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**Meaningful Witnessing in the United States, India & New Zealand:  
The Possibility Space for Digital Video Within Human Rights, Protest  
Movements and Activist Practices**

A thesis  
submitted in fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Doctor of Philosophy in Screen & Media Studies**  
at  
**The University of Waikato**  
by  
**Benjamin Lenzner**



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## ***ABSTRACT***

This dissertation examines the emergence of digital video practices rooted in human rights, social justice issues and protest movements through a number of select case studies in the United States, India and New Zealand. This project analyzes and critiques the formation of digital video practices through the lens of Manuel DeLanda's interpretation of assemblage theory. Examining interactions between crucial elements present in a possibility space that aid in the cultivation and assembling of budding forms of digital video, this study considers the implications in the relationships between both material and expressive qualities of these assemblings. The central argument of this thesis asserts that digital video practices centered on human rights, social justice and protest movements require adaptable linkages between supportive structures, creative capacities and digital video technologies in order to produce sustainable and creative digital video practices buttressed by documentary agendas that fuel their dynamic evolution.

My research seeks to engage with the complexities of agency and technology and examines their significance in different contexts by providing a constructive outlet for practitioners to share the process behind their methods in order to offer insight into their creative workflow. Digital video technologies are proliferating at a rapid pace, yet very few video practices have formed that suggest linkages to documentary traditions. One can bear witness, yet to traverse video documentation in order to create a rhetorical argument of meaningful witnessing is a complex process that requires more than easy access to mobile video tools connected to the Internet. The case studies analyzed in these three democratic nations support the argument threaded throughout the project; digital video practices have the potential to thrive, albeit in pockets where formal or informal support systems are present and through assemblages where digital video technologies are constantly being adapted and an investment in human capital is paramount to the privileging of digital video tools or online platforms. Case studies that focus on individual practices in New York City and New Zealand reinforce the difficulties practitioners face when attempting to cultivate video practices without supportive structures. Comparatively with other case studies in India and New York, individual practices with long-term organizational support navigate challenges and re-assemble their practices in order to remain sustainable and influential.

This study also engages with assemblage theory in the context of documentary history and contemporary digital video practices and reassesses the historic relationship between emerging photographic, film and video tools and the lens based practitioners that harness these apparatuses for documentary purposes. Like assemblings themselves, these creative associations are never smooth at their inception, but require adaptable solutions and adjustable reassemblings in order to maintain the potential for sustainable practices to develop and flourish. This dissertation argues that as digital video practices continue to evolve, they have the potential to redefine creative approaches to documentary media and the opportunity to confront historic traditions of the documentary form.

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## ***CHAPTER 1 – Introduction***

### **1.1 - The Assembling of Emerging Digital Video Technologies & Their Relationship to Traditions of the Documentary Film**

A decisive moment emerges towards the end of *This Is Not a Film* (2011), the possible documentary, potentially not-film, by the Iranian filmmakers Jafar Panahi and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb. The key question and then subsequent musings by the two protagonists are almost nonchalant, laying the groundwork (though the foundation had already been set) for the last twenty climatic minutes of the film, which for the first hour had been confined to Panahi's apartment. Panahi, a seasoned and well known Iranian director under house arrest and banned from filmmaking by the Iranian government, opens a window and starts recording nighttime fireworks exploding on the Tehran skyline with his iPhone. Mirtahmasb, using a prosumer-esque camera, is recording all of this and from behind the lens asks him, 'What are you filming?'<sup>1</sup> Panahi replies, 'I got bored. I'm taking a film. We aren't able to make our film, so at least I want to see if I can do anything with the cellphone.' Panahi then turns his iPhone on Mirtahmasb. Now they are both recording each other, though we have not yet been offered a vantage point from Panahi's iPhone. Mirtahmasb replies, 'They say, "When hairdressers have nothing to do, they cut each other's hair." Fine, you shoot too.' The two of them both sit down at the kitchen table, Panahi looks at Mirtahmasb and laments about his smartphone, 'But what good can it do? The quality is too low.'

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<sup>1</sup> All film dialogue transcribed by author. Throughout this dissertation, quotes from outside sources are in single quotation brackets and quotes from my interviews with practitioners in the field are double bracketed.

This exchange between Panahi and Mirtahmasb initiates a relationship between two filmmakers and two cameras, in essence, a conscious birth of possibilities. The potential for the creative experimentation that Panahi and Mirtahmasb initiate at this juncture of the film had been present since the first scene when Panahi, cradling his iPhone, sat down for breakfast at the table in front of his refrigerator. It was morning then. Panahi ate flatbread with jam and made a phone call, presumably to Mirtahmasb asking him to come over. In this opening sequence, his smartphone is his mobile phone, nothing more. Although Panahi is under house arrest, banned from making films for twenty years, presumably his creative abilities stifled, the film sets up a possibility space that takes time to evolve, which in turn reflects dynamics apparent in the broader connections between digital video technologies, creative practitioners and the potentials of the documentary form. These types of dynamic interactions, between the material and the expressive, simmer throughout the case studies in this dissertation. The focus of this thesis is on digital video practices and practitioners in different contexts. The complexities of these types of relationships emerge to form the central examination of this dissertation.

This PhD dissertation examines emerging digital video practices within the context of human rights and social justice issues. Throughout the course of this thesis, the assembling of myriad forms of digital video practices with intentions of being used in a purposeful, often political and at times in a documentary way are explored and analyzed. This thesis looks at documentary as a set of possibilities and examines how citizen digital video practices emerge and evolve. Defining the current nature of creative video practices that use affordable digital video tools poses inherent difficulties, specifically because these practices

are often disparate in their approaches and creative processes. The borderlines are porous. In the case of *This Is Not A Film*, we've encountered professional filmmakers exploring digital video in a context quite unlike many that will be examined throughout this dissertation. However, this example shows that digital video practices have both a conscious and unconscious relationship to the documentary form. Digital video technologies simultaneously bisect both professional and amateur practices. The camera embedded in Panahi's iPhone lay dormant until the end of *This Is Not a Film* and based upon his conversations with Mirtahmasb, the use of his iPhone camera as a creative tool was unrealized in the months leading up to his house arrest.

'Listen Jafar,' Mirtahmasb tells Panahi as the two of them sit in Panahi's kitchen at night. The sound of fireworks in the distance, Mirtahmasb expresses that the quality of the video from Panahi's iPhone is not what is important:

I believe that what matters is that it is documented. Since the day those things happened to you and after you left the prison. If you had turned on your cell phone camera, you would have recorded a lot of important moments. We won't know if they can be turned into a film or not. Even the things we've been doing so far today, if you want to turn it into a film, I doubt it, but if you're documenting the days, then go ahead. (*This Is Not a Film* 2011)

This dissertation examines a number of specific digital video practices centered on issues of human rights, social justice and community-based initiatives in three democratic countries throughout the world – the United States, India and New Zealand. As we will explore later in this thesis, human rights provide a rich historical setting in regards to the use of lens-based technologies, which have been critical to the documentation of social justice issues and supportive in the presentation of documentary narratives centered on activism within multiple contexts. Human rights as an entry point, coupled with considerable fieldwork

engaging with what we might call ‘citizen practitioners’ in these three countries offers a rarely seen vantage point from which a variety of creative approaches of these emerging media makers are discussed, analyzed and reflected upon.

The definitions of these digital video practices are often ambiguous; professional documentary filmmakers using amateur video technology or amateur videographers transitioning into professional roles are not uncommon. The terminology used in this dissertation will attempt to situate some of these creative practices within traditional frameworks that might have more clearly defined historical implications. Yet different labels will be used for different practices, because these emerging video practices vary tremendously. Often it will be problematic to define these digital video practices as documentary, due to a lack of crafted narrative or perhaps a sheer reliance on video documentation, rather than documentary making. Furthermore, some of these practices seem to fall closer to those often labeled ‘citizen journalism’ rather than documentary. Nevertheless, this thesis is interested in the possibilities of new forms of digital video practices and their potential relationship to documentary media. Subsequently, the breadth and reach of the creative practices explored throughout are wide and diverse.

This project seeks to challenge the celebratory rhetoric associated with digital technologies, which tend to conflate technological innovation with democratic progress. These assumptions, which inflect social and political debates around the significance of digital platforms, often presume that digital video technologies and access to the Internet offer unlimited potential for creativity and democratic forms of visual expression. As Evgeny Morozov (2011, p. 293) writes, ‘What is [...] most dangerous about succumbing to technological



determinism is that it hinders our awareness of the social and the political, presenting it as the technological instead.’ Yet, alluding to technological determinism is merely a starting point. When this research project commenced (at the tail end of a year bookmarked by the downfall of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City), the rhetoric that surrounded digital video seemed to be as ubiquitous as the mobile camera tools that fuelled the liberating oratory attached to the proliferation of digital video both online and offline. However, this dissertation has continually strived to focus on the broader possibilities of the network itself. This thesis is not about technology per se. Instead, it seeks to understand the ways in which technologies are elements in relation to other factors within the wider possibility spaces of the emergence of digital video practices. As Joss Hands (2010, p. 23) writes, ‘Technology is thus not so much an essence as it is a descriptive category of things that we make. [...] Such a view sees technology as variable, malleable and responsive, and thus begs the question of whether there is really a universal category of “technology” at all?’ This dissertation aims to analyze how a specific set of digital technologies (including audio-visual capture and storage, mobile video cameras, video editing and distribution through online networks, such as real-time streaming) are being utilized, examining their use in respect to multiple variables at play within spaces of human rights, social justice and activist movements. Technology can mean different things in varying contexts and within different assemblages.

Accordingly, the essence of this dissertation endeavors to distill, understand and critique the relationships that emerge from the creative capacities that form as organizations and individuals engage in the formulation of digital

video while experimenting with digital technologies and online platforms. As Michael Newman (2014, p. 2) writes:

The medium of video exists not only as objects and practices, but also as a shifting constellation of ideas in popular imagination, including ideas about value, authenticity, and legitimacy. We can apprehend video's materiality and its significance only through the mediation of discourses of video technology and the practices and social values associated with it.

One of the key rhetorical assumptions encircling digital video is that it opens up new possibilities for social and political engagement, certainly in relation to the mass mediums that dominated twentieth century societies – and most crucially, lowers the threshold for everyday people to begin to employ these technologies as a means of instigating social and political change (which is central to the agendas of documentary itself). This propensity for liberating magniloquence has been historically present through the widespread diffusion of film and video technologies. Discussing the liberating and democratic oratory that has trailed video for decades, Newman (2014, p. 25) writes, 'It promised to be a kind of Robin Hood of media, redistributing power in communication from corporations and institutions to individuals.' Yet this thesis recognizes that technology itself is not enough. This dissertation argues that for digital video practices to develop and sustain, there must be supportive structures in place to nurture their development. Additionally, practitioners must navigate the complexities involved in recording, uploading, crafting and disseminating their creative work. The variables involved are complicated and should not be underestimated. I have chosen to focus on practices that appear sustainable because they illuminate the inner workings of these assemblings most clearly and offer insight into the ways in which these delicate assemblages form, maintain and provide inklings of connection to traditions of documentary media. As we

will see, the practices that produce the most far-reaching documentary effects are those conscious of their assemblings and therefore open to change.

In response to the multiple interactions between technology, individuals, supportive structures and creativity circulating as digital video practices emerge, this dissertation confronts multiple questions. A number of these interrogations were present at the start of this project, yet numerous queries emerged during the course of my fieldwork. Of the many questions that this thesis confronts, it asks directly why certain recent digital video practices thrive where others falter. Moreover, it ponders the ways in which nascent digital video practices might produce a documentary effect and potentially introduce shifts in regards to the possibilities of what documentary is or can be.

Vitaly, the central question that this thesis seeks to address is how and why are digital video practices emerging in specific possibility spaces and what elements are essential for the development of creative practices situated in protest, social justice and activist movements? Many of the digital video practices examined throughout this thesis were birthed through the initial act and acts of witnessing. Subsequently, many of the corresponding practitioners attempted to make their creative practice more purposeful, though as we will come to understand in upcoming chapters, all have had varying degrees of success. Developing a digital video practice into a form of meaningful witnessing is complicated and requires a long-term commitment. The principal act of witnessing is a deeply layered engagement with immediate experience. As John Durham Peters (2001, p. 707) writes:

Witnessing is an intricately tangled practice. It raises questions of truth and experience, presence and absence, death and pain, seeing and saying, and the trustworthiness of perception – in short, fundamental questions of communication. The long history of puzzlement and prescription about

proper witnessing that developed in oral and print cultures is a rich resource for reflection about some of the ambiguities of audiovisual media.

Bearing witness is the first step to an encounter of which the transference of testimony is essential to the comprehension of the moment for those who cannot claim to have been witnesses. As Peters (2001, p. 709) reminds, ‘To witness has two faces: the passive one of *seeing* and the active one of *saying*.’ Thus to transcend witnessing into meaningful witnessing, the act of enunciating one’s experience is critical. Peters (2001, p. 709) argues, ‘Herein lies the fragility of witnessing: the difficult juncture between experience and discourse.’ This dissertation is acutely interested in the transition space between witnessing and meaningful witnessing. As Paul Frosh (2006, p. 277) reinforces:

However, something needs to assemble this testimonial apparatus, to bring together all these separate utterances of witnesses (the journalist, the eyewitness, the camera) into a coherent purposive conjecture about the point of the text which encompasses them. This is precisely the implied witnessing agency or intentionality of the text.

The core objective of this dissertation is to better understand the processes behind the articulation of witnessing into meaningful witnessing, the creative methods and complex techniques from which documentation strives to become documentary. It seeks to comprehend the relationship between human agency and other forms of agency that might play roles in the formation of digital video practices rooted in human rights, social justice and activist movements. These interconnections are fragile and the relationships that form are often beyond the control of the practitioners and organizations seeking to buttress and proliferate these varied forms of visual storytelling. These practices frequently assemble both consciously and subconsciously at once. How they might form is hard to

predict and once created, equally difficult to sustain. Discussing the complexities of witnessing, Frosh and Pinchevski (2014, p. 602) write that agency:

[...] should be understood not as a willful action taken by a single agent at a specific moment but as an arrangement of multiple points of agency perpetually poised for activation at different moments in time. The assemblage summons various points of intervention across space and time, only some of which will be engaged in any given event, and even when engaged, there is no certainty as to their effects, for they might make no difference or make a big difference depending on their overall constellation.

It is up to each practitioner to decide on what form their meaningful witnessing might take and how they will creatively express their witnessing. It is no easy task to, in a sense, testify. It is equally as difficult to circulate this testimony so that it might reach wider populations, as well as engage with the specific individuals who hold the power to make and enact change. To reinforce, this project examines the complexities of the assembling of meaningful witnessing rooted in the use of digital video.

This dissertation argues that the success and sustainability of digital video practices are the result of the adaptability of the creative capacities of these practices over a prolonged period of time in which the emergent assemblages they surface within are regularly challenged by external fluctuations such as technology, infrastructure, political situation, audience engagement and the capacities of these numerous elements to connect. This project examines how digital video practices are adopted, used, deployed, embedded and adapted within particular types of global and local assemblings. Experimentation with these practices opens up numerous questions in regards to ethics, creative approaches to documentation and relevance to traditions of the documentary form. I will argue that supportive structures (such as a formal organization or informal community network) often provide a foundation critical to the growth of digital video

practices, bolstering their ability to emerge and allowing space for the elements within their assemblage to flourish. These supportive structures are essential for the development, maturation and endurance of digital video practices rooted in human rights and issues of social justice. Importantly, for practices to become sustainable, citizens must engage with emerging digital video tools with an understanding that the fluidity of the tools, changeability of platforms and variations in artistic forms of representation must remain flexible and exploratory.

## **1.2 - Digital Video Practices & the Definition of the Documentary**

How do we define documentary for the purpose of this dissertation? What has documentary been? What might documentary be in the context of these practices and how might practices that sit closer to video documentation be important in respect to emerging digital video practices? Documentary, as a term, is complex in that it covers a wide range of sub-genres that all seemingly fit within the context of non-fiction film and photographic storytelling. One of the first instances of the use of the word documentary in connection to the moving image was in the February 1926 *New York Sun* newspaper in a review of Robert Flaherty's film, *Moana* (1926). John Grierson, who would later become the commissioner of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), wrote that *Moana*, 'being a visual account of events in the daily life of a Polynesian youth, has documentary value' (cited in Hardy 1966, p. 13). In actuality, *Moana*, as documentary scholars tend to agree, is more docu-fiction than documentary. Christian missionaries and other westerners had long influenced the village of Safune in Samoa, where *Moana* was shot, and so although villagers wore western clothes, Flaherty asked that the Samoans in the film don traditional Samoan

garments (Zimmermann 2013). For this and many other reasons, *Moana*, is now seen more as a film that sits closer to that of fiction with possible documentary elements infused. Eventually, Grierson came to define documentary as the canonically cited, ‘the creative treatment of actuality’ (Hardy 1966, p. 13). ‘Creative treatment’ being the intention to craft a persuasive argument through the process of editing and the construction of a narrative. Yet documentary is complex. Grierson’s preliminary definition of documentary offers plenty of room to maneuver and many sorts of films can be situated within its confines.

Yet this dissertation does not specifically examine digital video practices that are clearly linked to definitions of the documentary derived from scholarly inquiry linked to film studies and the cinematic canon. Amongst other things, this investigation seeks to understand how digital video practices might be challenging boundaries of the documentary or offering potentials for new documentary approaches. Yet what does Grierson mean by *the creative treatment of actuality*?

As Michael Renov (1993, p. 33) reflects:

Under scrutiny, the Griersonian definition of documentary – the creative treatment of actuality – appears to be a kind of oxymoron, the site of an irreconcilable union between invention on the one hand and mechanical reproduction on the other. And, as with the figure of the oxymoron in its literary context, this collision can be the occasion of an explosive, often poetic effect.

