourse of denunciation by offering alternative interpretations of the conflict:

> **13.04** Reuters reports that Syrian forces have shot dead two protesters in the southern village of Busra al-Hariri, near Deraa. Syrian TV says a member of the security forces was shot dead by gunmen in the village; residents say no troops died.
>
> **10.20** Human rights groups say more than 1,100 people have been killed since protests against President Assad's rule began in March, and it now appears several hundred security forces may also have died.

Established through a series of contrasts, such as 'Reuters reports . . . Syrian TV says . . . residents say', 'human rights groups say . . . it now appears that security forces may have also died', the overall mood of these testimonies is one of ambivalence: if there are 'massacres' or 'vandalisms' on one side of the conflict, they are also there on the other. The absence of direct professional witnessing, where journalists would be able to better check facts for themselves, may be responsible for this testimonial pluralism. The outcome nonetheless is that, in presenting the two sides of the conflict, this politics of pity effectively destabilizes the figure of the persecutor, shifting the discourse of denunciation into undecidability – the presentation of the views held by all parties involved without taking a stance.

In summary, witnessing in the Syria news differs from witnessing in the Libya one in that civilian witnessing only partially sustains a discourse of denunciation, whilst professional witnessing introduces into the news a pluralism of testimonials that marginalizes denunciation in favour of impartiality.

Deliberating

Similarly to the Libya news, this area of coverage also consists of popular and official deliberation entries (27). Popular deliberation (9) expresses the voices of citizens in Syria and the world. Some clearly articulate anti-regime sentiments, as in:

> **10.11** Adolf Agbormbai in the UK writes: 'It is high time the international community takes decisive action against Syria. The Syrian government cannot be allowed to continue massacring demonstrators while the world sits and watches. This is irresponsible . . .'.

Even though these claims sustain the familiar distinctions among the state as persecutor ('massacring' people), civilians as victims ('demonstrators') and

the international community as potential benefactor (urged to 'take decisive action' and to not be irresponsible), other claims blur these distinctions:

> **13.59** Ziad A. Fadel from Michigan, US writes: 'We have family in a town called Hallouz just west of Jisr-al-Shugour [*sic*] in the mountains. The village looks over the city. They told us that people are being evacuated from the city in anticipation of a much-awaited and welcomed Syrian army attack on fanatics holed up there. Mr Erdogan's statements, if true, are irresponsible. He ought to know better about what these fanatics can do. Especially since the Turks have fought a much longer and bloodier war against their native Kurds'.

In direct contrast to the claim above, this one construes the Syrian army as 'much awaited' and 'needed', whilst turning demonstrators into 'fanatics' and the international community, represented by Erdogan, the Turkish president, as 'irresponsible' for seeking to intervene.

Taken together, these instances of popular deliberation unsettle the politics of pity, as we have known it in the Libyan coverage. Rather than establishing a stable stage of suffering populated by actors with fixed attributes and relationships, Syrian news continuously alternate these actors, thereby blurring the moral boundaries they are supposed to maintain. There is, consequently, no pure figure of evil or misfortune in the Syrian news, nor is there a clear imperative for the international community to exercise its 'responsibility to protect'. This blurring of divisions becomes even more explicit in further entries that directly address just this instability of positions:

> **13.04** Antoun from Aleppo in Syria writes: 'Protests in Syria began peacefully and there are still large segments of the peaceful protesters, but also there is a major segment that uses violence, weapons and vandalism. The biggest mistake the protesters may commit is to harbour this segment. Describing the protests in Syria as sectarian is more accurate than labelling it as popular. So far the regime remains the strongest link and a large faction of the society still holds to it. We welcome reforms with the regime at the top of it.'.

If deliberative argument can confer legitimacy on intervention, then, unlike Libya, the popular deliberation of the Syrian news complicates such legitimacy in that it projects the state as both evil and supported by civilians whilst construing civilians as both peaceful and violent. In encompassing a range of voices, from anti-or pro-regime to moderate reformist ones, popular deliberation in the Syrian news offers no dominant discourse of responsibility through which the conflict can be understood and reinforces instead a position of undecidability vis-à-vis the conflict.

Professional deliberation (18 entries) includes claims from international NGOs, principally the Red Cross, and foreign governments. The Red Cross emphasizes the humanitarian aspect of the conflict:

> **11.12** The International Committee of the Red Cross has called on the Syrian authorities to allow urgent and unimpeded access to all areas affected by the unrest within Syria. 'It's extremely alarming that our numerous requests for access to affected areas or detained people have not been granted by the Syrian authorities' says the ICRC's Hicham Hassan . . .

Choices like 'urgent and unimpeded' and 'extremely alarming' point to the urgency of the situation whilst the direct quote from an authoritative figure ('It is extremely alarming . . .') not only adds force to the humanitarian appeal but also firmly positions the government as the perpetrator ('suppression of unrest continues', 'called on the Syrian authorities to allow . . . access', 'requests . . . have not been granted by the Syrian authorities'). Foreign governments partially echo this politics of pity, also construing the conflict as an emergency through the choice of direct quotes, in 'massacre of innocents':

> **10.33** US Defence Secretary Robert Gates says Mr Assad's legitimacy has now been called into question by what he calls the 'massacre of innocents' in Syria.

Others, however, reflect either dissent between traditional and emerging global players, as in:

> **09.40** The unrest in Syria has prompted a split within the UN Security Council, where France and Britain have proposed a resolution to condemn the government's actions. But other nations on the council, including Brazil, China and Russia, say such a resolution – which does not propose concrete action – could further inflame tensions in an already volatile region.

or explicitly articulate geopolitical concerns regarding the conflict's spillover into neighbouring countries:

> **11.34** Jonathan Head, BBC News, Istanbul: 'Turkey has a 900-km border with Syria and, in recent years, has heavily promoted trade with its neighbour. Its officials say they fear chaos if Mr Assad is toppled – but they have quietly started helping the opposition, allowing a meeting to take place here earlier this month in which the disparate dissident figures tried to form a more coherent movement. One of Turkey's greatest concerns is that the unrest will destabilise Kurdish areas of Syria . . .'.

In both these entries, the politics of pity has given way to a more complex representation of the conflict, with humanitarian urgency qualified with reference to divisions in the international community between Western and emerging powers ('a split within the UN Security Council . . .') or specific geopolitical considerations ('could further inflame tensions in an already volatile region'; 'Turkey has a 900-km border with Syria . . . the unrest will destabilise Kurdish areas of Syria'). Despite, therefore, the discourse of denunciation, evident in the casting of the Syrian government as an evil persecutor, the professional deliberation of the Syria news fails to articulate a clear politics of pity that, as in Libya, can activate indignation against the perpetrator/state and empathy for suffering civilians. Instead, it construes a morally unstable discursive landscape, which enables a conception of responsibility as realpolitik to voice and thematizes the geopolitical concerns of international stakeholders.

Overall, the Syria news in BBC's convergent journalism is similar to the Libya one in that it combines a discourse of denunciation, established through its witnessing claims, with humanitarian concerns for civilians, articulated through its deliberation claims. Where the two differ, however, is in that, in Syria, both witnessing and deliberation rely on a more complex representation of the conflict than the politics of pity would allow. Whilst witnessing is now characterized by pluralistic testimonials, simultaneously denouncing and justifying civilian deaths, deliberation is split between appeals for action and concerns about the interests of international stakeholders. In this way, the securitization of BBC's convergent reporting galvanizes the question of action through a multiplicity of ethico-political positions that marginalize the discourse of responsibility to protect civilians and stand reluctant towards the option of intervention in the name of human security.

Citizen voice and the hierarchies of place and human life

The responsibility to protect has been hailed, let us recall, as a discourse of global governance that institutionalizes altruism by expanding the 'circle of empathy' beyond 'our own' people towards all vulnerable others in the international community, towards 'every person, everywhere . . . demanding taking risks to protect them' (Marlier and Crawford 2013:416). Whilst, as the authors continue, by coding altruism into a legal doctrine this institutionalization evacuates emotions of empathy and care from the sphere of international politics (2013:410), my focus on convergent journalism demonstrates how the digital testimonies of civilians, in emphasizing the authentic experience of civilian suffering, return emotions onto the global stage and attempt to moralize the West's relationship to those civilians in terms of providing protection to those who need it.

Approaching, thus, war and conflict reporting as a securitization of news, that is as discursive practice through which citizen voice construes conflict as a humanitarian emergency, in line with contemporary conceptions of

Western warfare, I analysed BBC's convergent reporting on two post-Arab Spring conflicts – Libya and Syria. In both cases, we saw that the securitization of conflict news involves a multi-vocal digital structure of communication, where the acts of witnessing, in civilian and professional testimonies, and deliberation, in popular and elite appeals, position the conflicts within specific regimes of pity – that is within different configurations of the relationship between sufferers, persecutors and benefactors. It is, however, the journalistic voice that ultimately dominates convergent news, as professional witnessing accounts for an overwhelming majority of entries in Libya (53 direct, 51 indirect vis-à-vis 6 civilian) and a clear majority in Syria, where indirect professional witnessing (36) accounts for more than double the number of entries for civilian witnessing (13); deliberative claims are similarly biased towards elite sources in both contexts, which feature in double the number of popular ones in both Libya (20 to 10) and Syria (18 to 9). Confirming, thus, Palmer's research on CNN's 'i-reporting', which demonstrates that convergent platforms reproduce the power relations of traditional journalism (2013), the hierarchy of voice in these BBC news texts suggests that professional authority and expertise are privileged over popular testimony and opinion.

This hierarchy of voice inevitably has implications for the politics of pity in each area of news coverage: a politics of denunciation in Libya and undecidability in Syria. Even though both areas of coverage, let us recall, share a discourse of denunciation in their professional and popular witnessing accounts, the Libya news reinforces this discourse with popular and elite appeals that ask for international support, whilst the Syria news qualifies the discourse of denunciation through civilian testimonials that blur the divide between perpetrator and victim and through popular deliberation that holds equally split views on the desirability of intervention. As a consequence, the securitization of the two areas of coverage also differs. Whilst the Libya news unequivocally articulates the responsibility to protect civilians, thereby acting as a prototype case of the institutionalization of altruism in the contemporary wars of the West, the Syria news privileges a form of responsibility as realpolitik, oriented towards the national and multilateral interests of global players.[4]

To conclude, in parallel to the hierarchy of citizen voice in convergent news, a different and more important hierarchy seems to be emerging – a hierarchy of place and human life. What this hierarchy suggests is that the deep asymmetries of the contemporary geopolitical order continue to classify the world into those who deserve and those who do not deserve protection, selectively distributing the potential for pity towards civilians across different conflict zones. Ultimately, it appears indeed that the celebrated institutionalization of altruism cannot but be 'imperfect and incomplete'. For, as Marlier and Crawford put it, 'it is often the case that where the great powers have little material incentive to intervene themselves, those seeking protection cannot rely on empathy' (2013:399).

Notes

1 This chapter builds on and extends the argument developed in Chouliaraki (2015).
2 See www.un.org/press/en/2011/sgsm13454.doc.htm (accessed 22 August 2015).
3 These are available online at: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13724765 (Syria) and http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/9416095.stm (Libya); accessed January 2014.
4 Historical fact reflects and confirms this distribution of responsibilities. In Libya, following Gaddafi's aerial raids against his own rebelling population, the UNSC swiftly authorized a military intervention on humanitarian grounds (UNSC Mandate, 1 March 2011; www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm). In Syria, in contrast, where the political landscape has been almost indecipherable (Thakur 2013), the only proposal for international intervention on humanitarian grounds (following the chemical weapons attack in Ghoutta in August 2013) was unsuccessful – though some positive action took place regarding the removal of chemical weapons; see www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/08/ghouta-chemical-attack-years-onward-150819141756348.html (accessed 22 August 2015).

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12 The people formerly known as the Oligarchy

The co-optation of citizen journalism

Julia Rone

The concentration of media, business and political power in the hands of a few oligarchs was targeted in a series of popular protests in Bulgaria throughout 2013–2014. In a situation of increasing media monopolization and unclear media ownership, the importance of independent sources of information was acknowledged by all protesters. And yet, as this chapter demonstrates, the citizen media that flourished during that period of popular unrest conformed to the already existing patterns of unclear ownership, low quality journalism and promotion of oligarchic interests. The citizen journalism efforts that emerged with the mission to target the oligarchy and the party model clearly served the interests of the main oligarchic circles in the country while hiding behind the rhetoric of democratization and participation. Evidence to support this argument is drawn from the accusations exchanged between *Bivol* (Bulgarian version of *WikiLeaks*) and ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, and between the two circles of media around the sites *NOresharski.com* and *NOligrach.com*. Instead of addressing the shortcomings of traditional media, these citizen-media initiatives are shown to have simply reproduced the same problems online and failed to meet the standards of media accountability.

In his well-known blog piece 'The People Formerly Known as the Audience', Jay Rosen (2006) quotes the founder of blogging Dave Winner who said that 'once the users take control, they never give it back'. I claim exactly the opposite in this chapter: that the users can give control back, that this is already happening and that it is dangerous precisely because it is not a transparent process but one hidden behind the rhetoric of citizen participation. To support this claim, I explore the boom of citizen-journalism projects during the various stages of anti-government mobilization in Bulgaria in 2013–2014, a troubled period that saw the rise and fall of five consecutive governments and a series of mass protests throughout the country.

I start by presenting various definitions of citizen journalism, and discuss the high expectations associated with it, including the claim that it stimulates political participation and democratization. Counter arguments are also discussed, including those that focus on the dangers of group polarization online

(Jamieson and Cappella 2008), structural problems such as the lowering of journalistic quality and standards with the advent of new technologies (Curran et al. 2012), and the troubling state of media accountability (Domingo and Heikkilä 2012). In the following section, I survey the field of audio-visual and print media in Bulgaria and examine the concentration of power in the hands of a few powerful oligarchs, arguing that it is precisely the worrying monopolies over traditional media outlets that have raised the expectations for citizen journalism as an alternative. I then move on to demonstrate that citizen journalism has also been co-opted in the current model of entanglement between media, business and politics, focusing on two specific cases of conflict between 'citizen journalists' online as indicative of the interests that stand behind them. The first case is the war between *Bivol* (often labelled as the Bulgarian *WikiLeaks*) and ANONYMOUS BULGARIA. The second concerns the mutual accusations between the 'independent news agencies' *NOresharski* and *NOligarch* and their respective circles of satellite websites and Facebook pages, which were established during the 2013–2014 protests in Bulgaria with the purported aim of providing non-mainstream information. I conclude that instead of offering an alternative, citizen journalism in Bulgaria during this period was successfully incorporated into the already existing media universe of unclear ownership, scandalous content and promotion of oligarchic interests.

The media are dead, long live the media

As early as 2001, Frank Webster identified two main components of the 'crisis' of journalism: the first is the growing trend of concentration of the media in the hands of few individuals and consequent rise in commercial pressures; and the second is the development of new electronic forms of communication. One type of response to what was seen as the increasing void between citizens and government, and the failure of journalism to foster public debate and participation was the development of the public journalism movement in the US (Webster 2001:25). This started in the late 1980s and early 1990s to address conventional journalism's loss of credibility and was billed as an invitation for journalists to treat the press as 'an agency not only of but also for communication, a medium through which citizens can inform themselves and through which they can discover their common values and shared interests' (Glasser and Craft 1998, quoted in Webster 2001:27).

The advent of digital and social media, including blogs, social-networking sites, collaborative projects such as Wikipedia and content communities (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010:62), took the democratizing potential of public journalism to a whole new level by enabling a strong interactivity with and among publics, and the generation of a new kind of public discussion forum. Thus, citizen journalism emerged as a second phase of public journalism (Correia 2012). Rosen (2006) argued that so far '[a] highly centralized media system had connected people "up" to big social agencies and centers

of power but not "across" to each other' and that '[n]ow the horizontal flow, citizen-to-citizen, is as real and consequential as the vertical one'. While Carr et al. adopt a broad perspective in defining citizen journalism as a 'range of amateur information reporting and sharing activities' (2014:3), others such as Nip (2006) and Veenstra et al. (2015) introduce an important distinction between participatory journalism, where audience members contribute their voices to a centralized information news source, and citizen journalism, which is not dependent on the central presence of third-party organizations. Correia (2012) accepts this distinction and notes that in participatory journalism user contribution is solicited within a frame designed by professionals embedded in a mainstream context and functions as a corrective to mainstream journalism. On the other hand, 'citizen journalism is no longer just about overcoming the limits of journalistic professionalism but goes further and tries to overcome the limits imposed on citizenship by a certain kind of journalism conditioned by primary definers and powerful sources' (2012:108). In this sense, citizen journalism could be perceived as giving voice to those whose voices are ignored or suppressed and as capable of producing counter-publics and counter-discourses.

Homero Gil de Zuniga claims that 'blogs may facilitate the creation of a common public sphere – a space that, albeit virtual, contributes to a better informed citizenry and a healthier democracy' (2009:117). In a similar vein, Sharon Meraz (2009) notes that '[c]itizens can now leverage their Web-based social networks for creating knowledge and meaning outside elite cueing, which is transforming how information is created, interpreted and diffused in the Internet age'. Such claims are supported by a wide range of studies. For instance, in a detailed empirical analysis of the Russian blogosphere, Etling et al. (2014) demonstrate some of the ways in which it opens up a space for civic discussion and organization that differs significantly from that provided by the mainstream media, TV and the government. Nevertheless, both Gil de Zuniga and Meraz warn against the hidden dangers associated with new technologies. Starting from the much discussed 'echo-chamber effect' – the fragmentation of web publics into homogenous communities of practice – and moving on to 'cyber-balkanization' – the phenomenon of group polarization online – there is an always present danger that citizen journalism might not facilitate dialogue, but rather obstruct it and keep people enmeshed in the comfort of their own circles of interest (Jamieson and Cappella 2008). In *Misunderstanding the Internet*, Curran et al. offer compelling evidence that 'the internet did not inaugurate a renaissance of journalism; on the contrary, it enabled leading news brands to extend their ascendancy across technologies, while inducing a decline of quality not offset, so far, by new forms of journalism' (2012:179). The influence of the Internet is filtered and organized through the structures and processes of society. The impact of citizen journalism thus cannot be understood without placing it within the broader system of interdependencies involving mainstream traditional journalism and other citizen media practices such as graffiti, protest art and rap/hip-hop, among others.