This research argues that the expressive power within certain digital video practices can be interpreted as producing wide ranging ‘documentary effects.’ These effects can be political in nature, such as encouraging viewers to work toward social and political change. Or they might be technological in that experimentation with digital video tools may provide impetus for established documentary filmmakers to try something new, for example, using hardware or

mobile video technologies in a certain way or engaging in alternative forms of narrative, such as experimenting with length or structure. Most intentionally, producing a ‘documentary effect’ relies on the creation of a narrative structure, the deliberate crafting of an argument by a practitioner, the act of transforming visual documentation into meaningful witnessing. These effects might present new dilemmas in regards to ethics or simply, the engagement of these digital video practices might force the audience to question what they are seeing. These political, technological and audience interactions have the potential to challenge the possibility spaces for ‘documentary’ itself. We will see these relationships develop and specific questions arise throughout this dissertation.

John Grierson’s definition – *the creative treatment of actuality* – and much of the documentary theory that emerged in the 1990s comes from a cinematic framework; however, it is important to reinforce that this dissertation engages with digital video practices that are not trapped within the confines of cinema. They are practices cultivated on New York City streets, in rural villages in India, and on top of oil drilling ships on the shorelines of New Zealand. These practices are not immediate, but refined from years of attempting to understand the morphing relationships between the moving image, visual documentation, emerging digital video technologies and the role of non-fiction narrative. Some of these digital video practices have minimal, if any, connection to historic forms of the documentary. Yet these creative practices have strong continuities from those of their predecessors. As Newman (2014, p. 75) writes:

Our experience now makes hard distinctions between different media less logical. Film and television can no longer be understood so easily in terms of space (theater/home) or materiality (film/video) or aesthetics (big screen, cinematic/small screen, televisual). Both are experienced in various spaces and on screens of various dimensions.



Documentary media (photography, film, video, radio, art, digital, online) has also moved to new screens and spaces. It is no longer contained within the structures of cinema. Similarly, the relationship between filmmaker and subject has become much more complex and indistinct in respect to the boundaries between who is in front of the camera and who is behind the lens. Novel approaches to documentary media, especially within the spheres of community and video have long histories of experimentation. This dissertation focuses on specific digital video practices in a number of global geographies, yet it is important to acknowledge that many pre-cursors to community video practices have existed. There is not the space here to provide an exhaustive list, but some examples offer useful reference points to this broader history. In 1969, through the 1970s and up to the present, the Whitesburg, Kentucky based media center, Appalshop has continuously used the moving image (whether it be film, video or digital video) throughout the local Appalachian region of the Southeastern United States. Although Appalshop may not have direct lineage to many of the digital video practices and community organizations that comprise the case studies in the forthcoming chapters of this dissertation, it is critical to acknowledge that Appalshop engaged in early forms of moving image media practices that consistently challenged concepts of documentary media. As Stephen Michael Charbonneau (2009, p. 137) writes:

[...] Appalshop is a standard bearer for how to produce counter imagery that gives “voice” to a presumably unheard community and enable communities to undermine damaging representations perpetuated by an increasingly globalized and synergized mainstream media.

Many other organizations that embraced the collaborative use of video within the context of community activism emerged throughout North America

from the late 1960s onward. In 1966, the National Film Board of Canada started the Challenge for Change program, which sought to utilize the moving image to address issues of social justice and hopefully spark change as well. As Deirdre Boyle (1997, p. 32) writes, 'But the Challenge for Change went further: by training community people to make their own films and videotapes, they were freed from dependence upon liberal strangers who wandered into their lives and then out again once a documentary had been made.' The New York City based, Paper Tiger Television, which was founded in the early 1980s, attempted to integrate a local video sensibility onto public access television stations. Suggesting that the work of the NFB and Paper Tiger were linked in their intentions, Boyle (1997, p. 207) writes, 'What Challenge for Change was for the '70s, Paper Tiger Television became for the '80s, providing an influential theoretic model for video activism using public-access cable channels and, eventually, satellite distribution.' These two examples are mere selections of many programs and organizations that have attempted to tackle techniques of lens based media and have approached new methodologies in respect to the documentary form.

More recently, the Australian based organization Engage Media, has used digital video to engage communities throughout the Asia Pacific to confront and document social and environmental issues throughout the region, in countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines and beyond. Although it is necessary to mention these key points in the history of the documentary tradition in relation to community based projects, analyzing these movements is not a principal goal of this dissertation. Yet it is vital to recognize that predecessors have existed, paving

a pathway for those practitioners, organizations and facilitators to learn from past successes and failures of non-profit video organizations around the world.

The use of lens based technologies often, if not always, remains central to the idea of documentary and therefore clarifying previous parameters that surround definitions of the documentary provides essential reference points that will be revisited throughout this dissertation. Certainly, the idea of the documentary has always encompassed multifarious interpretations. Brian Winston (1995, p. 6) writes that scholars such as Michael Renov situate documentary with the ‘direct ontological claim to the real.’ In *Claiming The Real*, Winston states that he has never seen a definition of documentary that doesn’t reference Grierson’s initial definition. Renov’s writings integrate the concept of ‘truth’ and Renov (1986, p. 71) himself states that, ‘Every documentary issues a “truth claim” of a sort, positing a relationship to history which exceeds the analogical status of its fictional counterpart.’ But a documentary is more than just a *truth claim*. It is also a process of non-fiction storytelling through the moving image in which it can be quite difficult to predict the journey that a narrative argument will take. The documentary is a rhetorical form of visual communication and though documentaries attempt to represent *the real*, by no means can *the real* be boxed into one representation and thus interpretation. The documentary must be allowed to flourish and wander. In *Theorizing Documentary*, Michael Renov (1993, p. 21) goes further to consider:

[...] the context of a nascent poetics of the documentary – those principles of construction, function, and effect specific to nonfiction film and video – concerns what I take to be the four fundamental tendencies or rhetorical/aesthetic functions attributable to documentary practice.

The four elements present within an ‘active making’ of the documentary that Renov (1993, p. 21) outlines in detail are:

1. to record, reveal, or preserve
2. to persuade or promote
3. to analyze or interrogate
4. to express.

*Theorizing Documentary* was published in 1993 and it is interesting to note that Renov includes non-fiction film *and* video within the structures of these four tendencies. In 1993, the influence of the video camera on the documentary form was prominent. The use of VHS technologies had been realized in respect to basic visual documentation, as well as utilized as a tool to help aid in the formulation of non-fiction narrative structures. In regards to the definition of documentary, Renov reinforces that the relationships and tensions between these tendencies are what creates artistic discourse for both makers and audience. A documentary maker cannot just record or document (Renov’s first tendency) and then absolve themselves of the need to craft a narrative. The act of recording or filming is an act simply of visual documentation. In the same way that a photographic artist understands the methods behind the printing process (exposure, contrast, burning and dodging) and also comprehends the necessity to formulate a body of work (how images might connect to one another in order to tell a story or present an experience); the documentary maker must also hone their craft through further steps that work to transform visual documents into creative structures.

Many of the digital video practices within this dissertation hint at the potential for these relationships to form, yet the practitioners behind these emerging practices regularly abandon meaningful steps that are pivotal to

connecting imagery in order to persuade an audience. Arranging a convincing argument can become complex as emerging online platforms often consist of numerous forms of visual media (such as the written word, video, photography, hyperlinks) and thus present practitioners with alternative methods to offer different types of *documentary agendas*. Since most of the digital video practices analyzed in this dissertation focus on human rights agendas, the innate motives centered on social change fuel these practices. Yet merely having an intention to advocate a position does not link a digital video practice to documentary, further creative experimentation must ensue. This dissertation will address these methods of storytelling and ponder whether multiple online platforms integrating numerous forms of media that are cultivated by practitioners engaged in digital video practices might also be forms of documentary creation. Certainly the methods of documentary always evolve, pushing boundaries in order to test creative limits. As John Ellis (2012, p. 8) writes:

Documentary is an activity. It consists of filming without fiction. Documentary filmmakers take the world as it comes, or arrange the world so that it comes in particular ways, and then work on the resulting footage. Documentary is an organized activity of creation. It makes an object, a film, which then goes on to affect its viewers. Documentary is also a task. Its task is that of presenting reality, showing the world, explaining the world. Documentary has an ethical task laid upon it, bound up with the difficult question of whether or not truth can ever be shown.

Similar to photography, the other lens based media that simultaneously dances around questions of ethics, representation, the gaze, truth claims, the camera's ability to document and the production of documentary content; as it evolves, the documentary floats within, around and beyond any sort of practical definition. As Bill Nichols (2001, p. 21) writes:

Documentaries adopt no fixed inventory of techniques, address no one set of issues, display no single set of forms or styles. Not all documentaries

exhibit a single set of shared characteristics. Documentary film practice is an arena in which things change. Alternative approaches are constantly attempted and then adopted by others or abandoned. Contestation occurs. Prototypical works stand out that others emulate without ever being able to copy or imitate entirely. Test cases appear that challenge the conventions defining the boundaries of documentary film practice. They push the limits and sometimes change them.

Throughout this dissertation, it will become clear that the digital video practices this project examines often straddle multiple roles of representation. Frequently, these practices might share or skirt numerous points of reference to definitions of documentary or citizen journalism; they are playing with elements of the capacities of dissemination, distribution channels, broadcasting, target audience, production methods, length of material, relationships between professional and amateur, narrative structure, access, ethics, video tools, and digital infrastructure. Furthermore, the indexicality of the footage captured and the way in which footage is pieced together as part of the art of storytelling, as a call to action or in pursuit of an argument all fall within structures of documentary and are critical to the assemblage of emerging digital video practices. However, the definition of these digital video practices often comes down to the perception of the audience and like the ways in which visual documentation is prone to multiple interpretations, so are the definitions of these practices. As Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (2008, p. 3) write, ‘Ultimately, in the case of cinema, television, and, increasingly, the internet, individual viewers will have their own preconceptions and expectations of material labeled “documentary” (either by themselves or by others), and these may or may not accord with more established definitions.’

In a similar manner, the technologies being used to craft digital video practices straddle multiple functions. Camera technology migrates between the

moving image and the still image with the push of a button. A mobile phone can at once be a telecommunications device, a video camera, as well as a platform to edit, upload, and publish a video, a story or a film. Yet the ease to document and publish does not effortlessly fuse into the constructive brainstorming required to produce an engaging documentary narrative. With mobile video technologies, further implications emerge in respect to ethics, form, and relevance of documentary, as well as ease of publication in regards to these practices. As these numerous variables at play (technologies, creative capacities, supportive structures, traditions of documentary expression and journalism) help to inform how the nascent practices examined in this dissertation assemble, it is how these practices are adopted, used, deployed and embedded into particular kinds of assemblings that are the focus of this project. It is clear that the ways in which these relationships form become part of an assemblage or multiple assemblages. Assemblage theory mirrors Nichols previously cited description of how documentaries form and reform and often push and redefine the boundaries of the definition of the genre through experimentation with digital video practices. Referencing Gilles Deleuze, Manuel DeLanda (2010, p. 10) writes:

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns – different natures. Thus the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. It is never filiations which are important, but alliances, alloys; these are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind.

Analyzing the emergence of digital video practices through the lens of Manuel DeLanda's reconstruction of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *assemblage theory* allows these practices to be dissected and scrutinized clearly. Reflecting upon a documentary effect, relationships present within emerging

digital video practices, the practitioners experimenting with these tools, storytelling possibilities and the online and offline platforms that offer public canvases for these experimentations to be shared is important in that assemblage theory allows for the significant elements involved in the formation of these practices to be scrutinized through understanding the multiple interactions within their collective working relationships. Furthermore, reflective input from the citizens crafting this media has been mostly absent from scholarly analysis. This dissertation confronts that trend and situates the voice of the practitioners squarely within an examination of these practices, inquiring as to how these individuals see their practice, their approaches, the tools of digital video, their methods of visual documentation and at times, non-fiction storytelling. It should be noted that assemblage theory is discussed much more comprehensively in the ensuing chapter. However throughout this dissertation, my interpretation of Manuel DeLanda's take on assemblage theory is applied to creative practices and critiqued in numerous settings in order to understand the multiple variables at play in the formation of the forthcoming case studies.

It must also be mentioned that issues of ethics will arise throughout this dissertation. Documentary ethics and ethical issues that surround digital video practices are highly contingent upon specific circumstances within each practice. A consciousness of ethics is one element that transforms witnessing into a meaningful witnessing that can become documentary. The case studies of this dissertation are incredibly diverse and the ethical issues that arise are often distinct to particular situations, as well as specific to the conditions of each creative practice. Issues of ethics will be explored throughout each chapter as they arise. This dissertation will address a number of issues relevant to



relationships between practitioners, subjects and community. Yet more often than not, discussion of ethics will be pertinent to each context and situation. Although ethical dilemmas will emerge and be examined within these case studies, they won't always turn up in each and every instance. And although ethical issues are important to the evolution of these creative practices, their analysis is part of a broader understanding of how digital video practices are emerging throughout these eclectic possibility spaces. Yet importantly, ethical practices are one of the elements that distinguishes 'documentary' from related forms of video production.

Ethical dilemmas have troubled documentary practitioners and theorists over the course of the history of the genre. These ethical questions have often been contingent upon specific circumstances; however, they have tended to address the documentarian's relationship with the subject and then finally, the audience. These ethical tensions for the documentary maker have repeatedly centered 'on how to maintain a humane working relationship with someone whose story they were telling' and secondly, 'focused on ways to maintain a viewer's faith in the accuracy and integrity of the work' (Aufderheide, Jaszi and Chandra 2009, p. 6).

Professional associations that documentary media makers maintain with the subjects of their creative projects are complicated. When a documentary maker spends days or months with a person or community in order to gain a sense of trust that allows them to film or photograph; what were once distinct ethical boundaries are regularly both tested and breached. These borderlines are often not clear, nor are documentary ethics set in stone. Ethical parameters are further tested when recording is finished and editing has commenced. As Brian Winston

(Rosenthal ed. 1988, p. 313) asks, ‘If one takes the everyday lives of people – a favorite subject matter of the documentary – and transforms them into an artistic statement, where does one draw the line between the actuality of their lives and the aesthetic needs of the artist?’

For the audience, understanding how a story has been crafted can be complicated and opaque. As Dai Vaughn (1999, p. 78) writes:

Some things may have been less rehearsed or more rehearsed, less spontaneous, less calculated, less uninfluenced by the camera’s presence than we-as-viewers suppose them to have been. But there is no sharp demarcation between the misunderstandings of documentary and the misunderstandings of life.

A variety of moral considerations and ethical challenges consistently emerge as documentary practitioners approach the creative process. Issues of consent, audio-visual integrity, methodologies of recording, re-appropriation of images, trust and safety of the subjects, portrayal of the other, publication of images, ethics involved in the editing of a narrative are a selection of factors related to ethical dilemmas that have been historically present throughout the development of the documentary genre. As Calvin Pryluck (Rosenthal ed. 1988, p. 267) explains, ‘Discussion of ethical issues will not by itself solve the problems; it may remind us of their existence and perhaps lead to a more fruitful relationship between filmmaker, subject, and audience.’ As we will see in subsequent chapters, the digital video practices that most resemble documentary are often those that take into account and ruminate upon the ethics that surround their creative approaches to media making.

### **1.3 - Supportive Structures / Creative Capacities**

This project does not focus exclusively on technology or media, but rather examines the relationships that surround and inform emerging digital video practices that are either directly or indirectly connected to future possibilities for documentary media within the contexts of human rights and social justice issues. Although in a vast number of areas of the world many people have access to mobile digital video technologies of some sort, numerous questions persist, as only a small number of individuals seem to be harnessing the relationships between their own creative capacities and the potential of these affordable video technologies. Why aren't sustainable video practices being crafted more frequently and more prolifically? How and why do emerging digital video practices evolve in certain places and at specific times? What sorts of circumstances must be present and types of relationships cultivated in order to create and sustain digital video practices that surround or support issues of human rights and social justice? Specifically, how do a patchwork of singular elements within a particular possibility space interact in order to form assemblages that support nascent forms of emerging video practices rooted in the use of affordable and portable digital video technologies?

Exploring the possibilities of recent digital video technologies and the assemblages that emerge in very different global geographies is at the core of my PhD research. From the middle of 2012 until late 2013, I conducted fieldwork exploring different types of nascent video practices in order to understand the ways in which digital video technologies are, at times, interacting with human creativity, online distribution platforms, human rights issues and linkages with community organizations in order to open up potentialities for the creation of

documentary discourse and inventive digital video practices. I conducted fieldwork that probed the creators behind specific digital video practices in New York City, India and New Zealand, as well as touched upon a collaborative practice between practitioners in the United States and Egypt. I also briefly gained insight into the development of an Israeli and Palestinian documentary collaboration that emerged from the work of one amateur Palestinian videographer.

Yet the wider landscape and connections between technology, multiple modes of dissemination and ways in which practitioners, citizen journalists and filmmakers are approaching their digital video practices in the context of activism, social justice, human rights and resistance movements are very much connected to my research goals. The practitioners and facilitators explored in this project *also* understand the innate power of video documentation, yet these media makers are constantly challenged by the struggles that emerge during the creative process.

As these digital video practices are often disparate in their approaches to citizen media making, the methodology of my fieldwork engaged with research through multiple methods. In New York City, where my fieldwork began, I saw the city as a possibility space and identified a diverse number of creative practices that seemed to be evolving out of the Occupy Wall Street movement, a high-profile protest movement that addressed economic disparities present in the social structure of the United States. Although I focused on practitioners whose practices seem to have emerged out of that movement, I connected with a number of other practices and practitioners through multiple recommendations from individuals I had previously interviewed in New York City. Revising my

unwieldy and impractical lens, in India, I decided to focus my fieldwork on one organization, Video Volunteers, commencing via an entry point in order to gain a wider understanding of Indian-based assemblings. By examining a single organization, I began to understand the complexities that surround one organization's attempt to catalyze and foster citizen based digital video practices in a country where it is necessary to experiment within multiple and extremely different assemblages. Returning to New Zealand, I brought together the diverse practices I examined in other contexts as a framework for positioning and comparing New Zealand based digital video practices. In New Zealand, there are global organizations working in localized settings, as well as community-based organizations trying to stimulate digital video practices. My experience conducting fieldwork in New York City and India allowed my research to gain a global perspective and thus clearer insight into the assemblings of multiple digital video practices within numerous contexts.