The focus in the current study is on the former type of interdependence, namely that between mainstream journalism and the self-proclaimed 'alternative' citizen journalism online. I claim that in Bulgaria there has been an increasing convergence between the two in terms of ownership, working methods and writing style. In this respect, the process described by Natalie Fenton (2012) as 'de-democratizing the news' is particularly interesting. The prominence of online tools and platforms for information gathering and production has resulted in a decline in advertising revenue for traditional media outlets, 'combined with increased investment in new media technologies to attract audiences online, alongside cuts in personnel as profit margins have decreased, resulting in negative impact on journalism' (Fenton 2012:122). Ever smaller teams of journalists are forced to cover more and more fields, resulting in a decrease in specialization and a lowering of journalistic standards both online and offline. At the same time, citizen journalism projects cannot come up with a viable business model in order to compete with major news organizations. Fenton (2012:124) quotes data from the Open Society Institute relating to Eastern Europe, according to which,

> media across the region had lost 30 to 60% of their income and were forced to adopt cost-saving measures, including reduced volume, staff layoffs, reduced investigative reporting, and cuts in international and provincial coverage. They relate the changes to the global financial crisis that brought about severe constraints in news production as well as ownership changes resulting in an overall drop in the quality of news delivered to citizens and as a consequence a news media that has become shallower, more entertainment centred, increasingly isolationist, more prone to political and business influences, and lacking in investigative bite.

These critiques aside, it is also important to note that even though new technology provides increased opportunities for media accountability, these opportunities have not been sufficiently explored. Domingo and Heikkilä (2012) distinguish three types of media accountability practices with regard to different phases of news production: (a) actor transparency – practices situated *before* the act of publication and addressing norms and expectations of public communication; (b) production transparency – practices situated *during* the production process and related to managing access, selection and presentation of news; and (c) responsiveness – practices relevant *after* the production stage and involving responding to questions and criticism. Domingo and Heikkilä found that

> online media organizations in general have not placed development of media accountability practices as their top priority . . . [and] have not taken advantage of their technological high ground compared with offline media to facilitate actor transparency, production transparency, and responsiveness of journalism.

In what follows I set out to examine patterns of group polarization, de-democratization and lack of accountability (Głowacki: 2011) that plagued both mainstream journalism and citizen journalism in the Bulgarian context in 2013–2014. In conducting the current study, I started by drawing on existing research to identify the main problems of media freedom and pluralism in Bulgarian traditional media. I then engaged in monitoring the Bulgarian online space for an extended period of time (from February 2013 until January 2015) in order to trace the connections between the self-proclaimed 'alternative' citizen media sites that emerged during this period. I focused on blogs and websites that presented themselves as 'anti-government information agencies' and 'anti-corruption and anti-mafia media' and the series of Facebook pages directly related to them. These websites and blogs were identified on the basis of three original pieces of investigative journalism (Gadjokov 2013; Manolova 2014; Kichashki 2014), which I supplemented by content analysis of over 100 articles from these sources, outlining the most important topics in each of them and comparing the texts of the articles in order to identify practices of direct copying and reposting of content. Instead of focusing on just one type of media, I explored the use of multiple platforms in a complex media environment (Mattoni 2009) and the flow of information between them, in an attempt to avoid what Treré calls a 'one-medium bias', i.e. the focus on the use of single technologies at the expense of the broader media spectrum with which actors engage (2012:2362).

Concentration of power

The entanglement of media, business and politics

The first wave of the 2013 protests in Bulgaria erupted at the beginning of February over high electricity bills and increasing poverty and inequality. The mobilization quickly attracted thousands of people throughout the country and continued to escalate until the then Prime Minister of the centre-right government, Boyko Borisov, submitted his resignation on 20 February. After a short period of rule by a caretaker government, a new cabinet led by the Bulgarian Socialist Party in coalition with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) was formed at the end of May 2013, with the finance expert Plamen Oresharski as Prime Minister. A mere 2 weeks later the cabinet was shaken by a new wave of protests: on 14 June people took to the streets again to oppose the appointment of Delyan Peevski, a media oligarch with an astonishingly fast growing political career, as the new chief of the national security agency DANS. The appointment was rescinded by the Parliament on 19 June, but the protests continued in one form or another throughout the year, and in July 2014 the Oresharski cabinet also resigned, leaving the country to a new caretaker government. A new centre-right government was formed in February 2015, with Boyko Borisov as Prime Minister once again. The circle closed, with the political landscape returning to where it was before the protests.

This confused political situation has led to a regrouping of the main political actors and clarified their alliances. The main source of division between different political factions in Bulgaria is the attitude towards Russia and Euro-Atlantic politics: the leftists and the nationalists have traditionally sided with Russia, while right-wing parties are more pro-EU and -US. This ideological conflict has had direct financial repercussions for each of the political groupings involved. The period from the beginning of the financial crisis to 2013, when mass protests erupted, was characterized by a rapid and comprehensive consolidation of political, business and media power. The figure of Peevski came to symbolize this unholy trinity: with his talent for finding 'good deals', he provided a 'media umbrella' for criminal bosses and every party in power (Peevski 2014) in exchange for privileges in securing state public bids for his firms. These, in turn, received credit from Tsvetan Vasilev's Corporate Commercial Bank, where many government agencies held their accounts (Peev 2014). The appointment of Peevski as chief of the National Security Agency – which would have provided him also with important intelligence and investigative power – outraged people, and they spontaneously took to the streets. However, the protests were soon hijacked by right-wing groups who saw an opportunity to seize power and promote their own political and financial interests. The protests were not only reported, but also choreographed on the pages of the right-wing newspapers *Capital* and *Dnevnik,* both owned by Ivo Prokopiev. Prokopiev is a powerful businessman whose name is often associated with GERB, the centre-right party of Borisov.

At the time when the February 2013 protests started, the media landscape in Bulgaria was organized as follows, in terms of ownership: Peevski and Vasilev controlled the newspapers *Monitor*, *Telegraf*, *Presa*, *Novinar*, *Maritsa*, *Struma*, *Weekend*, *Show* and *Meridian Match*; the websites *Blitz.bg*, *Vsekiden.com*, *Monitor.bg*, *Inews*; and the radio channels *Magic*, *The Voice*, *Vitosha* and *Veselina* (Antonova and Bosev 2014). It further became clear in 2014 that the duo had also financed other major daily newspapers such as *24 Chasa*, *Trud* and *Standart*. Another major newspaper group, *Economedia*, owned for over a decade by the previously mentioned Ivo Prokopiev, published *Capital* and *Dnevnik* and their extended online versions *Capital.bg* and *Dnevnik.bg*. The last important player in the printed press, the newspaper *Sega* and its online version *sega.bg*, was owned by Sasho Donchev, executive director of the private gas company Overgas. But ownership – whether full or partial, including vertical integration from advertising to distribution – is just one among various subtle and not so subtle ways in which journalism is controlled. Current strategies of control over the media include direct pressure on journalists working for both commercial and public media, who risk losing their jobs if they overstep the mark; indirect pressure through control of key appointments such as head of programme, head of news, marketing managers and lawyers, among others; direct financing with public resources, for example, through budgets and operational programmes; encouraging

pro-government behaviour and sanctioning attempts to institute independent decision-making; corporate financing – direct or indirect, in particular financing through advertising; influencing the choice of regulators and the fact that chief regulator positions can be taken by members of the former State Security agency; appropriating self-regulation; and pressure exercised by Parliament on the Council of Electronic Media (Ognyanova 2014).

If we accept that media freedom means the independence of media from government and from government authorities' control and intervention, and that media pluralism means the independence of media from private control and the disproportionate influence of one or a few economic, social and/or political sources of power (Calderaro and Dobreva 2013), it becomes clear that in the Bulgarian context it is hard to speak of either media freedom or pluralism. Although few people have a full picture of the extent to which media are entangled with oligarchy, the lack of media independence is widely acknowledged and there is a drastic decline in trust in media (Nasimento 2013). This troubling situation is addressed in many of the emerging online platforms for citizen journalism that promise to provide uncensored news and an objective impartial account of current affairs.

My oligarchy is better than your oligarchy

Anonymous versus Bivol

The first case to discuss against this background is the 'war' between ANONYMOUS BULGARIA and *Bivol.bg*, the Bulgarian partner of *WikiLeaks*. It is difficult to speak of *Anonymous* in the Bulgarian context as a single entity because in fact there are several different constellations of websites, Facebook pages and online forums that share the same name and claim to be *Anonymous* (Rone 2014). Here, I focus on one particular constellation of *Anonymous* which consists of the Facebook page ANONYMOUS BULGARIA[1], with more than 25,000 likes, and the WordPress blog ANONYMOUS BULGARIA[2]. The motto of the blog is 'Води се война за нашите съзнания. Война, която губим' (There is an information war going on for our consciousness. A war that we are losing). The authors of the blog declare the following in the 'About us' section:[3]

> Във взаимният ни профил на всички в екипа ни, можем да заявим, че сме общо погледнато анти-глобалисти, патриоти, свободно мислещи и общо, хора които гледаме на нещата противно на общопредставяното от политици, масмедии и съвременното обременено с измами общество.[4]
>
> Gloss: In the common profile of everyone from our team, we can say that we are, generally speaking, anti-globalists, patriots, free thinkers and generally, people who perceive things contrary to what is presented to us by politicians, mass media, and the contemporary society burdened by deception.

The main topics that are dealt with on the ANONYMOUS BULGARIA blog are think tanks, in particular the role of Soros in funding civil society in Bulgaria, the identity of the June 2013 protesters and their relationship to the Open Society Foundation, Genetically Modified Food, Zionism and Bulgarian history. The blog has been very active in establishing the term *copocmymka* (Soros-tute) – a combination of the name Soros and the word for 'prostitute'. The blog post 'Соростуция For Dummies' (Sorostution for Dummies) engages in an elaborate gendered metaphor:[5]

> Всяка соростутка си има също сводник. Този човек е шефа, 'el papi chulo' за соростутките. Той си има собствен 'think tank' (мозъчен тръст). Този мозъчен тръст е като сградата, в която работят соростутките, нещо като 'el puticlub', чрез който 'el papi' представя 'програмите' на големите 'публични домове' (тръстовете донори), които ако останат доволни им пускат пари за 'бизнеса'. Тогава 'el papi' си вади хуя (химикала) и нарежда на соростутките да се захващат с 'работата' по 'програмите'.
>
> Gloss: Every sorostute has a pimp. This man is the boss, 'el papi chulo' for sorostutes. He has his own 'think tank'. This think tank is like the building in which the sorostutes work, a bit like 'el puticlub' through which 'el papi' presents the programmes to the big 'brothels' (the donor trusts), who, if they are content, give money for the 'business'. Then 'el papi' takes out his dick (pen) and orders the sorostutes to get to 'work' on the 'programmes'.

Bivol, on the other hand, is a website that focuses on investigative journalism. It has received from *WikiLeaks* the rights to publish the US State Department diplomatic cables relevant to Bulgaria. The main topics that *Bivol* discusses include energy development, investigations of ecology-related themes (e.g. illegal deforestation), political corruption, and shady practices in political marketing. *Bivol*'s Facebook page has more than 124,000 likes. The 'About Us' section of *Bivol*'s website states:[6]

> Създадохме този частен независим сайт, за да дадем още една възможност да достигнат до вас качествени журналистически разследвания, както и обективни мнения на специалисти и анализатори по най-горещите теми от ежедневието ни . . . Без цензура и без автоцензура, безпристрастно и коректно ние предлагаме разискване по най-актуалните теми. Бивол е и трибуна на своите читатели, той е място за обмяна на идеи и бъдещо сътрудничество. Защото ние искаме да сме коректив, а вие, нашите читатели, можете да ни помогнете.
>
> We created this private independent site to give you, the readers, another chance to have access to quality investigative journalism and to objective opinions of experts and analysts on the hottest topics of our everyday life. Without censorship and without self-censorship, impartial and honest, we offer a debate on the most current topics . . . Bivol is also a

> tribune for its readers; it is a place to exchange ideas and a place for future collaboration. This is because we want to be a corrective, and you, our readers, can help us.[7]

While ANONYMOUS BULGARIA and *Bivol* had cooperated for a long time, a rupture occurred at the end of June 2013 amidst the popular protests against Delyan Peevski and the left-wing Oresharski cabinet in general. The reason for the argument was Harta 2013 – a document drafted by Bulgarian intellectuals to propose specific measures for fighting the current oligarchic model. Tens of academics, public intellectuals and prominent figures of Bulgarian civil society signed the document. On 24 June *Bivol* issued a statement on their website to the effect that they support Harta 2013, though with some reservations, and urged others to support it.[8] On the same date, ANONYMOUS BULGARIA posted an article on their blog entitled 'Хората, които стоят зад "Харта 2013" ви използват!' (The People who Stand Behind Harta 2013 Use You).[9] The blog post claimed that at the historical moment in which Bulgarians took their own freedom in their hands, a huge manipulative machine was trying to capture this process of liberation and take advantage of it for its own purposes. It further argued that every single person who signed Harta 2013 had connections with the Open Society Foundation and was financed by the US, and that the signatories included journalists from *Economedia* – Ivo Prokopiev's media group. The text ended with an emotional appeal to the 'citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria', urging them not to believe that this was their revolution, because middle-class intellectuals were going to trick them again.

The discourse of ANONYMOUS BULGARIA points to the contested origin of Bulgarian civil society, which has traditionally been perceived as imported from abroad (Kabakchieva and Hristova 2012). The idea here is that the ideology of bottom-up organization has been implanted top-down by Western think tanks and that funding is made accessible only to people who have the necessary cultural capital, including knowledge of foreign languages and skill in 'writing up' projects. Beyond the immediate context of Bulgaria, ANONYMOUS's suspicion towards civil society reflects a global trend of increased tension between civil society (contested on similar grounds in other geographical locations) and new social movements (Esteves et al. 2009). Against this background, the ANONYMOUS attack on *Bivol* for its support of Harta 2013 included accusing *Bivol*'s two main authors of 'being members of civil society' and revealing detailed information about their biographies and possible conflicts of interest in another blog post, 'Биволчетата по бели гащи' (*Bivol* members caught red handed).[10] ANONYMOUS launched a DDoS (Distributed Denial-of-Service) attack against the website of Harta 2013 and took it down on 25 June.[11] On 26 June, they published an open letter in which they threatened to do the same thing with the website Bivol.bg if *Bivol* failed to withdraw their support for Harta 2013.[12] Several days of intense attacks against the *Bivol* website followed in which the war was

fought on two fronts: ideological and technical. *Bivol* claimed that ANONYMOUS BULGARIA were pseudo-*Anonymous* who did not have the technical capacity to take down their website. Screenshots of the website were regularly published and the fans of both groups, ANONYMOUS and *Bivol*, had to choose which side to believe and support.

In response to the public campaign against it, *Bivol* published an article on 27 June entitled 'Харта 2013 и българските пишман Анонимни – самые анонимные в мире' (Harta 2013 and the Bulgarian Wannabe Anonymous: the most anonymous in the world),[13] in which it pointed out that bringing down the Harta 2013 website was met with glorifying reports in the media of Delyan Peevski. The implication is that support from Peevski's media means that the ANONYMOUS attack against the protesting intellectuals served the interests of the government. *Bivol* further outlined areas of strong similarity between the anti-Soros, anti-Western conspiracy theories in Putin's Russia and the arguments put forward by ANONYMOUS BULGARIA. It insisted that ANONYMOUS BULGARIA was a fake: it had nothing to do with the tech-savvy global *Anonymous*. In truth, *Bivol* argued, it was a nationalist, pro-Russia group supporting the leftist government and using the *Anonymous* brand to misinform people.

With the passing of time it became clear that there was some truth in the accusations published by both sides. One of the two founders of *Bivol*, the journalist Atanas Chobanov, previously a candidate of the right-wing Blue Coalition in the European Elections in 2009, headed the list of the predominantly right-wing Green Party[14] in the 2014 European Elections. And while Chobanov insists that *Bivol* has never been funded by right-wing parties, but exists only thanks to donations, the site clearly gravitates towards the right in relation to most internal and external policy issues. On the other hand, while there are other factions of *Anonymous* in Bulgaria that are closer to the global image of the movement as networked, international and open to diversity, the particular constellation I am examining here has become increasingly exclusive, discriminating and nationalist in its rhetoric (Rone 2014).

To conclude, the global projects of *Anonymous* and *WikiLeaks* (the latter represented by *Bivol* in the Bulgarian context) have been appropriated in Bulgaria by local leftist–nationalist and right-wing networks of influence with their own domestic agendas and conflicts. Instead of providing alternative information that is independent of party politics, these citizen-media groups have become themselves part of the networks of power they were supposed to challenge. There are of course crucial differences when it comes to the quality of journalism provided. Both *Bivol* and ANONYMOUS BULGARIA claim to bypass traditional media and provide alternative information, but the authors featured on the *Bivol* website follow journalistic standards, check their sources and provide original investigative journalism, while ANONYMOUS BULGARIA are still immersed in conspiracy theory allegations.[15] On a broader level, the conflict between *Bivol* and ANONYMOUS BULGARIA

can be interpreted as one instance of the growing global tension between civil society and the type of expertise it promotes and produces, on the one hand, and on the other, new social movements and the kind of collaborative knowledge they engage in developing from below.

Popular dissent in Bulgaria, as I have argued so far, has been appropriated by groups that present themselves as citizen-led but in fact reproduce the politics of the right and the left in the country. Since ANONYMOUS BULGARIA could not oppose the protests without losing popularity, they targeted the protesters and used any possible means to destroy them. Providing independent news slipped into performing ad-hominem attacks and waging a propaganda war. Similar battles were fought on several other online platforms as well, as I demonstrate in the next section.