Assemblage theory, as a theoretical apparatus, necessitates a structured and meticulous reading of the properties and capacities of the emerging parts that connect and aid in the formation of working assemblages that support and nurture, yet also have the potential to disrupt, these fluid creative video practices. Assemblage theory reinforces a holistic approach to examining these video practices. The relationships between these elements are analyzed in order to understand how these assemblages, in this case human rights centered digital video practices, evolve, form and dissolve. Furthermore, assemblage theory asks for both the material and expressive qualities of the singularities that are part of and also surround these practices to be scrutinized and examined. The second and following chapter of this dissertation further introduces assemblage theory as my

theoretical framework and explains its role within the comprehensive structure of my PhD research. Additionally, this chapter explains the focus on human rights based digital video practices and illuminates its relationship to documentary by re-approaching the history of direct cinema and the photographic practices that helped spark concepts of human rights through the lens of assemblage theory. As well, this chapter demonstrates the notion of how assemblage applies within the present-day context, yet also how it can serve as a tool for historical analysis in order to better comprehend the emergence of lens-based documentation of human rights and issues of social justice. The purpose of the second chapter is to offer a concrete and extensive introduction of assemblage theory and explain its importance within the context of this dissertation.

Chapter three focuses on the methodology of my fieldwork. Consisting of more than thirty interviews over three continents, my research includes conversations with numerous media makers, many of them citizens cultivating their own types of video practices in contrasting possibility spaces. My research treats New York City as a possibility space, Video Volunteers as an entry point to Indian assemblings and takes these to consider assemblings within the New Zealand context. I confronted numerous challenges during the course of my fieldwork and these will be examined and explored within this chapter. The methodology behind my interview process, the reasons behind my choice of case studies and at times, observation of video training practices as well as issues that emerged during my fieldwork are explored in this third chapter.

The fourth and fifth chapters cover the assembling of human rights based digital video practices mainly in New York City and examines the platforms and assemblages that help in sustaining a number of these practices over time. Both

of these chapters situate and critique the creative capacities of the practitioners engaging with these practices, while assessing the contributions of supportive structures that surround and reinforce their sustainability (or lack thereof). The fourth chapter explores the live streaming and professional development of the journalist, Tim Pool, whose video practice evolved out of the Occupy Wall Street movement of late 2011. Pool's practice is difficult to define. Yet the evolution of his work allows us to begin to understand how the relationships between emerging technologies and creative practices have the potential to create a 'documentary effect' within the context of human rights and protest movements. Furthermore, this chapter's chief focus considers how these video practices emerged within a heavily networked online environment and assesses the validity of the naïve faith that seemed to permeate the proliferation of live streaming practices in that the ability of these networked images had the potential to generate a documentary effect in and of themselves. Additionally linking the documentation of Occupy Wall Street, this chapter also examines video practices and digital software that were crafted in response to the Stop-and-Frisk tactics of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in the months after the Occupy Wall Street encampment was forcibly dispersed from lower Manhattan.

Chapter five focuses on the work of the Brooklyn, New York based global non-profit, WITNESS, and extends from there to examine the website, *18 Days in Egypt* (2011), a California based online platform working to collate stories around the revolution directed against the former Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak. These two examples contrast in their methods of engagement with the network. *18 Days In Egypt* is an experimentation that encourages Egyptians to curate their own stories from the uprising in Egypt. WITNESS, on the other hand, provides

resources and support to regional organizations that offer training and guidance for citizen activists using digital video tools. WITNESS adapts to the local network in order to identify human rights activism and then works with organizations to support digital video practices.

The sixth chapter examines the work of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), Video Volunteers, based in the southern Indian state of Goa. Video Volunteers trains Indian citizens, throughout the country, methods of documentary storytelling and video reportage so that they, in turn, may document and create stories about issues affecting their communities. In the scope of my research, Video Volunteers is an entry point to talk about digital video practices embedded in local settings. The organization is a single NGO that deliberately serves as a catalyst for the development of citizen journalism in India and understands the importance of developing human capital as a central aspect to sustainable assemblings. This chapter analyzes how the organization approaches their video practices throughout diverse possibility spaces spread across India. Situating the work of Video Volunteers, chapter six also discusses other forms of emerging digital video practices in India. Examining Video Volunteers offers a critical reflection on how one organization can act as a catalyst for a variety of assemblages.

Chapter seven analyzes the Wellington based charitable trust, Inspiring Stories, a growing and morphing documentary film workshop for youth that conducts programming throughout New Zealand. As well, this chapter examines the creative video practices and challenges that Greenpeace New Zealand, the Auckland based protest video documentarian, Linda M., and finally the recently established, New Zealand On Air and New Zealand Film Commission project,



Loading Docs, face in their quests to craft sustainable video practices and bring storytelling to the fore within their specific and very different communities and audiences. Case studies from preceding chapters have contemplated digital video practices situated in democratic and differently networked environments. A number of these progressions persist throughout these New Zealand case studies, yet many elements differ. The digital video practices rooted in activism of the previous chapters have been deeply anchored and became specific in their focus on human rights and social justice issues. However, some of the New Zealand based practices have misread the importance of human capacities, privileging technology over identifying necessary skills and nurturing practitioners. Subsequently, their supportive structures are not as highly robust and thus the creative capacities throughout these New Zealand case studies seem more tenuous in their depth and reach.

The eighth and final chapter of this dissertation revisits these case studies in order to situate them within the cohesive arguments of this PhD research. Although many questions have emerged throughout the duration of my fieldwork, as well as during the writing process, the conclusion revisits the initial questions that helped form the genesis of this project and analyzes how these questions have been answered and which questions might need further exploration in future research projects. Additionally, I briefly return to the theory and methodology behind my research in order to re-situate and reflect upon my PhD project as a whole.

Thus returning to the many questions of this dissertation, how are multiple creative practices that utilize recent and often changing digital video technologies emerging? Are these nascent practices occurring spontaneously as technological

determinists would suggest or might their origin be almost evolutionary, intricate, evolving, complex? Furthermore, how might these practices connect to more formal traditions of documentary media making?

The limitations of the possibility space or diagram that these organizations and individuals are forced to create within guides digital video practices into a collaborative effort integrating elements that are adapted during the creative process. Creative restrictions can present impediments to the artistic process, but these restrictions also have liberating qualities that often strengthen or push the imagination to extend beyond the limitations of preconceived boundaries. These collective and forming relationships between the expressive and the material are becomings and assemblings. Felix Guattari explains the emergence of collective enunciation within the formation of these assemblages. Guattari (1995, p. 120) writes:

In this respect, we should note that it is entirely possible that the new communication technologies will contribute to a renewal of similar means of elaboration and intervention. But it is not these, as such, that will trigger creative sparks, that will engender pockets of awareness capable of deploying constructive perspectives. New collective assemblages of enunciation are beginning to form an identity out of fragmentary ventures, at times risky initiatives, trial and error experiments; different ways of seeing and of making the world, different ways of being and of bringing to light modalities of being will open up, be irrigated and enrich one another. It is less of a question of having access to novel cognitive spheres than of apprehending and creating, in pathic modes, mutant existential virtualities.

This is important. Guattari is saying that new creative practices emerge from fragments of experimentation, through trial and error, not due to one specific technology. Technology, creativity, and the relationships between the two feed off one another and from the energy that is harnessed, assemblages of expression are created. These assemblages may collapse, but they also may thrive. It is the

nature of the elements present within a possibility space to engage with the potentials of these relationships in order to test the connections between each other and thus see if sustainable assemblages might emerge. Guattari's thoughts reinforce our understanding of the living and temporary nature of assemblages as well as mirror many of the relationships that arise within the case studies of this project.

The particular digital video practices explored within the chapters of this dissertation have commenced from witnessing and have taken time to surface and mature. Although these affordable video technologies may be present within our daily lives, it is the process of nurturing emerging video practices that presents a challenge. Though many people might own mobile phone cameras that have the potential to record video, most citizens don't engage with their expressive capacities and in turn, the capacities of the video technologies that surround them. A naiveté exists that the mere presence of accessible video technologies sparks nascent forms of documentary video practices (Newman 2014, p. 104). This dissertation examines, scrutinizes and questions the varied complexities behind the emergence of a number of very specific digital video practices rooted in human rights, protest and social justice movements. Why do some individuals and organizations decide to embrace these video technologies? What sorts of creative, infrastructural and sustainability challenges do these video practices and citizen practitioners face along the way? Might the use of these video tools reformulate the boundaries of the documentary film? And with these emerging creative practices what sorts of limitations become visible or invisible to the practitioners experimenting with these portable technologies, online platforms for distribution and transition spaces of documentary storytelling and citizen

journalism? The following chapters seek to engage with these questions and analyze a diverse range of recent and emerging digital video practices that are often centered on issues of human rights, social justice and protest movements in very specific global possibility spaces.

## ***CHAPTER 2 – Theory***

### **2.1 - Assembling, Assemblages & Creative Practice**

On a cold early June winter morning in the Waikato district of the North Island of New Zealand, I found myself sitting in a community center in the small city of Hamilton surrounded by a group of high school kids, a few local teachers and two workshop facilitators who were gathered in order to partake in a free day-long community based filmmaking workshop sponsored by the New Zealand charitable trust, Connected Media. The morning was spent discussing filmmaking in its many forms and genres and before lunch the lead facilitator, almost apologetically, brought up the issue of music and copyright, stressing that any short film submitted to a linked youth film festival called, *The Outlook for Someday*, would need to be legally cleared and that in the past, the use of popular music had sometimes been an issue. Looking around the room at the students, who ranged from 11 to 16 years of age, it seemed as if this valiant effort at discussing legal matters might have fallen on deaf ears. The kids were hungry and only minimally interested in all this legal mumbo jumbo. “Any questions before we eat?” Ilai Amir, the workshop leader inquired. One of the students raised his hand and asked something to the effect: we’ve been watching all these clips from short films and advertisements and I just wanted to know, well, what if we like something that we see on television, can we copy that, can we use that? “Yes definitely,” Amir replied, almost in contradiction to his prior pre-lunch copyright spiel. “Anytime you see something you like,” he continued, “you should remember what it is and use it and then you’ll begin to create your own style.”

How and why do creative practices develop? This question, along with a number of others, is one of a few core interests that this chapter will begin to explore. In order to begin to analyze my research and address these questions, it is critical to introduce a theoretical approach to my study that helps in considering the multiple elements that inform, influence, shape and assist in the creation of the geographically diverse, culturally distinct, technologically varied, wide range of documentary practices and practitioners that constitute the critical case studies of my dissertation.

Manuel DeLanda's interpretation and re-envisioning of Gilles Deleuze's *assemblage theory* is the theoretical framework in which I analyze the fieldwork and findings of my PhD research. Examining digital video practices through the lens of assemblage theory offers a useful theoretical approach that counters assumptions about universal effects of technology across diverse social and political contexts. It also counters an overvaluing of technology or lone human creative endeavors, re-framing creative capacities to an assembling of human and non-human elements. Technology means very different things in different locations and throughout various assemblages. This dissertation focuses on the relationships between supportive structures, creative capacities and digital technologies within emerging assemblings. My use of assemblage theory began early in this project as my fieldwork was designed and shaped through this theoretical framework. I embarked upon my interview process with a keen comprehension that the relationships between technologies, creativity, networks and supportive structures were swirling – alive and vivid – throughout multiple assemblages.

As we will see throughout this dissertation, creative practices often emerge from a wide variety of accumulated technologies and previous practices and ideas. Ideas build upon previous ideas. Artistic styles help to create and inform new styles. This is why the above short anecdote from the film workshop is such an apt example to begin this chapter on the theory that surrounds my dissertation. We are all informed by previous creative influences, just like many technologies are informed by prior technologies or individual elements of those technologies. As Brian Arthur (2009, p. 38) writes:

[...] technology consists of building blocks that are technologies, which consist of further building blocks that are technologies, which consist of yet further building blocks that are technologies, with the pattern repeating all the way down to the fundamental level of elemental components. Technologies, in other words, have a recursive structure. They consist of technologies within technologies all the way down to the elemental parts.<sup>2</sup>

Assemblage theory provides a vantage point that allows for distinct analysis of the multiple variables that often form together at specific moments in time and aid the formation of creative practices. This dissertation will explore how, at times, creative practices and technologies are mutually beneficial, whereas in other instances (or locations) this relationship might diverge. Sometimes assemblages are conducive in fuelling creative practices towards a wider and prolonged dissemination throughout the world. At other times similar assemblages can be incredibly brief, or possibly even disappointing in their brevity and reach. Current technology and platforms for dissemination are, in a

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Arthur's argument uses an evolutionary model. He maintains that technology continues to become more complex and evolved as new iterations emerge. This assertion does not necessarily mesh smoothly with assemblage theory; yet both the parallels and dissimilarities at play in the evolution between technologies, creative practitioners and digital video practices are important to link to and address.

sense, like weather patterns. You may be able to see them as they approach on the horizon, yet to predict how they will interact within a specific environment is very difficult and might be completely different in another landscape. Digital video practices are deeply embedded within the local and reliant on a host of interacting elements, of which the malleability of creative capacities reinforced by supportive structures is crucial. Practitioners often consciously, sometimes subconsciously adjust and experiment as new technologies emerge, reduce, improve and transform. It is clear that for technologies or creative practices to sustain these tendencies of adaptation must be present.

The value of assemblage is in its ability as a theory to account for the dynamic and shifting relationships emerging as these creative practices birth and assemble. My use of assemblage is much more – a practice of a theory. It is a conceptual way of looking and mapping the surfacing of elements as they evolve within the possibility spaces of the case studies examined. Uniquely as a lens, assemblage helps to distinguish and analyze multiple factors; therefore, assemblage theory aids in the understanding of assemblings as living and temporary confluences. Other theoretical approaches seemed to be rather flat in respect to the challenges in understanding the dynamism of emerging digital video practices.<sup>3</sup> Throughout this project, my intention has been not to re-work assemblage theory, but to use it to better understand how these practices have emerged and are emerging, transitioning, changing and at times, dissolving. This

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<sup>3</sup> Media ecology and actor-network theory are examples of other theories that did not seem to suit the reach of this study. For further reading on media ecology, see Mathew Fuller's *Media ecologies: Materialist energies in art and technoculture* (MIT Press, 2005) and for an introduction into actor-network theory, see Bruno Latour's *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2005).



is not to say that assemblage theory does not have weaknesses. As a theory, it tends to focus on relations between elements and not necessarily on singular traits specific to elements themselves. At times, this can be tricky to navigate. Nevertheless, assemblage theory offers a way to comprehend the intricacies of these practices and this assemblage aperture provides a new way of seeing and opens up layers of knowledge that might be otherwise hidden.

What is assemblage? Where does it come from? How does it form? Assemblages, whether they are technologies, social structures, creative practices or another formation, emerge from a multiple set of possibilities, the notion of a *diagram* being a way of conceptualizing the environment in which these possibilities are actualized. As DeLanda (2006, p. 125-126) writes, a diagram is ‘a display of relations of force, or of a distribution of capacities to affect and be affected. Since capacities may exist without being exercised (i.e. since they may exist as possibilities) they form a possibility space, and a diagram would display whatever structure this space has.’ To elucidate this idea of a diagram, which this dissertation will refer to as a *possibility space*, let us take the simple example of real estate in the town of Raglan, a small community on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand where I happened to live for large parts of the project. Every Thursday in the *Raglan Chronicle*, the local weekly newspaper, the majority of the advertising is taken up by real estate companies. If you are a potential homeowner, you could buy either a house or a plot of land, the latter in which you would then build your own home. The significant aspects of the possibility space in this instance might be the land base, legal requirements and various home owning possibilities.

Now let's say you were to buy a plot of land. In this instance, the possibility space would reduce to the land you have purchased and there would be a multitude of different assemblages that could form to create the place you would call home. Yet standing on the curb, looking at your patch of grass, all you might see is a number of abstract possibilities. This would also be the possibility space that encompasses the ways in which the development of your land might evolve. You can drive to the lumberyard or confer with an architect and then you would have a better idea of the wide range of potentials for assembling your home. However, there might be a number of variables either visible or invisible that could impact what sort of home you might build. The land could be on a steep hill and thus you might only have the option to set a specific foundation, which subsequently might give you a limited range of choices for the type of home you could erect. Maybe there are unforeseen zoning laws that also direct or restrict your building in certain ways. Perhaps there are no limitations but a variety of internal or external singularities that converge at that time to influence the assemblage of your home.

The assemblages this dissertation examines are often not as concrete as the building of a home. Instead, this project focuses on practitioners engaging with digital video practices and it is these individuals who play a critical role negotiating the interactions between the creative capacities, supportive structures and digital technologies present in the many assemblages examined throughout this dissertation. Additionally, most of the assemblages we will be discussing integrate converging singularities that include technology, available infrastructure, cultural histories, documentary practices, creative modes of storytelling, political contexts, activism, platforms for dissemination, protest

movements, employment opportunities, power structures, and the creative capacities of individuals.

One of the key elements critical to the generation of sustainable digital video practices centered on human rights and social justice is the interaction between human and non-human components of these assemblages. In this context, capacities to connect that are supported by affiliated networks along with a creative adaptability present in the work of a practitioner provides more flexibility for the sustainability and assembling of digital video practices. Over time, this type of creative nourishment has the potential to develop relationships between digital video practices and the tangible ingredients necessary to engage and disseminate moving images through online platforms and via hardware and software tools. As J-D Dewsbury (2011, p. 151) writes:

In other words, agency is distributed via the materiality of the body as a mutually constitutive communication with the materiality of the world, and assemblage becomes ever more vital a concept given it now resonates with the discovery of ever more nuanced understandings of body-brain-material compositions.

The importance of capacities to connect can work both ways and can also present constraints to the evolution of assemblages. As there are assembling relationships that fall outside the boundaries of specific control or reach of a central practitioner within an assemblage, there are also moments in which a practitioner might make a specific decision that works against the progression of their practice. By no means does this thesis argue that the creative capacities of a practitioner is the only element necessary for the sustainability of a video practice, it argues that these capacities, within supportive structures of the organizations and individuals that surround these practices are crucial factors for the health of the assemblage as it merges, dissolves and reformulates. The relationship is

tenuous. However with flexibility and a deliberate comprehension of the possibility spaces by the individuals present within these assemblings, creative longevity is given a greater chance to thrive.