NOresharski *versus* NOligarch

The main sources I draw on in this section are three investigative articles that address the lack of media accountability and the problematic nature of 'citizen journalism' websites that emerged in the course of 2013–2014. The first article, entitled 'ВНИМАНИЕ: анонимни български 'медии'. Избягвайте на всяка цена!' (ATTENTION: Anonymous Bulgarian 'Media': Avoid at All Costs!), is by Krasimir Gadjokov and includes a list of more than 40 online news media that have failed to disclose important information, such as the name of the owner or company behind the initiative, a phone number or an address for contact (Gadjokov 2013). The second article, entitled 'Средства за масова дезинформация' (Media of Mass Disinformation), was published in *Capital* by journalist Maria Manolova and revealed that several self-proclaimed 'independent', 'alternative' and 'free thinking' media initiatives in the Bulgarian online space were in fact taking part in a carefully orchestrated disinformation campaign (Manolova 2014). Ironically, Manolova failed to highlight the no less problematic connections between *Capital* itself and *NOresharski* – an 'independent information agency' established during the protests. The third article that informs this discussion is entitled 'Корпоративните медии - инструментите на подмяната' (Corporate Media: The Instrument of Substitution) and claims that there are two interdependent circles of online and offline media that promote the interests of their respective oligarchs (Kichashki 2014). To begin with, Manolova (2014) distinguishes two large waves of emerging 'citizen journalism' websites during the period of popular unrest. The first wave coincided with the winter 2013 protests against the centre-right government of Borisov and is marked by the appearance of sites such as *dnes-24.com*, *nakratko.bg*, *bgmak.eu* and *svobodnoslovo.eu*. The second wave of emerging 'independent' sites coincided with the summer protests against the left-wing cabinet of Oresharski and is marked by a strong rhetoric of suspicion towards the protesters. Sites established during the second wave include *silnabulgaria.com*, *hashtag-bg.com*, *expressnews.bg* and *bezpartien.com* (Manolova 2014). *Bezpartien.com* states in the 'Goals' section of the website:[16]

> За съжаление медийното пространство в България е наситено със сервилни 'репортери', отразяващи дадени събития, особено тези, свързани с политиката, само от едната страна. . . Именно затова ние сме тук – за да дадем на гражданите място, в което да могат да формират своето мнение на база на информацията, която идва от двете страни за всяка тема. Корумпираната журналистика не е журналистика. Политически интереси пречат на журналлистите да си вършат нормално работата
>
> Gloss: Unfortunately the media space in Bulgaria is saturated with servile reporters representing events, especially those related to politics, from one perspective only . . . This is precisely why we are here – to give citizens a space where they can form their own opinion on the basis of information that presents both sides of each topic. Corrupt journalism is not journalism. Political interests prevent journalists from doing their job properly.

Silnabulgaria.com describes itself on its Facebook page as 'a project to create online news without censorship. Articles are republished from many websites with the goal of quickly informing the Internet society'. *Svobodnoslovo.eu* claims to be[17]

> бързо развиваща се медия с основна цел – безпристрастно и обективно отразяване на всички важни за обществото новини. Основен приоритет за нас са политическите новини от България, като се стремим да покажем всички гледни точки. Освен това провеждаме собствени разследвания по сигнали на читатели и наболели теми.
>
> a quickly developing media with the main goal of impartial and objective coverage of all news important for society. The main priority for us is the political news from Bulgaria and we aim to present all view points. Apart from this we engage in our own investigations with topics pointed out by our readers and with topics of current relevance.

All these websites claim to share the goal of providing non-corrupt, impartial journalism. Interestingly, several also share the same design and/or the same physical address where their domains are registered. These websites also widely share content among each other. As Manolova notes, they are popularized by a series of fake Facebook profiles which repost their content and create a hype around it. This whole mini media eco-system is engaged in promoting a leftist/nationalist agenda. The problems of media concentration in the hands of a few players and unclear ownership that plague traditional journalism reappear in such online spaces in an even more radical form. As already pointed out, none of the 'free', 'independent' citizen-media initiatives mentioned above provide any information about their owners, authors, sources of information or contact address. The irony is that the largest website in this group, *NOligarch*, defines itself as an anti-corruption

and anti-mafia media.[18] *NOligarch* appeared 'spontaneously' on 16 August 2013, with a website that mirrored that of *NOresharski*, established one month earlier by protestors against the Oresharski cabinet.

The Anti-government Information Agency *NOresharski*[19] joined Facebook on 8 July 2013. Their declared initial aim was to provide accurate and objective information about the protests, but they later included among their objectives investigating the mafia structures that underpin Bulgarian political life. *NOresharski* is a pun on the name of Plamen Oresharski, the coalition prime minister responsible for the appointment of Delyan Peevski as chief of the national security agency DANS in June 2013. In order to avoid dependence on corporate funding, *NOresharski* seeks alternative funds through a system for online donations (Lambrev 2013). It works in close collaboration with *Protestna Mrezha* (Protest Network)[20] – described as a place for interaction and contact established on 7 August 2013 with the major goal of forcing the resignation of the Oresharski government by maintaining the momentum of protests. *Protestna Mrezha* states that it seeks to facilitate coordinated citizen participation and control in order to oppose any government which supports oligarchic structures and corporate interests, or acts against the values of freedom, democracy and citizen-led society. *NOresharski* presents the tasks of organizing protests and disseminating information as interdependent. The investigations published on its website have targeted mainly the deals of Delyan Peevski and the scandals around the Corporate Commercial Bank owned by Tsvetan Vasilev.

While *NOligarch* clearly promotes a left-wing, nationalist agenda, *NOresharski* and *Protestna Mrezha* are aligned to centre-right and right-wing political parties and to the media empire of Ivo Prokopiev, which publishes *Capital* and *Dnevnik*. I see *NOligarch* and *NOresharski* not only as mirror websites (the former copying the rhetoric and visual identity of the latter) but also as fronts for the political circles they represent. Each occupies a position at the centre of an enclosed network of digital and social media that are linked to each other and republish each other's material. These two alternative universes of media content transcend the boundaries that separate offline and online journalism, as well as traditional and citizen media, and take media concentration, de-democratization and lack of accountability to a whole new level. In addition, the two self-enclosed groups of media around *NOresharski* and *NOligarch* do not engage in dialogue, but instead demonize each other, a situation that leads to further group polarization and radicalization of opinions. These media did not open space for impartiality, professionalism and in-depth analyses. On the contrary, they saturated the media environment with 'suspicion, interpretive polyvalence, and evidentiary uncertainty' (Kuntsman and Stein 2014).

Conclusion: The people formerly known as the Oligarchy

During the mass protests in Bulgaria in 2013–2014, many 'independent', 'alternative' news sources emerged online with the self-proclaimed mission of challenging the monopolies that control traditional media. The protests

themselves had been triggered by the extensive overlap between media and political structures and the concentration of power in the hands of a chosen few. The 'citizen' media initiatives that emerged in 2013/2014 however failed to keep their promise and provide a genuine alternative to corporate media. Global and far-reaching projects such as *WikiLeaks* and *Anonymous* were appropriated locally and tailored to fit the needs of established networks of power. The multiple online media sites that emerged with the declared mission of undermining the oligarchy and the party model clearly served the interests of the main oligarchic circles in the country – a right-wing circle and a left-wing/nationalist one – with all their complex internal divisions and differences. The two media circles formed self-referential universes consisting of blogs, web pages and Facebook pages. Instead of resolving the traditional media problems that triggered the protests, these orchestrated citizen-media initiatives furthered the process of de-democratizing journalism.

Superficial critiques of traditional journalism and unconditional praise for online citizen journalism, then, obscure more serious issues and make it difficult to identify extensive problems that pervade the entire media ecosystem. The analysis of the Bulgarian media environment presented here has demonstrated that both online and offline media are plagued by a serious lack of accountability that undermines their credibility as sources. A possible scenario for fostering a more authentic and lively democratic dialogue could include returning to the three principles of media accountability proposed by Domingo and Heikkilä (2012): actor transparency, production transparency, and responsiveness. Fostering media accountability is a question of political will and public discussion and pressure. The use of digital tools might be helpful in this respect but, as we can see from the current analysis, increased media accountability is not an automatic consequence of technological affordances. Above all, any evidence suggesting that the people formerly known as the Oligarchy are embracing 'citizen journalism' must be treated as a warning: a call for citizens to be more careful than ever and to take a closer look at the links between 'independent' initiatives and established structures of power.

Notes

1 www.facebook.com/AnonyBulgaria?fref=ts (accessed 27 January 2016).
2 https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com (accessed 30 May 2015).
3 All translations are my own. Bulgarian text is reproduced as it appears in the original, without corrections.
4 https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/за-нас/ (accessed 30 May 2015).
5 https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/2015/01/19/сорострция-for-dummies-преди-първи-урок/ (accessed 30 May 2015).
6 https://bivol.bg/about.html (accessed 11 June 2015).
7 https://bivol.bg/en/about-bivol.html (accessed 17 June 2015).
8 Харта 2013/'Harta 2013'. Available at https://bivol.bg/harta2013.html (accessed 30 May 2015).
9 https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/2013/06/24/хората-които-стоят-зад-харта-2013-ви-изпо/ (accessed 30 May 2015).