To return, the above real estate example provides a straightforward way of envisioning a diagram or possibility space. As DeLanda (2006, p. 126) writes:

[...] the diagram of an assemblage involves *unformalized functions and unformed matter*. This means that diagrams have an abstract structure in which the expressive and the material are not differentiated, a differentiation that emerges only when the diagram is divergently actualized in concrete assemblages.

To finalize this home into a concrete form, there are a number of other elements of this diagram that have not yet been mentioned that might also inform the assemblage of the house. Architectural traditions of New Zealand, available materials, financial situation of the owners, climate and where the vision of the homeowner merges with these multiple elements are also parts of the possibility space and effect the assembling of this eventual residence.

Assemblages are always changing. As DeLanda (2011, p. 184) stresses, ‘the properties of a whole depend on the actual exercise of the capacities of its parts implies that removing one of them may indeed destroy the whole’s identity, but the part itself will not lose its own identity.’ DeLanda then uses the example of removing a heart from one animal and placing it into another. However I’ll steer clear of horror for a brief moment and stick to the example of this new home. Even in building or owning a home, assemblages are never completely static or concrete. An assortment of elements can change, be taken away, added, shifted, readjusted to form a different assemblage or a completely new assemblage. The house itself is not, as DeLanda (2011, p. 184) might remark, *a seamless totality*. Hinges can be removed and reused. A wooden deck might be

ripped apart and used to build the walls of an outdoor shower. An old stove may be recycled. Steel and metal are melted. Glass from a table becomes part of a window. Those individual parts become elements of other assemblages. Maybe your family grows, you might move or tear down one house to build another. This is a key component of DeLanda's interpretation of assemblage theory; assemblages are emergent wholes and 'are defined not only by their properties but also by their tendencies and capacities' (DeLanda 2011, p. 185). DeLanda (2011, p. 185-186) continues, defining those terms:

Tendencies can make the properties of a whole vary, sometimes even changing its identity, as when an ice sculpture characterized by its solidity and its shape manifests its tendency to melt at a certain temperature, losing those properties and much of its identity. Capacities, in turn, make wholes exhibit aspects of their identity that were previously hidden, as when an innocent plant turns out to be poisonous or, on the contrary, to possess unexpected healing powers.

Thus even this house presents tendencies that might at first glance appear permanent and static, a wall in the kitchen upon further inspection is actually a patchwork of old wine bottles. Or capacities that redefine elements of the emergent whole, the roof for example, turns out to be covered in solar cells, transforming not only the rays of the sun into energy but also quite possibly affecting the relationship of the house to the energy grid, taxes, environmental movements and so forth. These numerous factors can have consequences that at any time might change or allow for the formations of new assemblages. Sometimes the possibility space might shift a little bit, allowing new potentials to emerge and perhaps assemble. Yet it is more often than not the readjusting of singularities within a diagram that form assemblages.

Before moving away from this house and our neighborhood, let me address a couple of additional elements of DeLanda's re-working of assemblage

theory that are significant and incredibly important to my dissertation. DeLanda defines the concept of assemblage along two different dimensions or axes. He states that one axis, ‘defines the variable roles which an assemblage’s components may play, from a purely *material* role at one extreme of the axis, to a purely *expressive* role at the other extreme’ (DeLanda 2006, p. 12). He goes on to remind us that these roles are variable and may occur in combinations, ‘that is, a given component may play a mixture of material and expressive roles by exercising different sets of capacities’ (DeLanda 2006, p. 12). Graham Harman in his fascinating critique of DeLanda’s assemblage theory finds fault with this first axis. Harman (2008, p. 378) states that it is problematic and that DeLanda, ‘never really tells us what the *properties* of a thing are outside its relations. Are the properties of an assemblage material or expressive?’ Yet, I interpret this axis clearly. The properties of an assemblage don’t need to be defined as either material or expressive because they are often both at once. Assemblage isn’t necessarily one or the other. I would argue that at the same time assemblage is frequently and simultaneously both material and expressive. This house, for example, is a combination of materials and a material object in and of itself, yet at the same moment it is the embodiment of creative expression. It evokes feelings and emotion from the owners, visitors and those that pass by while walking down the street.

The assemblings that form the core case studies of my dissertation are quintessentially and concurrently material and expressive. They consist of digital video practices, creative experimentations with technologies and forms of narrative, non-profit organizations, smartphone video applications, collaborative documentary films, community based educational trusts, and most critically, the

interconnected relationships between the creative capacities of practitioners and the support networks formed within these assemblages. Fundamentally, individuals with intentions, dreams, ideas and the ability to act on their creative urges are integral to the sustainability of these assemblings. As Dewsbury (2011, p. 152) writes, examining the shifting relationships constantly occurring in the formation of new assemblages:

It is not change for change's sake; rather it is attentiveness to the transformative potential in the world, which gives due regard to the fact that change is not just willed by us humans but comes about equally through the materialities of the world in which we are just a part, and which, through habit, we encompass in the everyday, ever changing, assemblage of thought, intensity and matter.

Assemblages are both material beings as well as magnificently expressive and creative art forms, practices and people. Yet most importantly, it is crucial that both expressive and material roles come into play. As I will argue, a crucial element of the formation of assemblages is found within the material and expressive syntheses in the uses of various digital tools, ideas and methods of practice within the case studies of this dissertation.

The second axis that DeLanda discusses later in the same passage is even more critical to my PhD study. DeLanda (2006, p. 12) states:

The other dimension defines variable processes in which these components become involved and that either stabilize the identity of an assemblage, by increasing its degree of internal homogeneity or the degree of sharpness of its boundaries, or destabilize it. The former are referred to as processes of *territorialization* and the latter as processes of *detrterritorialization*. One and the same assemblage can have components working to stabilize its identity as well as components forcing it to change or even transforming it into a different assemblage. In fact, one and the same component may participate in both processes by exercising different sets of capacities.

For DeLanda (2006, p. 13), an example of territorialization could be, ‘the segregation processes which increase the ethnic or racial homogeneity of a neighborhood.’ Within the context of our house, perhaps the family is not even allowed to purchase the land because the community board that has to approve the sale won’t endorse the bid based on their ethnicity or caste or job description. Or maybe the neighborhood is not incredibly diverse in the first place. Perhaps if the land is purchased, there are zoning restrictions on the way in which homes are built or rules on the color of paints that may be applied to the outside of houses. These examples would fall into DeLanda’s definition of territorialization. They all reinforce and stabilize the internal homogeneity of the assemblage. The inclusion of different ethnic groups or castes within a homogenized community or the novel inclusion of a unique home within zoning regulations (for example, the first instance of solar panels on a roof) would be the process of deterritorialization.

In *A New Philosophy of Society*, DeLanda (2006, p. 13) explains deterritorialization through the example of communication technology and discusses the ways in which systems such as postal mail, telephones or computers, ‘blur the spatial boundaries of social entities by eliminating the need for co-presence.’ However, I’m not convinced that the use of communication technologies offers the best example of deterritorialization. Within the context of my research, deterritorialization is important in a number of ways, but it becomes most influential in the sense that many of the practitioners present in my case studies are empowered and constrained in both material and expressive ways. As we will see, sometimes these recently learned creative capacities play roles not only in the emerging media making of the practitioners involved, but also in the



ways in which these new skills deterritorialize and challenge practices, media, platforms, methods of storytelling, traditions of journalism, power and class structures. The expansion of creative abilities often goes hand in hand with the evolution of new tools and knowledge of the ways in which these digital tools can be used and experimented with. From these knowledge bases and new skill sets, the process of deterritorialization may begin to emerge, capacities to interact might expand, the possibilities for assemblages to synthesize gather steam and practitioners themselves often step outside of comfort zones within their perceived homogenized populations, expanding their roles in communities and at times challenging discourses through the process of deterritorialization. These emerging shifts, changes, and formations are what DeLanda (2006, p. 10) describes as the *mechanisms of emergence*, which he defines as, ‘the possibility of complex interactions between component parts.’ The emergence of assemblage relies on a number of diverse factors that are fluid processes, constantly prone to change and reformation.<sup>4</sup>

DeLanda also addresses the importance of acquiring new skills. I find his lengthy description as one of the most inspiring passages in *A New Philosophy of Society*. In it he adds that personal identity, ‘may be deterritorialized not only by loss of stability but also by augmentation of capacities’ (DeLanda 2006, p. 50). DeLanda then discusses the importance of the effects of the *acquisition of new skills*. He eloquently describes how vital and revolutionary these skills can be:

When a young child learns to swim or to ride a bicycle, for example, a new world suddenly opens up for experience, filled with new impressions and ideas. The new skill is deterritorializing to the extent that it allows the child to break with past routine by venturing away from home in a new

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<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that this thesis takes snapshots of these assemblings in specific times and spaces.

vehicle, or inhabiting previously forbidden spaces like the ocean. New skills, in short, increase one's capacities to affect and be affected, or to put it differently, increase one's capacities to enter into novel assemblages, the assemblage that the human body forms with a bicycle, a piece of solid ground and a gravitational field, for example. Of course, the exercise of a new skill can soon become routine unless one continues to push the learning process in new directions. (DeLanda 2006, p. 50)

More often than not, my PhD research examines the relationships between singular elements within assemblages that when synthesized tend to present deterritorializing processes. As Colin McFarlane and Ben Anderson (2011, p. 162) note, 'it is partly this constant tension of formation and form that assemblage perhaps uniquely brings to different areas of human geography.' Often within the case studies of my research, as assemblages are forming, personal identities and practices are deterritorializing as burgeoning digital video practices expand. Practitioners begin to see creative possibilities emerge and flourish. This process does not happen overnight. Deterritorialization of the individual or of an organization or an establishment for that matter may affect assemblages in a multitude of ways by shifting, changing, creating, or even ending assemblages. This dissertation is an exploration of the potential of using an assemblage lens to approach complex digital video practices and this theoretical perspective is applied in different ways across numerous practices throughout a scattering of terrains.

One of the key differences that surround the possibility spaces and forming assemblages of my PhD research is that practitioners tend to engage with certain elements present in their assemblages more than others. For practitioners, some factors are clearly defined and thus certain aspects that empower or constrain their practice are transparent. Yet these sorts of understandings differ depending on circumstances. The acknowledgement of possibilities might be

contingent on their own capacities to connect in respect to reading emerging opportunities within their assemblings. At other times, the clarity of the assemblage might be murky and possibility spaces difficult to interpret. The lens of assemblage theory helps in distinguishing and analyzing individual factors present in a possibility space, as well as aids in the understanding of assemblage as a living temporary confluence. In order to take the idea of assemblage further, let us explore how it is helpful in analyzing and re-reading a couple of specific historic documentary moments and movements. We will also continue to integrate additional layers of DeLanda's re-envisioning of Deleuze's assemblage theory, what DeLanda (2006, p. 14) himself calls his 'neo-assemblage theory' or 'assemblage theory 2.0.' With this re-examination we will begin to talk a little bit more about how technology forms, as well as how creative practices, tools, organizations and ideas assemble.

To reiterate, assembling becomes the way in which some of the variables of the broader possibilities of a possibility space emerge and combine to create a cohesive and fluid working productive process. As previously stressed, assemblages are always in the process of becoming and disintegrating. Part of my research examines the factors that encourage them to form and stabilize for a time, exploring how and why they dissolve and develop into new assemblages. Assemblage theory and social complexity steers clear of reflection focused on technology as the sole determining solution and re-centers research and analysis, connecting both the human and non-human components assembling within the variables present in a larger possibility space. This dissertation is focused on the human agents within these assemblings. The primary objective is not to counter technological determinism, but to explore the complex relationships between

factors such as human agency, technologies, support systems and networked infrastructure. As the fieldwork for this dissertation has often centered on digital video based online practitioners documenting or involved in activism in a number of contexts, I'd like to engage with assemblage theory through the lens and reach of Alice Harris' photographs that emerged out of the Congo Free State at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Photographic imagery ingrained with a human rights based documentary agenda provided critical support for the development of early human rights campaigns and organizations. Furthermore, I will re-read the evolution of the direct cinema movement through the vantage point of assemblage theory to reassess the significance of emerging capacities to connect in order to counterbalance the privileged importance often given to the burgeoning mobile film technologies of the time.

## **2.2 - Informing Assemblages, the Camera in the Congo**

As has already been extensively documented, it wasn't until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Kodak Brownie camera was introduced to the public, that photographers were offered an affordable, lightweight, portable camera.<sup>5</sup> At the time, camera technology was young and Kodak was experimenting with new materials that allowed for smaller cameras that were easier to use and more affordable for consumers. It was the early days of photographic film and similar

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<sup>5</sup> Many scholars have written about the Kodak Brownie camera, see: Kamal Munir and Nelson Phillips' (2005) 'The Birth of the "Kodak Moment": Institutional Entrepreneurship and the Adoption of New Technologies,' Richard Tedlow's (1997) 'The Beginning of Mass Marketing in America: George Eastman and Photography as a Case Study,' Reese Jenkins' (1975) 'Technology and the market: George Eastman and the origins of mass amateur photography' and Marc Olivier's (2007) 'George Eastman's Modern Stone-Age Family: Snapshot Photography and the Brownie.'

to the ways in which current digital photographic technology is constantly changing, so too was photography at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is the nature of technologies and the camera is a great example of technological shifts, even up to the present day. As Brian Arthur (2009, p. 42) reinforces, ‘In the real world, technologies are highly reconfigurable; they are fluid things, never static, never finished, never perfect.’ Creative practice is also a very fluid process, unstable and always evolving. Often new tools help inform a method of artistic creation, though I argue that it is the relationship between those tools, the artist and the available platforms of representation that aid the evolution of creativity.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in what was then the Congo Free State, British missionaries such as Alice Harris, her husband John Harris and others used Kodak cameras to capture the atrocities of King Leopold II’s army as it pillaged the natural landscape and local Congolese communities in search of rubber and taxes. In February of 1900, the Kodak Brownie camera had been released with a list price of one U.S. dollar (George Eastman House [GEH] Technology Archive 2000). Although the Kodak Brownie was lightweight and mobile, most of Alice Harris’ photographs from the Congo Free State were captured using a dry plate camera (George Eastman had been producing dry plates since the late 1800s).<sup>6</sup> Utilizing these recently available photographic tools (Sliwinski 2011, p. 64), Harris responded to the atrocities she witnessed in the rural Congo, shooting numerous portraits of Congolese who had suffered violence and torture at the hands of the colonizing Belgian Army. These photographs would soon become intimately tied to the collection and presentation of evidence

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<sup>6</sup> For a timeline of historical moments in the early history of Kodak, see, [http://www.kodak.com/ek/US/en/Our\\_Company/History\\_of\\_Kodak/Milestones\\_-\\_chronology/1878-1929.htm](http://www.kodak.com/ek/US/en/Our_Company/History_of_Kodak/Milestones_-_chronology/1878-1929.htm). Accessed 1 September 2014.

within the context of these human rights abuses. This crucial linkage displays an early distinctive relationship between lens-based media and the emergence of vital elements of a documentary agenda.

At the time of Harris' images, photographs were a relatively new medium of visual expression. It was the confluence of the vicious extent of Leopold's exceptionally harsh rule, documented by Harris and others, along with the noble work of the abolitionist activists of the Congo Reform Association (CRA), who succeeded in disseminating these images of atrocity. Harris' photographs helped develop an existing assemblage that was forming from a community of like-minded people devoted to social justice – the Congo Reform Association. Her images served a purpose, strengthening the CRA's reports of human rights violations coming out of the Congo, and further aiding an already growing movement to stop the violence in the Belgian Congo. Sharon Sliwinski (2011, p. 67) writes, 'Similar to the way in which the emergence of the concept of crimes against humanity presupposes the prior emergence of humanity as such, the photograph presupposed the prior existence of a mass public that could witness the event.'

Although Sliwinski mentions *emergence* in the context of the birth of a shared understanding of human rights offenses, returning to it helps us gain a better understanding of how at that moment, Alice Harris' photographic practice fits into all of this. DeLanda (2006, p. 10) notes that, 'a whole may be both analyzable into separate parts and at the same time have irreducible properties, properties that emerge from the *interactions* between parts.' It is necessary to remember that assemblages are not simply static cohesive syntheses. They are often constantly changing and interacting within themselves and concurrently in

multiple other assemblages (as is the case with Harris and her images). As John Allen (2011, p. 154-155) illustrates, ‘the geography of this or that is made up of relationships and things that jostle, co-exist, interfere and entangle one another.’ Though sometimes an assemblage might seem to be a flawless system, we must remember and be reminded that assemblages are better conceived as ‘assemblings’ in order to emphasize their nonpermanent nature. Assemblages can collapse at any moment or dissolve over a long duration of time.

Assemblage theory is unyielding in its insistence that assemblages consist of individual parts that when synthesized together create working structures. These individual parts can also be thought of as capacities, which may or may not be exercised or used. Sometimes the formulation of assemblages might be a premeditated union between component parts and other times it might involve an unintended consequence that allows elements within a possibility space to assemble. It is often both – a combination of foreseen and unforeseen consequences. The potentialities present between components in a possibility space are what DeLanda (2006, p. 10) would call the *capacities to interact* and thus assemble. These capacities are numerous. As abundant elements of a possibility space are in flux (ideas, technology, infrastructure and people all rearrange constantly), the capacities to interact also shift and morph. DeLanda (2006, p. 10) insists that, ‘there is no way to tell in advance in what way a given entity may affect or be affected by innumerable other entities.’ This is often true. Yet sometimes there are hints as to how assemblages might be affected by additional or reinforcing relationships between singular elements.

As Sliwinski explains, when John Harris saw the photograph that his wife had processed, that of a Congolese man named Nsala, sitting on a porch looking

at the severed hand and foot of his daughter Boala, he immediately thought of how it would affect an audience. As Sliwinski (2011, p. 67) states, ‘He imagined, in other words, that the image was a powerful tool that could arouse public judgment.’ This goes back to Sliwinski’s earlier point that at the time there was a commonality, or one could say a consciousness, beginning to emerge within a different space of possibilities, that of a shared understanding of human rights. Furthermore from Harris’ vision, there was the understanding that these photographs could work as visual documentation *and* that people might accept these photographs as reality on the ground.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there might have also been a broader set of discourses operating that gave credence to the value and utility of scientific knowledge fostered by the Enlightenment.

Although John Harris could have had no concrete expectations as to how these images would affect the larger diagram and the revolving assemblages of the time period, I would argue that he had an inkling and foresight as to some of the possibilities that could emerge. The understanding of the potential for assemblages to form or to anticipate their promise, I will define as a *consciousness of the possibility space*. A possibility space, similar to trying to read weather patterns, can only offer forecasts to further potentials. Yet to be able to analyze assemblages within a possibility space, consciously or subconsciously, can be important for the creation of novel assemblages or for the ability of a specific assemblage to be experimented with or placed in a different assemblage. In the wider context of photography or the moving image being situated around

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<sup>7</sup> Photographs taken by other missionaries of atrocities in the Congo at the same time were disputed as fakes by newspapers in Brussels (Sliwinski 2011, p. 64). This has been an issue since the dawn of photography and lens-based documentation. Unfortunately, history has also proven that documentary imagery doesn’t necessarily spark intervention.



the support of human rights campaigns, there are a number of avenues in which human agency might be exercised as these creative capacities operate within a variety of economic, social, political and cultural constraints. The impact of individual or organizational agency is complicated in that specific actions might lead to unintended consequences, or be based upon false knowledge or an incorrect understanding, or lead to (or result from) conflict in different ways, or at times, these relationships can spiral out of the control of the practitioners involved. The cultivation of creative capacities within these possibility spaces emerges over time. It is not spontaneous. Besides, assemblages are fragile and dynamic and human agency is tenuous. Often, the dissemination, use or interpretation of the case studies throughout this dissertation can be re-appropriated in ways that are beyond the control of their makers.

As for Harris' images, other elements of the possibility space formed to assemble the dissemination of her photographs. At least two books and a monthly journal printed Harris' many photographs from the Congo. As well, the Congo Reform Association formed in March of 1904. As Sliwinski (2011, p. 58) explains, it was 'the first humanitarian movement to use atrocity photographs as a central campaign tool.' Harris' images became part of the CRA's assemblies and calls to action. The use of the Kodak camera to document atrocities taking place in the Congo was an unintended consequence of the technology itself. The numerous individualities of that time (publishing, a burgeoning human rights organization, photographic technology, transport and access in and out of the Congo) allowed for the emergence of these individual parts and the creation of an assemblage that supported a number of unintended consequences to coalesce. Mark Twain's oft-cited satirical condemnation of King Leopold II's exasperation

over the representation of his harsh rule in the Congo, expresses Leopold's imagined incredulity over the power and global reach of the photographic image.

Mocking Leopold, Twain (2005, p. 53-54) wrote:

The kodak has been a sore calamity to us. The most powerful enemy that has confronted us, indeed. American missionaries and exasperated foreigners... Then all of a sudden came the crash! That is to say, the incorruptible *kodak* - and all harmony went to hell! The only witness I couldn't bribe. Every Yankee missionary and every interrupted trader sent home and got one; and now - oh, well, the pictures get sneaked around everywhere, in spite of all we can do to ferret them out and suppress them... Then that trivial little kodak, that a child can carry in its pocket, gets up, uttering never a word, and knocks them dumb!

One might argue, that this assemblage, though temporary, in fact helped to create and birth a new method of visual representation, an entire category of human rights reportage photography and lens-based imagery rooted in activism that persists and thrives to this day. Harris' photographs both *supported and were supported* by the human rights campaign birthed around the atrocities taking place in the Congo. Harris' body of work had a specific documentary agenda and her photographic practices link to Michael Renov's (1993, p. 21) previously referenced four tendencies of documentary.<sup>8</sup> Harris' creative capacities supported by an emerging human rights network back in Britain fuelled the spread of her documentary photography and reinforced the claims that the Liverpool based Congo Reform Association were making about an area of the world far removed from the United Kingdom. As we will see, these sorts of human and technological relationships, emerging documentary agendas and their roles in the formation of truth claims are urgent and labyrinthine throughout the case studies and fieldwork of this dissertation.

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Renov's four tendencies were discussed earlier in chapter 1.

Interestingly, the evolution of a camera that a child can carry in his or her pocket still plays an integral role in the way that human rights violations are documented and activism movements are recorded. Harris' photographs and their dissemination challenged the homogeneity of the photographic image, situating it within the context of human rights, social justice and activism and offering an influential and forming process of deterritorialization. Though ebbing in and out of importance with the flow of technology, the small portable camera has now become a central element of present day visual documentation. Furthermore, documentary history *can* be re-approached through assemblage theory as its lens provides a new perspective on the construction of the direct cinema movement. Through assemblage, we can begin to more clearly understand the complex and fragile dynamics that emerged as filmmakers experimented with the expressive and material elements assembling during the formation of direct cinema.

### **2.3 - Revisiting Direct Cinema As Assemblage**

Revisiting the direct cinema movement that emerged out of the documentary practices of the late 1950s and early 1960s through the lens of assemblage theory offers insight into the ways in which technologies are utilized and routes that creative practices take as they assemble within a wider possibility space. A re-reading of the direct cinema movement is important to this research because the experimental approaches of these filmmakers evolved into a number of precursory documentary methods that formed within possibility spaces of innovative technology merging with novel exploratory filmmaking and subject matter. Yet scrutinizing direct cinema through assemblage theory also reassesses

the validity of democratic rhetoric grounded in the proliferation of new technologies.

The possibility spaces associated with the advent of affordable lightweight film cameras and the introduction of synchronized sound provided alternative approaches and potentialities for the documentary filmmakers of the 1960s. The direct cinema movement, energized by the work of documentary film directors such as Robert Drew, D.A. Pennebaker, Richard Leacock and Albert and David Maysles initiated the fusion of a new mobility in documentary. The direct cinema movement was by no means a smooth segue from previous methods of documentary filmmaking. These filmmakers were pushing to explore new possibilities and looking for new tools. In some instances, they were helping to design camera and sound technologies while at the same time experimenting with the capabilities of evolving camera equipment. These cameras had evolved from larger and bulkier cameras that offered hints of mobility yet had not been developed to the degree in which portability and camera work flowed seamlessly and with ease. Though clunky but workable, the cameras that emerged in the early 1960s were the first such cameras in which agile movement and filmmaking began to meld, offering allusions to a promising symbiosis between camera, mobility and sound in the coming years and decades.

Various elements, not just technology, but crucially, key individuals who were primed for new practices could see the possibilities for documentary film and were pushing to exploit particular technological possibilities. Robert Drew had been a picture editor at *LIFE* magazine. Drew had been more inspired by the photographs that graced the pages of *LIFE*, than by the evolving documentary film practices and practitioners of the budding and similar cinema vérité

movement emerging in France or the direct cinema movement forming in the United States (Longfield 2009, 10-11). Working for *LIFE*, Drew had begun to realize that Americans were more and more comfortable with the camera's presence and that there was a blossoming relationship forming between what was captured on camera and the audience. As Dave Saunders (2007, p. 9) writes, 'if filmic subjects and situations were chosen judiciously, thought Drew, then unstaged life in America becoming accustomed to the camera's presence and function might yield up its own mode of truth.' Drew's understanding of these relationships was paired with the intention to explore new spaces. A political urgency stoked these new documentary practices. Similar to John Harris' foresight in the Belgian Congo, Drew had the awareness to sense that possibility spaces were shifting (the public as an audience, for example, might be more open to different sorts of documentary storytelling due to their exposure and understanding of the camera). Though Drew was not sure where his creative practice would take him, he felt the urge to test the possibilities. Affordable lightweight cameras and synchronized sound opened up Drew's realm of opportunity.

For Drew, this moment was an understanding of a possibility space, an acknowledgement of the prospects of new assemblings. I would argue that Drew possessed a visceral awareness of shifting capacities to connect and the mechanisms of emergence within the diagram. As DeLanda (2011, p. 186) expresses, 'a possibility space, a structure that explains how tendencies and capacities can be real even when they are not actual.' This would be what I previously defined as a consciousness of possibilities within an emerging possibility space that leads to the potential formation of assemblages. Drew's

consciousness, as well as that of other documentary makers of the time, was informed by a number of parts (portable cameras and synch sound, relationship of audience to camera, accessibility to the camera technology, political context, frustration with constraints of existing documentary practices, the influence of *LIFE* magazine's approach to photojournalism, Drew's relationships with other filmmakers) all within the unfolding assemblage of the possibility of what would be called direct cinema.<sup>9</sup>

The synthesis of the various parts within the possibilities of that time along with the evolution of a vision of direct cinema by the practitioners of that moment would be the embodiment of DeLanda's process of deterritorialization. This confluence of assembled parts, ideas and people challenged the internal homogeneity of a system, traditions of the documentary film. Direct cinema and cinema vérité were extensions of an existing practice, not a form of filmmaking that emerged overnight. There seemed to be a collective understanding of a need for change, for experimentation within traditions of the documentary film. A community emerged. The direct cinema movement was born and the filmmakers that were part of it knew one another. They collaborated and mentored each other.

It took time for direct cinema to evolve because the assemblage was forming, emerging when the parts became a whole. There were many assemblages during this period, some endured while others did not. At times, each direct cinema practice stuttered, confronting complications that practitioners

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that the elements listed as informing the development of Drew's practice are incomplete and include other variables such as access to subjects, the filmmaker's relationship to methods of dissemination, etc. The scope of this dissertation does not allow for a comprehensive analysis of direct cinema through the lens of assemblage theory, though there is certainly room and a need for further research in this field.

themselves did not necessarily envision. Graham Harman reinforces that this emergence can take time. Harman (2008, p. 371) puts this in plain terms, ‘The fact that many strange assemblages *can* become real should not obscure the point that they are *not now* real.’ This is an important point. Why then did direct cinema assemble into a creative form in the United States and not for that matter in New Zealand, India, Argentina or somewhere else? In fact, these sorts of documentary film practices *did* emerge in numerous locations – direct cinema in the United States and Canada and cinema vérité in France. There was much other experimentation of these sorts of documentary film practices throughout the world, in Europe and in South America, yet the practices developed in North America and France are the ones deified in film history. Perhaps the emergence of other similar movements weren’t sustainable or supported or possibly the parts and practices didn’t assemble in the same ways within the places and practices that we are aware of. As we know with the development of the motion picture camera, many people were working at similar times in different geographies to invent a camera and yet only a number of motion picture cameras are perceived to be the original invention by a select few. Historical accounts often work to highlight a select few and marginalize others.

The evolution of the direct cinema movement in the United States is interesting to this dissertation in that there were similar, almost parallel practices, emerging in different global geographies at the same time. The cinema vérité movement, which began to synthesize in France from the documentary practices of such filmmakers as Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin resembles direct cinema in a

number of ways yet is very different.<sup>10</sup> Classic cinema vérité films, such as *Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer, 1960)* directed by Rouch and Morin use comparable lightweight film cameras and synchronized sound. Yet the content and approach of *Chronicle of a Summer* and other films of cinema vérité are very different than the films of direct cinema.<sup>11</sup> Rouch came from more of an anthropological background and that sensibility informed the way he crafted his films *and* approached his subjects. The philosophical, and at times, very vocal quarrels between the filmmakers of direct cinema and those of cinema vérité are well known. Jean Rouch, Saunders (2007, p. 193) states, 'opposed what he saw as a fundamental denial on the part of direct cinema artists, documentarists who shun self-reflexivity and obvious pro-activity in their own films, preferring instead to remain off camera.' Technology, as we will see time and again, is not the magic wand that has the potential to transform traditions of the documentary. It is technology integrated with different practices, histories and methods, in multiple geographies, at various moments in time that sometimes offer global dissemination and which at other moments might not see the light of day.

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<sup>10</sup> A number of scholars, in the past and present, refer to direct cinema and cinema vérité as the same documentary movement. This can make the two movements hard to analyze in that writings tend to use the terms as synonyms and such, the clarity in differentiation between the two is often lost. The prior progressive documentary films and practices of the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) are often used as examples of influential precursors to both movements and may, in fact, be one of the sources of the vagueness in definition between the two as the films of the NFB emerged in both English and French speaking provinces. Subsequently, direct cinema and cinema vérité are often accepted as bilingual synonyms/translations.

<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that it took time for each movement to require a label (that was in turn misapplied to any number of other films), i.e. direct cinema and cinema vérité often used as synonyms. The labels that surround a creative practice can be problematic. Jean Rouch shunned the labels attached to his filmmaking. Similarly as we will see in chapter 4, the journalist Tim Pool is continuously confronting the labels that others place on his video practice, while at the same time, trying to define his practice for himself.



In the case of direct cinema, the experimental creative dance between expressive and material elements was essential to the development of this specific documentary sub-genre. Filmmakers, such as Robert Drew, embraced the portability and synchronized sound of new camera technologies. These decisions were not inevitable, but displayed a nuanced understanding and specific comprehension of the potential creative approaches that had opened up with the development of these film tools. The prominent filmmakers of the direct cinema movement created a support network; many of them worked on each other's films, helping out in sound, camera and editing. The realization of the potential connections between film technologies and possibilities for creative practices, along with a support structure that both advocated and challenged the documentary sub-genre of direct cinema, fortifies the importance of supportive structures and creative capacities throughout the core argument of this thesis. In the context of direct cinema, spaces opened up which were exploited by individuals with particular agency. The value of this creative kinship is apparent in these historic, dynamic and sustainable assemblings.

The film *Primary* (1960) directed by Robert Drew is considered to be one of the first examples of a direct cinema documentary film. John F. Kennedy was running against Hubert Humphrey in the Wisconsin primary for the 1960 Democratic nomination to be that year's party candidate. Drew sensed that documenting the campaign could be an intriguing story and following the every move of these two hopeful presidential candidates would be an ideal use for the team's portable cameras and experimental synchronized sound. As Saunders (2007, p. 12) describes, Drew hired a number of crew, including Richard Leacock, D.A. Pennebaker (both soon to be creating their own direct cinema

projects) as well as Terrence Macartney-Filgate (who had worked for the National Film Board of Canada – NFB). These practitioners were drawing from a shared set of experiential expectations from their participation working for *LIFE* magazine to previous early direct cinema films they had been involved with. All of these filmmakers had prior knowledge of the filmmaking process. They pitched their idea to Kennedy, who agreed to take part and when Humphrey learned that Kennedy would be game, he too allowed the film crew to shadow his campaign.

Drew brought together a team of filmmakers who had already been exploring new forms of documentary filmmaking, specifically Macartney-Filgate, who had previously worked as a director and cinematographer for the NFB's *Candid-Eye* (1958) series of observational documentaries. The *Candid-Eye* series was a predecessor of direct cinema, produced in the years leading up to *Primary*. It screened on Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television between 1958-1961. The burgeoning group received funding from the Time Incorporated Broadcast Division and as Dave Saunders (2007, p. 12) writes, *Primary*, 'would fittingly usher in a new means of conveying and recording events.' Institutional support became a key part of the assembling.

As a subject, John F. Kennedy played an important role in the preliminary assemblage of direct cinema. The charisma of Kennedy's character, along with that of his young wife, Jacqueline Kennedy, was in stark contrast to that of an older Hubert Humphrey. The elevation of Kennedy as a possible presidential contender only amplified his growing celebrity. The method that *Primary* used to document its subjects suited Kennedy's public persona. He was clearly at ease with the camera. Other choices of central characters within the direct cinema

movement were positioned easily into the way its methods documented its subjects. Already there was awareness on the part of subjects of these new documentary possibilities (which undermines some of the democratic rhetoric surrounding these practices). Perhaps it was the shifting times, the fifties turning into a more laid back and easy going attitude of the late 1960s that offered an additional ease of documentation, an embrace of the informal over the formal.<sup>12</sup> Certainly, the growing presence of both broadcast television and personal photographic cameras (8mm moving image and 35mm still cameras) instilled a perceived relationship and understanding between camera, subject and audience in the United States. *Primary* presented a new way to approach subjects, offering a novel gaze into the lives of two potential presidential candidates. The relationship between the filmmakers and the technologies gave the audience intimate access to the subjects in ways that might have previously been difficult to imagine (such as the candidates appearing relaxed while watching the election returns from the comfort of their hotel rooms on the night of the vote). The attempt to privilege this relationship is at the crux of direct cinema and diverges from the lens gleaned from both anthropology and sociology, which are essential values that informed the work of many cinema vérité filmmakers. Saunders (2007, p. 19) writes, ‘Drew sought not to follow this self-reflexive tradition but to focus on the potential of discreetly obtained footage.’ At times, this intimate relationship would be an unintended consequence of the technology, informing an element of the rapport that future generations in the United States would have with their presidential candidates.

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<sup>12</sup> Examples of this shifting attitude can be seen in the 1967 film, *Don't Look Back*, as well as in the 1970 film, *Woodstock*. Both films are centered on music and thought to be fine examples of direct cinema.

Yet this film was also an early experiment in direct cinema. Drew's technology and technique were not perfected. The synchronized sound, for example, did not always work. The technology was emerging and the capacities to connect were ever changing. This initial foray integrating nascent film tools and fusing both previous and promising filmmaking methods together was an unstable and developing process. Saunders (2007, p. 9) argues that the film has flaws and says, '*Primary* goes awry as an observational piece, falling back on expository convention to provide hard information where none can be gleaned through the nascent candid approach.' Certainly the filmmakers were aware that they were introducing new representational ideas to audiences and they weren't sure how these novel angles might be received. At times, they returned to methods that they felt audiences might be more comfortable with. In the film there are moments when Drew retreats to the safety of interviewing voters on the street which allows the audience to revert back to an easier connection to the visual text, that of the interview. The balance between direct cinema experimentations and traditional modes of documentary might be one of the reasons why the film works so well and is often praised as a groundbreaking precursor to the documentary films of today.