10 https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/2013/06/28/биволчета-гащи/ (accessed 30 May 2015).
11 http://offnews.bg/news/Общество_4/Анонимните-свалиха-сайта-на-Харта-2013_211523.html (accessed 30 May 2015).
12 http://novinite.bg/articles/42374/Anonimnite-zaplashiha-sajta-na-Bivola. (accessed 11 June 2015).
13 https://Bivol.bg/anonymous-balkanicus.html (accessed 30 May 2015).
14 The Green Party in Bulgaria has traditionally attracted supporters from both the political left and the political right. However, during the June 2013 protests the Bulgarian Green Party clearly positioned itself at the right of the political spectrum by signing a joint declaration with four other right-wing parties in the country. The Declaration is available at http://izbori.zelenite.bg/8109 (accessed 11 June 2015).
15 Articles posted on the ANONYMOUS BULGARIA blog include the following: 'Илюминати – елитът управляващ живота на земята' (Illuminati – the Elite Ruling Life on Earth), available at https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/2013/04/29/илюминати-елитът-управляващ-живота-н/; 'Как Западът Унищожава България, докато тя му ръкопляска' (How the West Destroys Bulgaria While the Country Applauds), available at https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/2015/03/02/как-западът-унищожава-българ ия-докат/; and 'Световната конспирация срещу здравето' (The World Conspiracy against Health), available at https://anonybulgaria.wordpress.com/2013/09/18/световната-конспирация-срещу-здраве/ (all accessed 15 June 2015).
16 http://bezpartien.com/%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%B8/ (accessed 11 June 2015, but, when checked in January 2016, the website had been removed).
17 www.svobodnoslovo.eu/primerna-stranitsa/ (accessed 11 June 2015, but, when checked in January 2016, access to the content of the website was denied).
18 http://noligarh.com/ (accessed 30 May 2014, but, when checked in January 2016, the website had been removed).
19 www.facebook.com/NOresharski (accessed 30 May 2014).
20 www.protestnamreja.bg/ (accessed January 2016).

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13 Memory, guardianship and the witnessing amateur in the emergence of citizen journalism

Karen Cross

This chapter focuses on the circulation and display of camera phone images taken during the London bombings in July 2005. It considers how such creations became meaningful within the emerging field of citizen journalism during that period and argues that the aesthetics of the amateur played a key role in terms of shifting the institutional lens of reporting. The journalistic use of family photographs, for example, evoked a national outpouring of grief and sentimentalism (Rose 2010). Although representing a departure from traditional uses of the camera, the use of camera phone images provoked a similar emotional response. Images taken on mobile phones stood to represent that which had previously been absent from the professional frame, and as such they articulated a new direction for the practice of news journalism. By creating what is referred to here as 'transitional objects', camera phone images can be understood as offering not only a new guarantee of authenticity but also a point in relation to which anxieties and hopes about the new landscape of citizen media practice came to be articulated by amateurs and professionals alike.

As theorists of photography have reported, the emergence of mobile technologies has significantly transformed personal uses of the camera to the extent that they no longer remain faithful to the memorial frame. Rather, personal photography, it is said, is orientated increasingly toward the social (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008; Murray 2008) and sensory self-communicative aspects of experience (Frosh 2015). This complicates the division between the private and the public domains of experience in ways that have opened up a new set of possibilities within the field of visual representation. The camera phone, it is said, makes 'amateur photojournalists out of its users' (Daisuke and Ito 2003), liberating them from the confines of privatized forms of communication. Added to this is the great emphasis that has been placed upon the emergence of grassroots (Gillmor 2004) and horizontal networks (Castells 2007:238) of peer-to-peer information exchange emerging on the web. Those 'formerly known as the audience' (Rosen 2006) are said to have taken over the show. In the rush to embrace new technological

identities, categories such as the *prosumer* (Toffler 1980:265) and *pro-am* (Leadbeater and Miller 2004) have also gained currency. This is problematic in that it entangles the use of technology with the ideals of the market. The transformation from consumers into producers implies some form of mass awakening in the use of technology that will eventually overthrow the power structures of old media, replaying the idea of opposition between the professional and the amateur and eliding the wider cultural dynamics of power present within all forms of media use.

Social photography promises a focus on the more 'banal and repetitious' (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008:23) or 'mundane' (Murray 2008:148) aspects of daily life. Greater emphasis is placed on the immediate and personal field of vision, which suggests liberation from the formalisms associated with the past, including those found within the professional and institutional domain as well as more personal and familial uses of the camera. Yet arguably the past continues to underpin uses of new technology in ways that sustain the memorial frame. The continuing use of the family photograph within news reporting, for instance, enables the articulation of emotions that may otherwise remain absent from the frame. The problem, as Gillian Rose points out, lies in the fact that the use of such images can simply feed the 'politics of sentiment'[1] (2010:91) that now governs the wider public sphere. Emotion is reified and consumed as a series of spectacles or performances staged in media. This makes it hard to understand how emotions form a fundamental aspect of all experience, and the way in which traumatic responses operate on an unconscious level even in situations that appear devoid of emotion, such as professional reporting.

During the London bombings in 2005, mourning the dead became a highly public event. This was made possible by the use of the familial lens, which served to create the impression of a universal experience of suffering. The presence of the family photograph allowed otherwise unconnected individuals to imagine themselves into the position of victim, and this was ultimately important for sustaining the wider justification for the global 'War on Terror'. But it was not just through the use of existing amateur images that such a form of identification was made possible. The example shown in Figure 13.1[2] pictures the commuter Adam Stacey trapped inside a tube tunnel between Kings Cross and Russell Square as he is struggling to breathe. This image, along with the images shown in Figure 13.2 and discussed later in the chapter, offered a unique, insider perspective on bombings and depicted that which would have otherwise eluded the visual field of news reporting. Both images also provided more than a simple form of documentary evidence. As Anna Reading argues, the commuter stands here as the 'everyman' representing the personal face of tragedy (2009:69). When uploaded to the moblog on which it first appeared, Adam Stacey's image became a screen onto which feelings of shock, outrage and hatred were projected. One can read it, as Anna Reading does, as a kind of 'speech act' (2009:70) in relation to which a form of



Figure 13.1 Adam Stacey. (Photograph by Eliot Ward. Creative Commons (CC BY 2.5), creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/).

'ethical witnessing'[3] was staged (2009:67). The image reflected a form of documentation that was grounded in personal rather than institutional experience. It is also the case, however, that images such as Adam Stacey's formed a constitutive element of a new economy of 'media witnessing' (Frosh and Pinchevski 2009:1), which emerged in and around the time of the bombings. This arguably drove forward a somewhat defensive culture of memorialization, which did not so much liberate the social subject as sustain a burdened form of witnessing associated with mourning the losses of the past.

Witnessing emotion/emotional witnessing

The issue of representation is perhaps less contentious here than in the case of other forms of documentation that normally emerge in the context of 'crisis reporting' (Allan 2013:92), especially those claiming to report the suffering of 'distant others' (Boltanski 1999:234; see also Sontag 2003). At the same time, we become aware of the intensely individualized and perhaps self-centred nature of citizen media, and its contradictions, as it frames communal experience in such deeply personal terms. Increasingly, we realize that citizen representations do not necessarily escape the power dynamics associated with traditional media use. Citizen media is embedded within a wider strategic formation of global communities, which can at times sustain rather than alleviate a sense of collective fear and suffering (Weber 2006; Allmark 2008). Moreover, as Lilie Chouliaraki points out, media today constructs a kind of 'experiential immediacy' which creates a feeling of solidarity based upon imagining 'the other in the self' (2012:204). This often elides the specificity of social and cultural experiences and masks regimes of power operating on a global scale.

Photography performs a key role within this evolving scenario. It is understood as a universal language, one that overrides the barriers of national borders. At the same time, it is heavily implicated in reproductive forms of power, which can simultaneously sustain social order and liberate human beings. By reflecting upon the nature of photography and the mode of attention it invites, however, the complexities of representation as a cultural process may be revealed. Photography activates rather than suppresses the opportunity for witnessing and thereby plays a bigger role in enabling inter-subjective encounters than often assumed. As Ariella Azoulay argues, it is precisely the 'civil contract of photography' (2005:39) that is revealed to us at the moment the camera is used, and during the subsequent circulation and display of the resulting image. This contract, she argues, constitutes an 'agreement that allows the logic of photography to overpower social relations, while at the same time providing a point of resistance against photography's total control' (2005:39). It may be that photography prohibits direct dialogue between the subject and the viewer in a very literal sense. But in 'becoming spectator', the viewer also becomes a 'citizen' (2005:43) of photography who is invited to see through the eyes of another, thus transforming the whole meaning of the act of looking.

A relation of witnessing is effectively established between the viewer and the photographer, or rather between the viewer and the image as the image comes to stand-in for another relational moment. This does not mean the photographer working with media professionals and agencies does not mediate the scene observed, but it makes it clear that the act of viewing establishes a process of negotiating meaning now set forth according to the dynamics of witnessing. Photography can be considered a mode of 'convening' together social subjects (Azoulay 2005:41) rather than maintaining their separation. This is certainly evident in the context of citizen reporting, where images appear to somehow express public feeling. In looking further at the public status of such images, however, the dynamics of witnessing are revealed to be deeply complex and not at all devoid of power relations. Stuart Allan (2007), and more recently Karin Becker (2011), have both argued that images produced via the use of mobile camera phones became iconic in the eyes of professionals because of – rather than despite of – their shaky, grainy look. Upon seeing camera-phone recordings that emerged from the London bombings, journalists reflected on what Ryley (cited in Allan 2007:13) referred to as 'the horror of what it was like to be trapped underground'.[4] Even though there was nothing obviously shocking – such as torn bodies – the images were felt to somehow carry the weight of human suffering and trauma. This guaranteed, as Bolette Blaagaard suggests, a new 'seal of authenticity' for journalism (2013:362), a situation which has parallels in other areas of cultural practice, including the arts (Berger 2009).