Five years later in D.A. Pennebaker's film, *Don't Look Back* (1965), Bob Dylan seems to be more comfortable with Pennebaker and his crew, than he does with the numerous reporters from the mainstream press that he interacts with throughout the film. Discussing this film, later labeled direct cinema, Jeanne Hall interprets this classic documentary as a critique of mainstream press and almost a visual manifesto to direct cinema. Of course, Hall could utilize the perspective of textual analysis to help territorialize the meaning of the movement through a

historic viewpoint. Yet Hall argues that Pennebaker's intention becomes unavoidably clear and most obvious when Dylan sits down for an interview with a reporter from the African Service of the BBC. The journalist (Hall 1998, p. 234) asks Dylan, 'How did it all begin for you, Bob? How did you get started?' One feels that this is the moment that we have all been waiting for, the instant when Dylan will perhaps finally cease to be slightly confrontational, let down his guard and open up. In fact, it becomes the exact opposite. Immediately, Pennebaker cuts away from the interview to a scene of a younger Bob Dylan performing for black farm workers in a rural setting of the United States. As Hall (1998, p. 235) reasons, 'the effect of the aborted interview in the film is to suggest that a bit of cinema verité film footage of Dylan's "beginnings" is ultimately more truthful, more revealing, than hearing him talk about them.'

At this moment in the film, Pennebaker doesn't let Dylan speak for himself but instead allows for dramatic logic to usurp the importance of word logic. Dylan and Pennebaker certainly agreed on the importance of seeing. As Hall (1998, p. 230) explains, Dylan's brusque and bitter interaction with a *Time Magazine* reporter later in the film ends with Dylan stating, 'I know more about what you do, and you don't have to ask me how or why or anything, just by looking, than you'll ever know about me. Ever.' In many respects, Dylan's quote was also the intended modus operandi of direct cinema, striving to show rather than tell and using the emerging tools available to experiment with this concept. Hall's reading of this film as a critique of mainstream media offers an intriguing analysis. Though many filmmakers and viewers might squabble over the 'truth claims' of the camera, especially in a film where Dylan is choreographed from the opening title scene, tossing aside placards as Allen Ginsberg meanders in the

frame behind him. One could watch this film and question direct cinema, as the filmmaker Joris Ivens did (Aufderheide 2007, p. 52), ‘which truth and for whom? Seen by whom, and for whom?’ Ivens went further, wondering whether accessible and portable camera equipment was only ‘skimming reality instead of penetrating it’ (Hall 1998, p. 52).

As mobile video technologies get exceedingly cheaper, smaller and more accessible, a similar naïve faith to that which appeared during the direct cinema movement has emerged. As we will see in a number of the ensuing chapters, a trust in the indexicality of footage from digital video cameras, the ‘fly on the wall’ rhetoric has re-surfaced. Almost identical and persistent rhetorical arguments in relation to the value of technologies have been re-envisioned. Audiences, the press and even practitioners are prone to privileging the power of the technology, placing a certain responsibility for truth claims directly onto the hardware and software tools themselves. Yet in this contemporary moment, critical are the ways in which the practitioners of digital video use these technologies, how they exercise agency, i.e. understand possibilities, respond to challenges, and experiment with tools. It is the methods behind how these practitioners approach their subjects, record their stories and craft narratives that are the keys to emerging digital video practices. These relationships constitute the variables that produce assemblings and human agency is what drives the momentum that connects these meaningful associations together.

Examining direct cinema through the lens of assemblage theory illuminates the value behind the creative capacities of human agency and the support structures present during the birth of this important sub-genre of documentary. As we will see, similar relationships are often present in the case

studies from my fieldwork in the United States, New Zealand and India. The assembling of emerging approaches to documentary filmmaking, a foundation in the methods of visual storytelling along with a common support system inclusive of multiple filmmakers, shifting attitudes in the United States towards the camera and television, documented with emerging mobile filmmaking technology, suggests elements of shifting spaces of possibility in the late 1950s and into the 1960s. The evolution of the movement acknowledges that methods of documentary filmmaking were forming diverse assemblages that both evolved and dissolved as technology changed, filmmakers experimented and practices adapted to new forms of documentary representation during the naissance of direct cinema.

#### **2.4 - Assemblage Theory: Deciphering Creative Capacities, Support Structures & Digital Technologies**

In this dissertation, my research is clearly interested in the role of the practitioner and the function that organizations and support structures play in the development of digital video practices. How does assemblage theory regard the role of creative capacities within the formation of assemblings? Where does the individual, the performance of creative capacities and experimental utterances of human beings sit within the framework of assemblage? Manuel DeLanda believes that assemblages consist of emerging relations of parts to wholes that interact to form cohesive ensembles of interconnections, which in turn evolve into working assemblages. Markets, neighborhoods, cities and organizations are all case studies that DeLanda approaches through the lens of assemblage theory. DeLanda's interpretation of assemblage theory is most interested in the creative capacity of an individual through their capacities to connect to both the expressive

and material elements that surround them. DeLanda sees the creative independence of an artist or a soldier or a farmer through their interactions and relations with other elements of the meshed network that is becoming the assemblages they are parts of. As DeLanda (2010, p. 3) argues:

A crucial question confronting any serious attempt to think about human history is the nature of the historical actors that are considered legitimate in a given philosophy. One can, of course, include only human beings as actors, either as rational decision-makers (as in micro-economics) or as phenomenological subjects (as in micro-sociology). But if we wish to go beyond this we need a proper conceptualization of social wholes.

No doubt, the crux of assemblage theory resides in its value connecting, analyzing and acknowledging the importance of the forming relationships between parts to wholes. And it is also important to note that, as DeLanda argues, all parts within an assemblage are reliant on their emergence from a historical context. DeLanda (2010, p. 9) states:

One final point needs to be clarified: when we say that a set of interacting persons gives rise to a community, or that a set of interacting organizations gives rise to a federal government, this should not be taken to imply a temporal sequence, as if a set of previously disconnected persons or organizations had suddenly began to interact and a whole had abruptly sprouted into being.

In regards to acknowledging the value of the surrounding relationships (including recognizing that movements such as documentary have not blossomed spontaneously) within the formation of assemblages, I do not disagree with DeLanda. This relational and historic webbing involved in the formation of digital video practices is central to the analysis of my case studies. My conflict with DeLanda's *neo-assemblage* theory and Deleuze and Guattari's *agencement* from which assemblage theory emerged is that it tends to devalue the creative capacities of individuals and organizations, situating them within a wider



framework of relationships. Assemblage merely accounts for the brushstroke of an artist, or the speech of a freedom fighter, or the gaze of citizen journalist as relevant to its relations. DeLanda's disregard for the significance of creativity is visible in an interview with him from 2012. Asked how humanity built cities within the larger context of organic history and assemblage theory, DeLanda (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 43) responded:

It is absurd to think that complex self-organizing structures need a "brain" to generate them. The coupled system atmosphere-hydrosphere is continuously generating structures (thunderstorms, hurricanes, coherent wind currents) not only without a brain but without any organs whatsoever. The ancient chemistry of the prebiotic soup also generated such coherent structures (auto-catalytic loops) without which the genetic code could not have emerged. And bacteria in the first two billion years of the history of the biosphere discovered all major means to tap into energy sources (fermentation, photosynthesis, respiration).

My response is complex, because at once, I agree and disagree with DeLanda. Yet it is crucial that my research adopts, interprets and critiques assemblage theory as it is applied to my project. If bacteria without brains, discovered methods to harness energy, why then should assemblage seemingly disregard the human decision-making involved in creative practices and merely situate their emergence within the contexts of the numerous relationships swirling around it? Would assemblage theory situate the creativity and documentation spawned by such creatives of the likes of D. A. Pennebaker and Alice Harris as merely the result of relations churning within their assemblings? Expounding upon these ideas, Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2002, p. 188) writes:

Thus, the assemblage, which Deleuze sometimes calls 'the minimal unit of language' (a position he refuses to grant to the word, or concept), involves multiplicities of various kinds: population, territories, becomings, affects, events. There is an interesting consequence to this, one we have already briefly evoked: being collective, the utterance is not within the speaker,

but always outside her, floating among the constituent parts of an assemblage as the event floated above the battlefield.

The complexities that Lecerle identifies are precisely why the majority of my fieldwork focuses on interviewing practitioners, media makers, designers of technology and facilitators and directors of organizations. Creative capacities, supportive structures and digital technologies are complex in their interconnections. Though the practitioners examined in this dissertation might enter into their practice with backgrounds in either video or activism; navigating technologies, narrative structures and methods of online dissemination are exceedingly complex. Likewise, a number of the practitioners within the case studies found throughout my research have commenced their creative practice with a limited or even non-existent background in the use of digital video technologies. This dissertation is interested in how practitioners, from diverse circumstances, each engage creatively within these assemblages.

Again, this project does not reject that creativity is informed and influenced by prior traditions of media making. Nor does this dissertation disregard the critical and specific relationships that aid in the assembling of creative practices. This project examines how recognizing possibilities and the commitment to putting these into practices develops in different possibility spaces. This research identifies the importance of human capital and particular kinds of human endeavors that are applied for particular ends. All possibility spaces empower as well as contain and each shapes potentials for creative capacities. In fact, the creative decisions made by practitioners are bound by context. Media makers in New York City cannot arrive in India or New Zealand and expect that the workflow of their digital video practice will be precisely the same as it was in the assemblage they are comfortable working in. Practices that

strive to be sustainable acknowledge their limitations and then adapt to their workspace. If technology is privileged as the sole solution, a creative practice will fail. To survive a practice requires a give and take relationship and a resourceful understanding between the assembling of creative capacities, supportive structures and digital technologies. This dissertation seeks to balance the lens of assemblage theory through distinct analysis of both material and expressive elements emerging from *within* creative practices and *swirling* throughout the assemblages these practices are linked to.

At times, other scholars take issue with how DeLanda's interpretation of assemblage theory prioritizes the importance of interactions between parts within assemblings over the possibilities for creative sovereignty. Using the example of a tree, Graham Harman (2008, p. 382) presents his case:

The problem is that DeLanda defines the double axis of his ontology in terms of capacities, not properties. Where are the properties of the tree in its own right, apart from its capacity to serve as material for larger aggregates, to unify and supervene upon smaller ones, or its dual propensity to close off from the environment while also bleeding into it? It is not clear where we find the tree itself in the DeLandian model, since it registers only through its effects on other assemblages, with the hot potato of reality passed down the line, and nothing actual taking any final credit for being real. In this way, the tree becomes a specific, relational state of affairs rather than an autonomous object.

Although many of the practitioners examined throughout this dissertation experience restrictions on their digital video practices due to limitations of technology or lack of networked infrastructure, as we will see, the creative practices that remain sustainable are fuelled by individuals and organizations who comprehend the necessity in adapting their approach, experimenting with different configurations of technologies and recognizing the importance of being flexible. In essence, they are reading and understanding the spaces of

possibilities, the capacities for connection and having foresight to play with emergent properties.

Again, this dissertation does not argue that humans are isolated in their actions. Instead, this thesis contends that individual and collective creative capacities are a learned skill set that is shaped while evolving over time through available possibilities, essential support and via sustainable approaches to digital video practices. In India, the organization Video Volunteers has developed digital video practices over many years, through trial and error and understanding what does and does not work at certain times and in specific places. Creative elements might pulse within fertile spaces of possibility, but the *understanding* of creative possibilities does not float outside individuals, but is comprehended by individual people and organizations. Bennett (2010, p. 38) describes this almost untenable perceptive quality of human agency:

Agency is, I believe, distributed across a mosaic, but it is also possible to say something about the kind of striving that may be exercised by a human within the assemblage. This exertion is perhaps best understood on the model of riding a bicycle on a gravel road. One can throw one's weight this way or that, inflect the bike in one direction or toward one trajectory of motion. But the rider is but one actant operative in the moving whole.

This dissertation approaches creative capacities in a similar fashion. The assemblages analyzed throughout this thesis confront numerous dilemmas in their formation. However, intangible qualities (often foresight derived from previous experience and certainly commitment to the cause) learned over time by practitioners are central to this dissertation and critical to understanding emerging digital video practices. Intangible qualities can work both ways and from them creative constraints can also emerge. Nevertheless, the role of the creative capacities of these practitioners, along with understanding the often complex

support systems (or lack thereof) that aid in the evolution of each practice, as well as understanding the ‘duel between specific objects,’ are central to both my understanding and analysis of assemblage theory (Harman 2008, p. 380). There are a number of important and specific elements that I have found useful in order to analyze the formation of digital video practices across the possibility spaces scattered throughout the case studies of this dissertation. Both material and expressive, these factors and their relationships are the fundamental elements of the profile for the possibility space of digital video practices centered on human rights, social activism and protest movements. These components will surface throughout this dissertation and interact with particular and specific elements to form, challenge and dissolve temporal assemblages of digital video practices. These core factors are particular to each case and include:

1. Technological capacities (appropriate to the practice and context), especially the relationship to the network (the Internet and mainstream media),
2. Power structures (language, literacy, political and economic situation),
3. Formal and informal support systems (manifested through training, dissemination, community),
4. Creative capacities in individual and collective forms (specifically those exhibiting commitment, adaptation, sustainability),
5. Territory.

The roles and relationships between these assembling components will become clearer in the subsequent chapters of my dissertation. John Allen (2011, p. 157) states:

Each assembled heterogenous mix of power is constructed through its relationships and interactions, and as those interactions change so,

potentially, do the actors and materials in the arrangement. What can be assembled to explore a particular avenue of enquiry may be reassembled to pursue another quite different set of questions and relationships.

The core of my research analyzes and navigates the heterogeneous mix of parts present in the relationships between assemblages and their arrangements within a possibility space. This dissertation explores the role of creative capacities within the formation of the sometimes nascent and at other times established yet forming digital video practices in the United States, India and New Zealand. I have conducted over thirty interviews with practitioners, media makers, citizen journalists, journalists, facilitators, lawyers, smartphone app designers and artists in three different countries in order to get a sense of what has compelled these individuals to engage and exploit possibility spaces to create their own digital video practices. Furthermore, this dissertation examines how practitioners describe their roles in these experimental creative practices that are at times situated, circling around and challenging traditional forms of documentary media. Additionally, discussions with these practitioners, facilitators and media makers offer valuable insight into how digital video practices and the role of creative capacities are situated within the context of assemblings – enabling, constraining, directing, catalyzing, adapting, experimenting. Associations to periphery assemblages are critical to the formation and production of digital video practices. Within the case studies of my dissertation there are continuous conflicts within these assemblages and these conflicts, at times, produce or allow for new ‘social-spatial relations’ to emerge (Allen 2011, p. 157). These relationships form assemblages within and of themselves.

To reiterate, the lens of assemblage theory guides this dissertation as it analyzes the role of human agency and other elements that synthesize into evolving assemblages and the relationship of these assemblages to other assemblages and the wider possibility space as a whole. Sometimes I will argue that the emerging assemblages I explore in my PhD research have expanded, changed, shifted and morphed both assemblages and the possibility space for documentary media. Though again, these are specific examples and not global or even necessarily regional generalities. Critically, one of the values of assemblage theory is that it recognizes and emphasizes the contingent nature of what technologies mean, instead of assuming linear progressions in the development of technological possibilities. Assemblage insists on a number of factors and analyzes the specific kinds of relationships that develop in respect to the formation of these emergent factors. Although assemblage theory aids the researcher and accounts for the eclectic and ever-changing nature of our world, it must be approached with caution as well. As Dewsbury (2011, p. 152) reminds us at the end of his article on assemblage:

It is not change for change's sake; rather it is attentiveness to the transformative potential in the world, which gives due regard to the fact that change is not just willed by us humans but comes about equally through the materialities of the world in which we are just a part, and which, through habit, we encompass in the everyday, ever changing, assemblage of thought, intensity and matter.

Critical to my theoretical approach through the lens of assemblage theory is analyzing the components and relationships found in these assemblages – human and non-human alike. Throughout this dissertation, I stress that the creative capacities of the practitioners and support networks involved in these assemblings are critical to their formation and sustainability. Addressing and

exploring how these media makers navigate the relationships that emerge throughout the development of their creative practices is central to understanding how assemblages of digital video practices form and sometimes, with passion and determination, survive.



## ***CHAPTER 3 – Methodology***

### **3.1 - An Introduction to Research Methodology**

Embarking on fieldwork in three diverse geographic locations has required careful thought as to the ways in which this project has embraced in-the-field research and examination of data. As laid out in the previous chapter, *assemblage theory* is the core theoretical tool in which this project engages with the multi-layered documentary projects and main participants that make up the key case studies of my fieldwork. This dissertation examines select case studies of digital video practices centered on human rights, social justice issues and protest movements birthed in the United States, India and New Zealand. Unlike the strict limitations that might be implemented in a quantitative study, the methods and approaches applying the lens of assemblage theory to this type of qualitative research are nascent and experimental. These qualitative research methods mirror the exploratory nature of the digital video practices investigated. As such, this project has embraced the challenges of intensive fieldwork. Through the lens of assemblage theory and examining evolving fertile and diverse media spaces, this PhD lays the foundation for new ways to study the evolution of digital video practices that are related to the documentary form.

In a sense, the emergence of the creative practices considered in this project is shadowed by the methodology of the study itself. Both are emerging. Clearing a pathway for the integration of assemblage theory with qualitative research has been a constant experiment in reassessment. Yet the critical thinking involved in examining the assemblings of the multiplicities of singularities present in a possibility space, as well as attempting to understand the capacities of these variables to connect paves a roadmap towards new structures of knowledge

and provides a viewpoint that lends itself to a fresh and significant perspective. This chapter explains and analyzes the paired union between the methodological and theoretical approaches of this exploratory PhD project. Within this framework, I will examine the process of data collection, explain the thought process in regards to the case studies chosen, explore the reasons and challenges behind certain decisions made during fieldwork, and describe the emergence of specific focal points within the evolution of this dissertation. Most simply, this chapter conveys the structure and agenda of my fieldwork, while presenting a transparent roadmap of the methodology infused in this research project.

### **3.2 - Methodology & Theory: An Assemblage**

Although there is a long history of textual analyses of documentary video creation and some work engaging with selected figures from the professional caste of documentary filmmakers, the current motivations and creative approaches behind the new and rapidly growing multi-generational documentary makers of YouTube have yet to be investigated.<sup>13</sup> It is the practitioners and their practice, those who stand out and are devoting time, energy and creativity to participatory

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<sup>13</sup> Such titles that have engaged with professional documentary filmmakers are Megan Cunningham's *The Art of the Documentary*, Liz Stubbs' *Documentary Filmmakers Speak* and the NFB film, *Capturing Reality: The Art of Documentary* by Pepita Ferrari. A number of books and publications that have examined YouTube include Jean Burgess and Joshua Green's *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, David Gauntlett's *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity, From DIY and Knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*, Michael Strangelove's *Watching YouTube: Extraordinary Videos by Ordinary People*, Geert Lovink and Rachel Somers Miles' *Video Vortex II: Moving Images Beyond YouTube*, Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau's *The YouTube Reader* and Alexandra Juhasz's article, 'Documentary on YouTube: The failure of the direct cinema of the slogan.'

online video culture, which have been the focus of my research.<sup>14</sup> Yet a general examination of online practitioners creating ‘documentary’ video content for YouTube was ultimately too vast and expansive to have been covered over the period of this PhD project. Therefore it was imperative to begin my research with a concrete working definition that focused and limited this study to a specific subset of online practitioners. In the broadest sense, my investigation covers digital video practices centered on human rights, social justice and protest movements, which often have a close relationship to documentary. Yet placing further parameters on this research and in order to offer a more directed focus, this study has centered on exploring the motivations, textual strategies, and communities of practice that surround the work of practitioners engaging in digital video practices which are published online and outside the professional sphere and are geared toward explorations of local or global political, human rights, activist or social justice based issues.

This limitation is important in regards to the restrictions imposed on the scope of my PhD research. Returning to theory for a moment, assemblages emerge from a diagram or possibility space. DeLanda (2006, p. 30) describes a diagram being, ‘a set of universal singularities that would be the equivalent of body-plan, or more precisely, that would structure the space of possibilities

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<sup>14</sup> Recent academic studies and comprehensive literature reviews analyzing prior research of YouTube and other video sharing sites have identified the importance for further investigations of online video content across a wide range of disciplines. An examination of YouTube research priorities published at the beginning of 2012 identified ‘the impact of video-sharing technology on the social and political arena,’ as a high priority area for future research (Snelson, Rice, Wyzard, 2012, 123). This project adds significant scholarly knowledge to this fast growing field. For further reading see, ‘Research priorities for YouTube and video-sharing technologies: A Delphi study,’ *British Journal of Educational Technology* 43, no. 1 (2012), doi:10.1111/j.1467-8535.2010.01168.x.

associated with the assemblage.’ A possibility space includes available elements present within an amalgamation of recent digital video technologies, the Internet and human creativity; the prospects for video creation and documentation are often quite open to various potentials. And thus the ‘body-plan’ of our possibility space is a boundless gamut of potential video making. Think of a topic, really anything, and search for it on YouTube. The result, or most probably *results* of your search are examples of the range of possibilities within this massive possibility space of video creation. To further clarify, DeLanda (2006, p. 30) writes:

Thus, while persons, communities, organizations, cities and nation-states are all individual singularities, each of these entities would also be associated with a space of possibilities characterized by its dimensions, representing its degrees of freedom, and by a set of universal singularities. In other words, each of these social assemblages would possess its own diagram.

Subsequently, my research establishes necessary restrictions on the ‘possibility spaces’ and ‘degrees of freedom’ in order to set limitations on which assemblages are examined in this dissertation, so that these emerging assemblages can be analyzed productively. Why then, make the choice to narrow the broader diagram to video produced within the cross-pollinating spheres of activism, social justice and human rights? As mentioned in the previous chapter, the evolution of the photographic image, from still to motion, has played a vital, evolving and historic role for both the progression of documentary, as well as providing the visual documentation that emerges from these political movements. As Leshu Torchin (2012, p. 17) writes:

Because viewers can share videos and upload their own video responses, the Internet harbors the capacity to transform audiences into distributors and producers, in effect turning witnessing publics into witnessing publicists. Here, one can see clearly the ways in which witnessing is not

simply a presentation or transmission of the testimonial image, but a matter of practice and engagement.

I would add to Torchin's statement that not only is it merely the Internet that 'harbors the capacity to transform audiences into distributors and producers,' but also access to video tools (both hardware and software), nurtured by communities of practice, these *creative capacities and digital technologies together* present valuable assemblages that this dissertation engages with in upcoming chapters.

Furthermore with assemblage theory and as we saw in the previous chapter, the properties of an entity are not directly linked to its capacities. They are not synonyms. Thus capacities 'may go unexercised if no entity suitable for interaction is around' (DeLanda 2006, p. 10). Therefore, writes DeLanda (2006, p. 10), 'being part of a whole involves the exercise of a part's capacities but it is not a constitutive property of it.' I would argue that throughout the existence of the camera apparatus, practitioners have sensed the importance of the ability of the visual image to play a crucial role in the documentation of activism and human rights and thus have acknowledged its critical value within multiple and multi-layered assemblages. Practitioners' understanding that possibilities exist and their engagement with creative capacities is one layer of the many elements that interact as assemblages emerge.

The majority of this dissertation limits our diagram to digital video situated within activism, human rights and social justice movements. Historically, assemblages that have integrated visual imagery offer decisive contributions to the way in which these activist spheres, issues and movements have been, are and will be represented. Torchin (2012, p. 175) adds, 'The Internet not only offers modes of inviting communities centered around shared concerns

and identities, but the technology of exchange and exhibition also provides means of bypassing gatekeepers and producing counter-histories that challenge official stories.’ The ways in which these relationships play out are also critical to the emergence of assemblages. Communities of activism, citizen journalists documenting these communities and individual media makers, yet to be situated within a specific definition, seem to be thoughtfully enmeshed and excitedly experimenting with new digital video tools, exploring pathways for dissemination and approaching creative methods of documentary narrative and visual documentation. From this narrower diagram, my analysis of emerging assemblages begins.

### **3.3 - Fieldwork & Assemblage Theory**

Approaching this dissertation through the lens of assemblage theory requires that the methodology accounts for the diversity of the possibility spaces in which these creative practices are emerging. Possibility spaces within areas of New York City will certainly be different to specific geographies of emergence in New Zealand or India. Differences will often be many and similarities may be few, but the ways in which technology, infrastructure, mainstream media and live streaming video practices, to offer a few examples, may or may not emerge and assemble in one possibility space in contrast to another due to capacities of entities to engage with one another are at the core of the structure of assemblage theory. Part of the methodology of this research is to identify connections, analyzing how variables interact with one another, exploring their emergent properties, scrutinizing the ways in which their capacities might connect and examining the unintended consequences often generated as technologies meet

creative practices. These are some of the analytical qualities and approaches to interpretation that are crucial to the comprehension of a diagram and intrinsic to assemblage theory.

It should be noted that the complexities of the multiplicities present in a diagram are too vast and multifaceted for each singular component to be analyzed. As there are few examples of research that attempts to integrate assemblage theory into fieldwork, there were numerous ways in which I might have approached my research methodology. From a longitudinal study analyzing the appearance and disappearance of certain media assemblages over a specific period of time to a quantitative analysis of trends and usages of a cross-section of media users in select geographic locations, the possibilities were and still are vast. However, I did not find these approaches appealing or exciting.

My fieldwork and research uses a qualitative approach, focusing on practitioners themselves and their understanding of their creative practices within assemblings. Embracing either a longitudinal study analyzing a broad swath of digital video practices across multiple possibility spaces or a quantitative analysis of a cross-section of media makers would have confronted a plethora of difficulties and logistical concerns. Essentially, the time frame of this project was not practical for a wide-ranging longitudinal or exhaustive quantitative examination. Furthermore, I am most interested in the human aspect of emerging assemblages and the role of the creative capacities of practitioners within these assemblages. Effectively, I was most interested in talking with citizens utilizing emerging digital video technologies and experimenting with new forms of creative practice.

Since the inception of this research, I have been most interested in gaining insight into the creative nature of emerging digital video practices. My intention has always been *to go and talk with people*. In plain terms, the methodology of my fieldwork consisted of approaching specific people with a particular creative practice in order to get a sense of how creative possibilities form as media makers engaged with various assemblages that integrated their use of digital video technologies.<sup>15</sup> When planning my fieldwork, my belief was that through these conversations I would begin to understand the variables and influences fuelling the creative practices of these select individuals and from those exchanges, I could begin to form a greater understanding of how these digital video practices evolve. It seemed to me that abundant creative digital video practices were popping up and dissolving almost constantly (they still are) and almost at times shadowing the evolution of certain hardware, software and online platforms. I believed that if I could identify a number of individuals with creative practices that appeared to be sustaining and adapting to certain shifts in technology, perhaps then, I could gain insight into how digital video practices emerge, form, adapt, nurture and even dissolve within their respective possibility space. As is typical of qualitative research, I acknowledge that my insight is intimately tied to my own interpretations.

In a way, my methodology can be thought of as starting from the nucleus of a practice in order to begin to better comprehend aspects of how an assemblage emerged and potentially sustained. I presumed that creative practitioners would, at times, directly identify and point to singularities and relationships that played a

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<sup>15</sup> For a complete list of interviewees, see the Appendix towards the end of this dissertation.



role in the creation of their practice and from there I could also begin to understand those influences and thus make further connections that might be either subtle or obscure for both the practitioners and myself. Instead of beginning with a possibility space, for example starting with the monumental task of analyzing digital video practitioners within the grand mediascape of India, which would require extensive analysis of vast media in India – in different regions, in different languages and contexts – I thought it best to begin directly with the practitioners themselves, through key case studies which would effectively focus both my investigation and subsequent analysis.

One example of how I focused my research is the case study of the Indian non-governmental organization, Video Volunteers. Beginning at the core of the organization, interviewing its two directors, then the lead workshop trainer and moving out to interview a number of regional community correspondents allowed me to focus on the creative approaches of both the practitioners and facilitators. From these interviews, I began to expand my analysis from the centralized organization and thus could start to identify elements (such as access to technology or infrastructure limitations) within the numerous possibility spaces of these scattered assemblages that helped to shape, form and influence the formation of these digital video practices. Starting with individuals and expanding my gaze outward offered a route to signifying possibility spaces, both tangible and virtual, some present but not yet workable, others smooth and cohesive, assemblages that were to inevitably morph in some way or another, as all assemblages must.

I enrolled as a PhD student at the end of 2011, a year that began and ended with two very different ‘revolutions.’ Thus, I commenced this project invigorated

by the energy of both the Egyptian Revolution and the Occupy Wall Street movement fresh in my mind. It seemed to me that the pulse of important experimentations with digital video practices was occurring in and around activist based movements, as well as in the spheres of human rights and social justice. Certainly, there has been a long and storied history of the visual representation of these types of movements on global, regional and local levels. Social media had been assigned by commentators and given almost supernatural powers to coordinate protests and document activism, yet I was skeptical that all it took was an Internet connection and a smartphone to change the world.

The digital camera of an iPhone 5 in New York is the same iPhone 5 in Wellington and is also the same iPhone 5 in Mumbai. Technology is a tool. As a piece of hardware it doesn't change. Yet, within different locations an iPhone 5 might have exceedingly ever-shifting ways in which it is being used, who might be using it and why. Or to go a step further, in various locations, individuals might use an iPhone 5 in exactly the same way. And thus, an iPhone 5 will have differing capacities to connect in different diagrams. It is the relationship between these distinctions that inform the numerous ways in which assemblages coalesce for disparate periods of time or perhaps not form at all. Although this dissertation will breach the surface of the hardware, exploring how digital video practices evolve and form, it is the relationships between the creative capacities of the individuals utilizing emerging technologies and the role of digital tools within these practices that this dissertation is most interested in.

Although mobile digital technologies are often indicated as being the magical essence of recent protest movements – the ‘open sesame’ of information – this tends to negate the many dynamics involved, including the presence of both

human and community agency, from documentation to the sharing of information through social media to constructive criticism in its varied forms (digital and in person) within these emerging assemblages. This form of technological rhetoric has the ability to trump the cultivation of relationships that are often necessary in the formation of assemblages. It is quite easy to disregard the multiple variables that are present at various moments in time, in different geographies, all further informed by a scattered and unpredictable excess of additional singularities that are shifting and melding and forming as local, regional, national and global diagrams themselves are constantly in flux.

A major focus of this PhD project has been an examination of the role of creative capacities of human agency and the supportive structures of community networks within the assembling of recent digital video practices. Creative capacities and supportive structures are decisive to the formation of assemblages of digital video practices. Although the individualities present within these diagrams have the ability to present capacities to connect, I believe that more often than not, it is the relationships between the human beings present in these emerging assemblages, along with the digital tools and the formal and informal support systems surrounding these practices that negotiate the emergence of the capacities of multiple elements and fuel experimentation with the ways in which these emergent properties create totalities. As these assemblages form, not only might creative practices merge and potentially thrive, but also practitioners themselves may symbiotically evolve within assemblage. As Manuel DeLanda (2006, p. 33) writes:

assemblage theory departs from methodological individualism in that it conceives of this emergent subjectivity as an assemblage that may become complexified as persons become parts of larger assemblages: in conversations (and other social encounters) they project an image or

persona; in networks they play informal roles; and in organizations they acquire formal roles; and they may become identified with these roles and personas making them part of their identity.

What does DeLanda mean here? As we will see in the context of my research, practitioners often start with a camera and an idea for a story and this role as a citizen journalist or live streamer or reporter or documentary maker will time and again evolve beyond the initial assemblage of person, camera and video creation. This dissertation examines how these roles emerge through different assemblings, while also studying how different practitioners understand, embrace, challenge and apply the meaning of these roles to their practices. The live streamer, Tim Pool, went from making skateboarding videos to recording Occupy Wall Street to live streaming Occupy Wall Street to being the international face of the revolution of citizen journalism (he was nominated for *Time Magazine's* top 100 most influential people of 2011) to working for multiple mainstream media outlets. Talking to Pool, he never foresaw this evolution yet he is very aware that he has been elevated to prominence. It was once just Tim Pool and his smartphone (although in practice, as we shall see, it was never that simple). Now his role is more than that. He has very quickly become incredibly influential. Some of the practitioners I interviewed are self-aware of this shift in identity and power, whereas for other individuals it might not be as clear-cut.

Thus in assemblage theory and as new practices assemble and transform, individuals, as well as communities of practice (such as NGOs or non-profit organizations), may evolve from themselves into parts of larger assemblages or utilize elements from other assemblages in order to help sustain or assemble unique and singular creative practices. One example of this would be the actions of Video Volunteers. In April 2011, Cisco, the technology company who owned

the Flip HD line of camcorders decided to discontinue the product. The Flip video cameras were a vital tool and had played a major role in the evolving media practices of Video Volunteers. With the demise of the Flip camera, it was possible that the assemblage that Video Volunteers had helped establish might fade away. Yet the organization took a chance and reached out to Cisco and secured hundreds of Flip cameras that had been manufactured but weren't going to go to sale because of the discontinuation of the product.<sup>16</sup> If the sustainability of this assemblage solely relied on the available singularities within the present possibility space to unfold without the role of human agency to step in and take action, the assemblage would have dissolved. The Flip video camera, a crucial component of the diagram was going to evaporate and the assemblage might change. Yet Video Volunteers took a chance and secured 500 plus cameras and this action allowed for these creative practices to sustain. Although Cisco acknowledged that the Flip camera was not economically viable to manufacture, Video Volunteers recognized that Flip camera technology was ideal for the digital video practices they cultivate within the local Indian context; as such, two possibilities spaces offered two outcomes.

There are many more examples of the importance of human decision-making and creative capacities and the formation and challenges to sustainability of assemblages within the key case studies of this dissertation. And such is the reason why the core of my PhD fieldwork focuses on the evolution of these digital video practices. Interviewing practitioners allows for this research project to directly examine the role of human and community agency within the assembling

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter 6 has a comprehensive discussion of Video Volunteers and their use of Cisco Flip cameras.

of these nascent creative practices. The inquisitive lens of assemblage theory is a new way of seeing the evolution of these diverse technologies and creative forces.

### **3.4 - Assembling the Globe**

The lens of assemblage theory is important in the three countries in which I conducted fieldwork – the United States, India and New Zealand. What value, might these three seemingly divergent and incredibly vast countries offer this dissertation? As mentioned before, the United States, India and New Zealand, all share a common democratic heritage that, at least in theory, tends to promote values of free speech and freedom of the press.

This project (funded by a Marsden grant from the Royal Society of New Zealand) commenced and revolved around gaining a better understanding as to how digital video practices are evolving throughout New Zealand. Through initial fieldwork in New Zealand, it became clear that prolific digital video practices rooted in social justice, human rights and protest movements were limited within the country. At that juncture, it was apparent that fieldwork constraints in New Zealand were plentiful. It appeared to me that perhaps I could extend my fieldwork and engage in research outside of New Zealand in order to better understand how digital video practices were emerging in other possibility spaces and through this comprehension, gain insight into the progress of similar practices in New Zealand.

As digital video technologies continue to expand, we are only beginning to see new ways in which this technology is being adapted on the ground as it adjusts and molds to different political, social and cultural atmospheres. It is important to note that these are complicated and shifting patterns playing out

within each localized context. Although there might be promising generalizations that can be examined, this dissertation attempts to steer clear of broad generalities and instead focuses on investigating the intricacies of creative practices within specific possibility spaces of these countries. The intention of this PhD is not to concoct an overall general theory about the nature of digital technologies or social media. The multifarious complexities present within *each singular diagram*, that is the *possibility spaces* explored in this dissertation support a careful examination of the ways in which digital creative practices form and are supported. Specific case studies in these differing geographies provide an exploratory examination that allows for an investigation into a sense of both present and emerging digital video practices.

Importantly, the locations of these case studies are places that I am intensely familiar with. I was born and raised in New York City. Residing in New York for much of my life while teaching in media arts programs throughout the city, I have a solid network of contacts and a confident knowledge of the city that has allowed me to penetrate a cross-section of documentary media makers during my four months of New York City based fieldwork. More generally, New York City presented an area of research into the conditions of practicing media makers within an environment where visual media is omnipresent and creating digital video content from multiple visual documents seems almost visceral to the creative ethos of the city itself.