Increasingly, the amateur forms a point of resistance for the professional. In describing 'the horror' communicated by the citizen image, it is qualities of amateur form that represent that which is felt to be troubling or 'abject'[5]

(Batchen 2001:199). This implies a kind of haunting – or the idea of 'ghosts within the machine' (Rosen 2006) – that serves to shake the institutional psyche. The celebration of amateur form becomes a way of reversing the judgements of the past, which were arrived at according to an arbitrary set of professional codes and conventions. The amateur effectively stands within contemporary culture as the derided or forgotten of history. In acknowledging the presence and importance of the amateur – represented in journalism as 'the citizen' – the professional identifies with a certain reparative mode of engagement that pervades the contemporary public arena. The materiality of the photographic image is key within this context, a statement that might appear strange at a time when the digital photograph is figured as a kind of 'non-object' (Rubinstein and Sluis 2008:23) or immaterial presence. Yet it is the photographic image, particularly if produced by a so-called citizen, that constitutes an 'embodied authenticity' within the 'post-human' frame (Blaagaard 2013:362). For this reason it is important to further interrogate the status of the image in the context of contemporary news reporting. One might argue, as Karin Becker does, that amateur images have become subject to a kind of 'taming' within contemporary news media (2011:32). It is certainly the case that media organizations have continued to debate how citizen contributions are to be treated and handled (Hermida and Thurman 2008; Pantti and Bakker 2009). This implies a continued need for control, and perhaps also a desire to regain the lost territory of traditional media in the face of the rise of new technologies. In being required to engage with citizen contributions, however, professionals have also been forced to reformulate their role as guardians of public knowledge, a process that was staged in highly positive terms during the reporting of the bombings.

The revitalization of the role of the professional was perhaps most apparent during the London bombings in the comments made by Helen Boaden, then Director of news at the BBC, who suggested that the overwhelming response from the public signified 'a terrific level of trust' in broadcasters (Day 2005). Earlier attempts made by the BBC to engage the public had been somewhat limited and usually paternalistic (Palmer 2003). But the continued growth in the use of digital media enlivened the debate around the BBC's willingness to allow the audience some control (Buckingham 2009), and with the subsequent celebration of citizen forms of reporting, especially since 2005, the responsibilities of the professional have been more radically redirected toward a seemingly more noble set of concerns. This appeared to involve a more active inclusion of public accounts across and between different media platforms, where the use of citizen content was effectively staged as a kind of symbolic bleeding through of public concerns. Arguably, in this evolving scenario citizen images came to form what might be termed 'transitional objects' (Cross 2015), or devices: they came to express concerns about the future of reporting. The image formed not only a fetish object[6] for the professional, one that was subject to omnipotent forms of control, but it also became a point in relation to which a new expression of

professional and institutional forms of identification emerged. This can be best explored by way of reference to a key piece of photography theory in which the role of the photographic object within contemporary visual culture is explored.

Memory work and the guardianship of images

In one of the most famous tracts of photography, Roland Barthes proclaimed that photographs are above all indexical traces of '[t]hat-has-been' (1980:77). For this he was intensely criticized, especially by those seeking to dismantle the prevailing documentary discourse of photography at the time he was writing (Sekula 1984; Tagg 1988). Barthes was fully aware of the problems of his own claims, which he put forward in order to encourage a deeper understanding of the symbolism of photographic materiality within modern culture. His interest in *Camera Lucida* did not reside so much in the question of visible evidence – whether the photograph was either a direct reflection of reality or not. Rather, his concern was to show how the process of representation itself could be understood as photographic, and therefore one that invited both the death and reanimation of the subject.

Photography in Barthes' view is embedded in the dynamics of identity formation at the most fundamental level. This is why he begins his book by narrating his desperate attempt to '[g]et back to photography' (1980:7) – to avoid all disciplinary forms of thinking that have been applied to the process to date. He wants to be 'a primitive, without culture' (1980:7), he tells us, but in starting his inquiry with only a few images, which he was sure existed *for him alone*, he finds himself drawn into a deeper recognition of that which underlies and motivates his interest in the image. Barthes tries to keep his reading pure, avoiding the imposition of sociological categories ('the Family, etc'; 1980:7). With the sinking realization of the inevitability of death (and mediation), he enters into a manic and futile process of revival, which becomes apparent through his attempt to reanimate his mother through the photographic image. This specific image of his mother – known as 'The Winter Garden Photograph' – alleviates his suffering for a while. It permits him the illusion of holding history in his hands and being present in the moment in which she was alive. But just like the flash of light that casts itself upon the camera lens, the moment of illusion passes all too quickly for him.

With constant toing and froing between the extremes of life and death, recognition and denial, photography and the photograph, Barthes restages for the reader his own defensive attempts at object recuperation. Playing with the image protects him from the realization of a deeper trauma to which he must bear witness – namely the first moment of destruction, where the mother became consumed as a consequence of his own drives and desires forming his own subjecthood. This action is repeated in 'unconscious phantasy',[7] which transfers through investments made in future objects,

including the photographic image. By restaging his denial for the reader of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes sustains a sort of therapeutic dance in which an attempt is made to atone for the foreclosing of life within the photographic moment. He becomes riven with guilt and filled with grief for the losses experienced both personally and in terms of a wider culture.

Perhaps in light of this we can understand the use of amateur forms of photography as an attempt to instantiate a phantasized lost object within the institutional imaginary. This is evident within a longer lineage of critical art practice, where the alignment of the visual artist with the amateur forms an alter-egoistic resistance to institutional incorporation (Roberts 2008). Here we see the curation and display of non-professional images or the mimicking of an amateur style representing a counter-cultural detachment from the dominance of a particular, historical mode of seeing. Within the area of critical cultural and sociological theory, Edward Said's notion of the intellectual as an amateur oriented toward 'love' rather than 'profit or reward' (1996:57) seeks to reconstruct the public role of the intellectual in more ethical terms. This is inflected by somewhat romantic overtones (Williams 1997) which hark back to a halcyon pre-industrial period in history, and is problematic for any future politics revolving around the idea of the amateur as a figure of social change.

Journalists may choose to identify *as* citizens, as has been recently suggested by Stuart Allan (2013). The risk is that this forms a kind of masquerade or mimicking of the amateur, which does not move practice forward but rather insists upon a more reparative or recuperative mode as described here. Recent deployments of the notion of memory work (Zelizer 2008; Zelizer and Tenenboim-Weinblatt 2014) further highlight the difficulty of creating a more integrative media practice. Journalism's 'work of memory' (Zelizer 2008:81) tends to become confused with the more politically oriented interpretative methods of analytic work, such as that revealed in the Barthesian frame or more critical self-reflexive practice. Feminist theorists looking particularly at the cultural significance of family photography (Spence 1986; Kuhn 2002), for instance, initially adopted the notion of memory work in order to describe a therapeutic mode of addressing personal histories and interrogating the cultural material of the past. In describing the importance of this notion, Annette Kuhn (2002:157), for example, states that

> [m]emory work undercuts assumptions about the transparency or the authenticity of what is remembered treating it not as 'truth' but as evidence of a particular sort: material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for its meanings and its possibilities.

This is a conscious and purposeful staging of interpretation, which can be said to occupy 'the liminal space between forgetting and transformation' (Radstone 2000:12). It allows one to be alert to reductive forms of thinking,

which is especially important when dealing with supposedly derided or forgotten aspects of history and related objects, such as the amateur image. No particular ethical outcome is guaranteed by the inclusion of manifestly memorial forms, which is not to say that journalism cannot align with citizen interests. It is simply that for the institutional shift to be effective a deeper interrogation of the cultural significance of amateur materialities within the professional frame, particularly those relying on definitions of the past, is needed. Reflecting on the range of projections and attachments formed in the various modes of witnessing that are now apparent in the use of media, and which extend beyond the moment of the image's initial production, can be useful.

Witnessing the self as 'citizen'

Mobile phone images taken during the London bombings have been widely circulated beyond the context of their initial display within blogs and news reports. They have appeared, for instance, in gallery spaces and exhibitions focusing on the bombings and more generally on the impact of digital technology. The images included in this chapter have appeared in exhibitions such as the *In Focus* display at The Photographer's Gallery in London (Dodd 2006), which focused on the use of mobile phone images in the reporting of the bombings, and at the exhibition *We Are All Photographers Now* in Lausanne, Switzerland (Debraine 2007). In these contexts images continued to be used as objects of emotional cathexis, in a manner similar to the emotional outpouring evident in the television coverage of the anniversary of the bombings.[8] This coverage replayed the memories of individuals intermixed with images taken on the day in a way that allowed professionals to take on the role of facilitator of memory. The role of the news professional became more curative in this respect.

Something similar played out within the gallery space, but more emphasis was placed on the aesthetics of the lens of amateurs, which was said to resist 'the ready iconography of their professional counterparts' (text from 'In Focus', 7 July 2005 display). This extended the use of the image as 'transitional object' in the way described earlier, but it also left some space for further reflection on the other responses that could potentially emerge in the post-commemorative moment. The display at The Photographer's Gallery focused heavily on pictures taken by Alexander Chadwick, who had been commuting to work on the Piccadilly line at the time of the bombing. These images showed people inside a carriage and walking along the line trying to exit toward the light at the end of the underground tunnel. Unlike Adam Stacey, however, Chadwick chose to submit his account to the more mainstream media platform of the BBC, who hosted accounts sent by members of the public on *Your Views* section of their webpages.

The third image, shown here in Figure 13.2, was adopted and circulated by the Associated Press (Lyon and Ferrara 2005) and went on to appear on

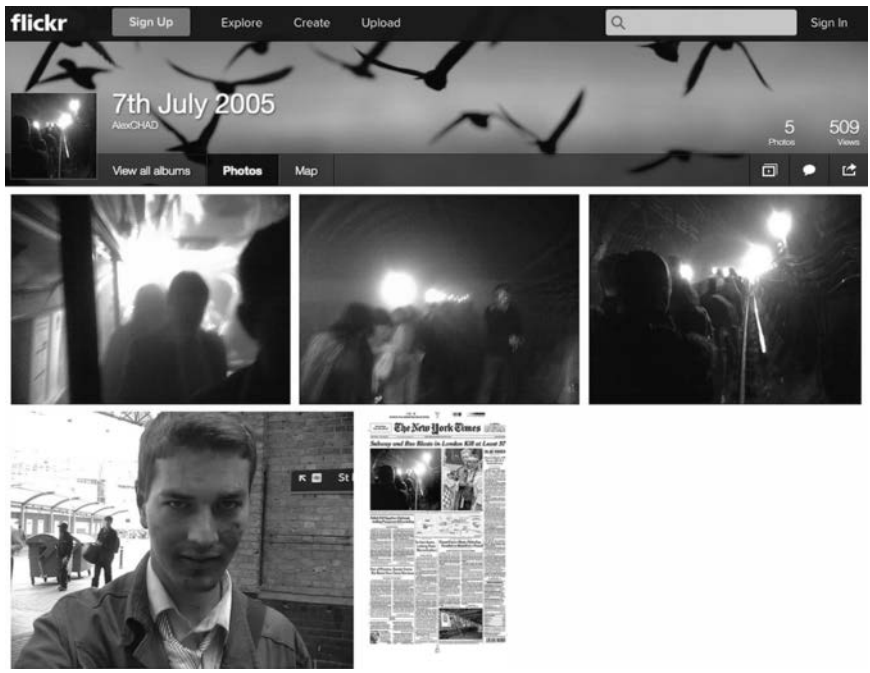


Figure 13.2 Images taken by commuter Alexander Chadwick, 7 July 2005.

the front cover of *The New York Times*. A copy of this is included on Alexander Chadwick's online image feed, which continues to be hosted on Flickr at the time of writing.

The image, professionals noted, was used in spite of its 'borderline image quality', and because it was felt to possess 'news value' (Lyon and Ferrara 2005), outweighing the normal expectations in relation to focus and clarity. By the time of the anniversary of the bombings, however, it was becoming clear that it was precisely the non-professional character of such images that constituted their lasting legacy.

The first three of the images in Chadwick's feed show what are now familiar views of the inside of the tube tunnels. The fourth is more distinctive in the sense that it forms an early example of the use of the camera phone to produce a selfie. Whilst the temptation is to read this, and perhaps also the other images, as part of an interminably narcissistic media landscape, Chadwick and Stacey's uses of the camera phone highlight how contemporary self-representation forms a deeply social act. The initial production of these images is implicated in precisely the politics of witnessing and response to crisis described here. They form a kind of gestural response (Frosh 2015), or social encounter through the body, which extends 'the self' as a nodal point

of media. Again, nothing can be assumed about this. There are no assurances about the shape that media participation will take, nor, in fact, any guarantee that the 'citizen' will continue to choose to interact in ways predicted or hoped for. And yet, celebrations of camera phone use in the aftermath of the bombings suggested that 'the consumer was turning into a citizen with a meaningful role to play' (Twist 2006). The fate of the professional was a concern, but greater emphasis was placed on the way members of the public found themselves responsible for maintaining the participatory environment of the new social media landscape. This new environment commanded the celebration of everyday life and the ordinary person who was becoming increasingly aware of their responsibility to sustain social memory and moderate mainstream forms of accounting.

Flickr initially allowed the geospatial tagging and categorization of images relating to the bombings, which made it possible for Chadwick to coordinate the images he produced with a network of other images. Just as was the case with Adam Stacey's image, we can see how this fed a sense of global community. Looking at the requests for information sent to Chadwick through Flickr, it is clear that a certain ambiguity remains in relation to the question of who is ultimately responsible for 'the citizen' image and its reproduction. The ongoing online presence of Chadwick's images has forced him to adopt an even greater degree of responsibility in relation to their curation and display than he had perhaps initially imagined. In the comments section appearing below the third, most famous image, which shows commuters exiting the tunnel, we see not only general members of the public commenting at the time of the event but also the subsequent, growing interest of academics, artists and publishers attempting to grasp at the meaning of camera phone images.

Chadwick refers interested parties to The Associated Press, who he states are now responsible for mediating the use of his image, which he initially uploaded and which was then used in the press coverage of the bombings, but explains that he would like to be kept informed about the public use of his photographs. He thus becomes a witness to the public observation of his own acts of witnessing. This compounds the sense of responsibility toward the digital archive, and facilitates the future survival of material photographic traces of witnessing. It demonstrates that releasing ownership of images does not necessarily also release one from the burden of responsibility that arises from the act of witnessing. This could induce a certain degree of anxiety or other kinds of unconscious resistance within the individual now publically classified as a 'citizen'. In the process of becoming more aware of her, or his, presence within the network, 'the citizen' is afforded a greater degree of sovereignty as a self-governing individual. This is the guarantee of new technologies, which invite the construction of personalized domains of communication and public profiling in a way that places new demands upon individuals, as they are effectively forced to cohere with forms of identity presented within news media, particularly as it seeks to bridge the amateur and professional divide.

Conclusion

As suggested earlier, the emergence of new technologically constituted identities, such as the 'pro-am', involves a rather dubious democratization of media based on the ideals of the market. The ambivalence of 'the citizen' toward such constructed categories reflects a certain degree of resistance to this cultural trend, or perhaps a new type of witnessing in relation to the processes by which contemporary media work. What is being offered now is the chance to find meaning that goes beyond the initial communities and networks that may have cohered at the point of the image's production, and within the context of its uploading and circulation across the digital network. It is not through the transference of images, as emotional forms, across digital domains that perspective is gained. It is rather by looking again and testifying to that which the image stands to represent to the world that a future politics of citizen media becomes possible. Through this process, which is more mindful of the cultural dynamics at play within the image's use and status, a more informed and empathetic response to history emerges, one that strengthens the value of the process of witnessing and also, perhaps, sheds some light on what it means to be 'a citizen' within the context of social media use.

Notes

1 This is a direct reference to Lauren Berlant's piece 'Poor Eliza' (1998). Berlant describes the binding of individuals to the nation state 'through a universalist rhetoric not of citizenship per se but of the capacity for suffering and trauma' (1998:636). The 'commodities of "women's culture"' are considered especially important in the way they structure injustice in terms of the pre-ideological realm of feeling defined by 'unconflicted subjectivity in a flowing intimate world' (1998:636). Such forms, which could include the family photograph, smooth over the abstraction of emotion as a production of the individualized feminine personal sphere.

2 Image taken by Adam Stacey's friend Elliot. For details, see BBC News' article 'Images of 7 July: Tunnel Horror'. Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5102860.stm (accessed 13 September 2015).

3 Reading adopts Anne Cubilie's (2005) perspective here to describe the agency of the witness. This is particularly important, Cubilie argues, in understanding women's experiences in situations of human rights abuses, but it may also be applied here to thinking through the articulation of a 'citizen' view.

4 Also see Seward (2005) defining images as snapshots of terror.

5 This is a reference to Julia Kristeva's understanding of horror, where 'the abject' is defined as that which disturbs systems and order. The use of the term in relation to amateur forms is problematic because 'the abject' is not an object with which one finds oneself faced, but, rather, something that has 'only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I' (1982:1).

6 In Object relations theory, fetishism is a pre-Oedipal phenomenon. As Winnicott explains, 'the transitional object stands for the breast, or the object of the first relationship', which 'may eventually develop into a fetish' (1971:9). This contrasts with Freudian and Lacanian readings where the fetish is formed of attachment to the mother's lack.

7 It is important to note here that Barthes is dealing with that which is staged in 'unconscious phantasy'. A more detailed outline of this can be found in Susan Isaacs'

'The Nature and Function of Phantasy' (1948), which explains the distinction between the conscious and unconscious imaginings of the psyche as well as the process of transference as a mode of emotional exploration.

8 See Lorenzo-Dus and Bryan (2011) for further reflection on the television coverage of this event.

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