India is a country that I know well. I have studied, lived and worked in India, off and on since September 2000, when I was a student in Jaipur, Rajasthan. Furthermore in 2005-2006, I was an American India Foundation (AIF) Service Corps Fellow, living and working in the city of Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

My connection to the AIF network of NGOs integrating media programs throughout the country is far-reaching and the course of my three months of India based research allowed me to obtain unique access to citizen media makers and NGOs throughout the country. India, a democracy of more than one billion people with a strong history of activism, offered the potential to gain insight into the ways in which first generation media makers are approaching digital video practices in a country that has, in comparison to New Zealand and the United States, minimal networked infrastructure. As a small percentage of the Indian population has regular access to the Internet, integrating an investigation of Indian practitioners within a vastly different diagram seemed to offer a comparative richness to this exploratory PhD.

Additionally, exploring the methods and modes of a specific subset of the population of online media makers in New Zealand allowed this project to offer a unique and distinct global comparison. Critically, this project was formed and funded in New Zealand. The different political and social justice climate, slower integration of digital technologies and infrastructure throughout the country, and importance of this research as part of a larger Marsden project to situate New Zealand within three diverse, individually complex and evolving democratic geographies of digital video practices offers an important contribution to the field of documentary studies.<sup>17</sup> The fieldwork of the project has always intended to better understand how digital video is evolving throughout New Zealand. Moving outward to understand digital video practices external to New Zealand was

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<sup>17</sup> This research project is funded by the Royal Society of New Zealand (Marsden Fund).



inspired by the hope that this research approach would then allow for better insight into the formation of New Zealand based practices.

Finally, video practitioners in all three of these countries present important distinctions as to how online media makers are approaching new video technologies and their relationship and interactions with broader documentary cultures (both online and offline). According to the 2013 World Bank Development Indicator (World Bank 2013) of the percentage of Internet usage per 100 inhabitants (data from 2012), New Zealand has 89.5% of its population accessing the Internet, whereas the United States has 81% and India has 12.6% of its population using the Internet. Although Internet access is widely available in both New Zealand and the United States, in areas of the world where infrastructure is limited (e.g. India), most of the population will often first access the Internet through a mobile phone. Internet accessibility is explored in many of the interviews I conducted with practitioners during my fieldwork in India. Importantly, Cisco (2014) projects a 11-fold increase in global mobile data traffic between 2013-2018, which amounts to an extraordinary 61% compound annual growth rate. It is important to note that according to these same Cisco (2014) statistics, by 2018, 78% of all global Internet traffic will be video content. This ecology is complex. There has been a growing need to examine the ways in which individuals interact and adapt to the increasing use of digital video technologies and mobile media throughout the world. The examination of emerging video practices in these three diverse geographic spaces through the critical eye of assemblage theory offers a complementary yet contrasting analysis into emerging digital video practices and how these might be related to documentary.

On the ground, this investigation has attempted to be narrow in its focus. It began by concentrating on very specific participants and then evolved to focus on practitioners whose video practice is nurtured through the work of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations that support video as a tool for advocacy and self-expression. By definition, community organizations, non-profits and NGOs cultivate the skills of individuals as well as develop and support communities of practice. These organizations are assemblages as well. DeLanda (2006, p. 33) states, 'Interpersonal networks may give rise to larger assemblages like the coalitions of communities that form the backbone of many social justice movements.' In essence, the people creating video content within the setting of a community organization will often be individuals cultivating their own video practice with the support of the organization itself. In my research, these organizations have offered a unique launching pad for snowball recruitment methods via the many allied organizations, networks and people that are affiliated with each organization or community of practice.

As mentioned before, the scope of this comparative study is deliberately and necessarily limited. My research chooses specific entry points into this new digital video production culture and then balloons out from these initial sources. My investigation is qualitative and contextualized. It is not meant to be representative of the wider population of users who are engaging with online videography.

### **3.5 - Fieldwork Methodology**

In the field, this PhD dissertation has employed a primary focus on interviews, in some cases supplemented by field observations and textual analysis. Each stage of research overlaps and informs the investigation throughout. The root of this investigation has been interviews with participants, e.g. practitioners of digital video, facilitators, software developers, directors of NGOs and others. In total, I have conducted 34 semi-structured interviews throughout my three fieldwork geographies (see Appendix for a complete list of interviewees). I personally interviewed each practitioner, though a number of interviews in India were conducted in Hindi, via a translator. Prior to each interview, I did extensive preliminary research on the video practices of each participant. For many of the practitioners I interviewed, our conversation was one of their first opportunities to discuss how they approached their creative practice.

Every interview was digitally audio-recorded and prior to each interview, the interviewee signed a release form that granted the use of the interview for PhD purposes. These interviews covered a wide swath of terrain in the hope that the questions would allow for each participant practitioner to discuss their work within the larger cultural, political and social contexts, as well as reflect upon the ways in which their creative practice assembled. I was also very interested in the personal history of my interviewees, how and why they had chosen to engage in their practice at a specific moment in time. Furthermore, the question of human agency and the ways in which communities of practice nurture creativity also became a central topic of discussion throughout the interview process.

A number of similar questions were asked of each participant, yet most questions were drafted specifically for each interviewee in response to their

varying circumstances and based on the content of their practice. General issues explored during the interviews examined the kinds of resources used in the development of their video practice. Some of the questions were geared toward a self-assessment of each practitioner's level of technical video skills, their knowledge of available software and hardware and a general reflection on their use of digital tools and their aspirations looking forward. Further topics covered included each practitioner's agenda for creating online content and their consideration of audience. Other themes explored were the social and political issues that motivated their storytelling, how they label, share and store content, as well as an assessment of the quality of their videos and the nature of the content produced. Also discussed were reflections on the organizational structure of their formal or informal communities or networks of practice, along with how collaborations might be approached within these communities and the challenges they face with their work. Additionally, each participant was asked to reflect upon the positioning of their own practice, including their knowledge of the documentary genre and understanding of a variety of issues central to documentary culture, such as those of ethics, performance and authenticity.<sup>18</sup>

Interviews ranged in length. The shortest was about twenty minutes and the longest lasted more than an hour. On average, each interview was 25-30 minutes long. Every interview has been transcribed and I have more than 400 single-spaced pages of interview transcriptions. There were a number of challenges to the interview process, mainly concerned with diligently making sure each interview was properly transcribed.

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<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that I am also a documentary filmmaker. Subsequently, I am very familiar with the practical language that revolves around the use of recording tools for digital video and approaches to documentary storytelling.

The second layer of this investigation, ongoing during my fieldwork, was the observation of documentary practices and the training/workshop practices of NGOs in India and Charitable Trusts in New Zealand. Initially, I had intended to observe the ways in which the majority of the practitioners I interviewed engaged in the video making process. However, as I conducted interviews I began to realize that this would be much more difficult than I had anticipated. Though all of the practitioners had ongoing creative video practices, the crux of the way in which they engaged with video making seemed as if they would be hard to follow and difficult to trail in the field. Often these media makers were working in locations that were in different areas from where I conducted each interview. As well, a number of the practitioners who participated in this research were not crafting narratives on a daily basis and subsequently, it would have been difficult to observe their video fieldwork at a moment's notice. Yet critically, the fluctuating nature of my research didn't offer sufficient time to develop long-term relationships with the majority of the people I interviewed and certainly for that matter, the subjects of their creative practice. Subsequently, it was difficult to negotiate the observation of digital video practices in the field. To add to that, the participants in my research were often working and shooting footage in environments of various hostility and the presence of an outsider, i.e. myself, could have at times, jeopardized the work of a number of these practitioners. I did however, during the course of my fieldwork, observe a few practitioners engaging in their documentary practice, though not as many as I would have liked. Additionally, I observed a number of workshops and training sessions of non-profit organizations of which I interviewed facilitators and organization leaders. Sitting in on these workshops offered a complementary viewpoint to the

interviews and gave a focus on the types of training offered by the organizations and the ways in which their activities strive to sustain individual practices.

Mainly due to time restrictions, the above constraints existed in respect to observing the creative approaches of digital video practitioners and practices in the field. During the course of my fieldwork I was very aware of the limitations I encountered and subsequently approached and adjusted my fieldwork accordingly. In retrospect, however, I might have made different decisions as to how I would have gone about data collection. Many alternatives exist in regards to the ways in which I could have approached the methodology of my fieldwork. A greater engagement with the methodologies that surround media ethnography could have provided a broader embrace as to the absorption of each creative practice within their respective cultural and political contexts. The strategies of media ethnography could have aided this project's understanding as to:

[...] how media are embedded in people's quotidian lives but also how consumers and producers are themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts. (Ginsburg et. al 2002, p. 2)

Although I acknowledge the significance of a media ethnography perspective, undertaking my research through the lens of assemblage theory (an untested approach within the context of digital video practices) was a difficult and intricate process that required patience. However useful integrating approaches to media ethnography might have been, this method would have framed this project in a very different light.<sup>19</sup> I believe that understanding the aperture of assemblage

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<sup>19</sup> Media ethnography has a wide and varied scholarship. Other literature that I've taken into account includes Barry Dornfeld's book, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture* (1998) and articles by Meg McLagan, such as 'Principles, Publicity, and Politics: Notes on Human Rights Media' in *American*

was a complex, emergent and important task that was essential to the health of this project. Most importantly, my fieldwork mainly centered on interviews with practitioners and facilitators. Unquestionably, these dialogues with media makers opened up new ways to analyze and think about the emergence of these practices.

### **3.51 - Participant Recruitment Strategies**

I used a number of methodological strategies to select participants, one being a snowball recruitment strategy. I attempted to begin with particular nodes derived from established communities of activist and documentary video practices. As mentioned, I identified certain video practitioners whom I thought had the potential to offer interesting case studies for my PhD project. These individuals, along with others, often mentioned further practitioners who might be interesting for me to reach out to. As well, local organizations that I linked up with throughout the United States, India and New Zealand also guided me to other media makers. Usually, I would collect their contact details and then research their work to see if they would be a potential fit. Sometimes the creative practice was relevant, fitting the criteria of practices that integrated accessible digital video technologies and activist based issues. At other times these leads were off topic and not relevant to my research goals. As well, there were moments when I reached out to video makers via an email or a phone call. Sometimes it would be a follow up connection through a recommendation. Other times, I would read about a film or an organization in a local newspaper and I would track down the applicable contact information via the Internet. Often when I assumed I'd get a

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*Anthropologist* (2003). See the bibliography at the end of this dissertation for further reference information.

response, for example through a personal connection, I never heard back. And sometimes when I tracked down someone out of the blue, without any personal connection, I received a response and set up an interview. A few times, those ‘hail mary’ emails turned out to be some of the best interviews and case studies of my fieldwork.

My criteria in selecting participants for this research shifted with the possibility spaces I engaged with and modified as I began to get a clearer picture as to how creative capacities and communities of practice unfolded as emerging assemblages within these diagrams. My fieldwork in New York City began with the casting of a wide net, almost pursuing any lead that seemed promising. As New York was the location where I started the interview process, my methodology and theoretical approaches had not yet fully formed. I began my research with a broad lens, testing possibilities of assemblage against a wide range of video and mobile practices (including the development of video apps for mobile phones). I deliberately sought a variety of technologies. Yet the most important commonality was the experimentation with narratives related to activism, social justice, protest movements, human rights and the further possibilities for connections to the documentary form. As I was interested in how assemblages might form out of a relatively new mobile phone video technology, I interviewed Tim Pool who used his smartphone to live stream the Occupy Wall Street movement. Another example would be the photographer, Ed Kashi, an early adapter of the integration of video and multimedia into photojournalistic practices and someone who often documented human rights within conflict regions. I interviewed Kashi as I wanted to know why he had decided to begin this video transition ahead of his peers. These two practices are very different, yet



I wondered if perhaps I could begin to make connections between new practices, established traditions of the documentary form and shifting technologies at different periods in time.

I was also directed towards many practitioners who were experimenting with social media, online video and other technologies, yet whose work was not distinctly in the realm of activism, human rights or social justice issues. In a way, I was chasing up possibilities, eager to get a better sense of the various potentials that were emerging from the richness of a New York City diagram. As DeLanda (2010, p. 11) writes, ‘Whereas variables specify the different ways in which an object being studied is free to change (its “degrees of freedom”) parameters specify the environmental factors that affect the object.’ Thus in New York, not only was I talking with video makers, but I was also conversing with individuals creating video based smartphone apps and lawyers who could see the potential of these apps to play a role in the documentation of unwarranted NYPD stop and frisk procedures. Although a number of these interviews are only briefly addressed in my dissertation, they were important in that I began to get a better understanding of the many levels of potential for assemblages to emerge or as DeLanda (2011, p. 187) explains, ““knobs” with modifiable settings the values of which determine the condition of the identity of an emergent whole at any given time.’ The case studies I explore engage with assemblages that form with multiple capacities. No two assemblages are alike and no assemblage remains a static whole.

I might add that this research project has been exploratory in nature. Subsequently, one of its intentions has been to get a broader sense of the possibilities present. In New York, it was easy to pick up on the diverse nature of

multiple practices, pursue leads and contact people. The ease in which I could reach out to practitioners and link up with individuals was conducive to getting an expansive sense of the wide range of digital practices and the richness of the possibility space. Not surprisingly, on reflection, I realized that examining such a wide breadth of practices is complicated and impractical. After my New York research phase was completed, there were a number of months before I embarked on the next stage of fieldwork. This period of time allowed me to reflect upon the ways I could readjust the selection process of the participant practitioners I hoped to engage with while in India and New Zealand. Understanding that specific communities of practice often nurture spaces in which practices are cultivated was an important lesson I learned from my fieldwork in New York City. I realized that if I could identify video organizations in India and New Zealand that were similar to the New York based non-profit, WITNESS, then perhaps these organizations would offer more direct access to practitioners who were directly engaging in the practices I hoped to explore. This would allow for my research to narrow in on practitioners, creative practices and communities of practice that were more concrete and specific to my study.

It must be acknowledged that this research has a number of limitations. Specifically, I've made a conscious choice to interview specific participants. This dissertation would have evolved very differently if I had chosen different subjects. This I concede. Again, this dissertation by no means attempts to extract broad conclusions as to the nature of digital video practices. Social science research has the tendency, at times, to be unordered, experimental and even imaginative. The practices explored in this dissertation have sometimes matured, are often unformed and are always in the process of changing. Subsequently, the

methodology has evolved as the nature of the research has ripened and continually re-centered. This research project recognizes its many constraints and works within its limitations in the hope of offering novel analysis. This will be reiterated and reinforced throughout this dissertation. I have evaluated information gathered from the many interviews conducted, analyzing my data through the theoretical lens of assemblage theory in order to provide a rich narrative of the nature and implications of the practices employed by the practitioner participants who have taken part in this study.

### **3.52 - In, Around & Beyond the Big Apple: Fieldwork in New York City**

I commenced fieldwork in New York City at the beginning of June 2012. In late 2011, encouraged by the momentum of the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, citizen journalism and citizen reporting blossomed as the Occupy movement gained global mainstream media coverage.<sup>20</sup> Although OWS had long ceased the physical occupation of Zuccotti Park, my preliminary research led me to a number of media makers who had evolved from the movements of citizen journalism that had spiraled out of OWS. Some of these practitioners had linked up with pre-existing campaigns; many were attempting to pave their own way, yet all were driven citizen media makers with very different practices. At the time of my fieldwork, New York City felt like a place of overabundant churning possibilities. Perhaps New York is always full of creative potential, a cultural hub where imaginative individuals gather to play and experiment with new artistic possibilities. Through this vastness it was necessary, for the sanity of my fieldwork, to be as restrictive and focused as possible, yet at the same time to be

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<sup>20</sup> In chapter 4, citizen journalism will be discussed in more detail.

open-minded as to whom I would connect with in order to get a wider sense of the possibility spaces in New York.

From June until September 2012, I carried out research and data collection in New York City. I conducted 11 interviews with 14 participants.<sup>21</sup> Each interview I transcribed myself. As previously mentioned, the main intention of my data collection was to focus on the role of creative capacities in the evolution of digital video practices that revolve around ideas of activism, social justice and human rights. I wanted to explore emergent practices through the experience of the practitioners themselves. To reiterate, it had seemed to me that unique creative practices were emerging in and around experiments in digital video centered on activism. Examining the possibilities of these practices through the lens of assemblage theory, while concentrating on the role of creative capacities and supportive structures as crucial elements within these assemblages soon became the focus of my research. Although I conducted 11 interviews, a number of those interviews are more relevant than others. Below I will focus on the strategies and significance of practices of a few key case studies.

One of the most valuable interviews I conducted was with the live streamer/citizen journalist/journalist, Tim Pool. Pool had become well known for his marathon live streaming of the Occupy Wall Street protests. At that time, his reporting was picked up by a number of international news organizations. *Time Magazine* had nominated him as one of the most influential people of 2011. After emailing back and forth for a number of days, I linked up with Pool and his colleague, Geoff Shively, who had just been in Syria, helping individuals in the Syrian Free Army learn how to upload YouTube videos via secure and

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<sup>21</sup> Three interviews were conducted with two interviewees.

untraceable methods. I met them in Brooklyn and together they sat down for an interview. Shively eventually left and I had an additional 30 minutes to chat with Pool.

My interview with Pool elucidated the importance of creative capacities and the value of communities of practice and audiences in regards to the formation of assemblages. The evolution of Pool's practice, which developed around a local event that spread globally, evolved from the existing resources available to him at the time. Pool's practice (covered much more in depth in the next chapter) utilized the available infrastructure of the possibility space he worked in – a solid 3G network, his smartphone and extended battery capacity to live stream the Occupy Wall Street protests. Pool did not aim for narrative coherence. His initial goal was unedited live documentation of a political movement. Pool's communities of practice included the live streamers, professional reporters and citizen journalists that surrounded him at the OWS protests, but most crucially, he received feedback in real time from his audience. Viewers around the world sent him comments and directions as to where protests were popping up and even suggestions of how to use his smartphone better so that viewers could clearly hear his audio. Constantly, Pool made split second decisions, engaging with technology, infrastructure, protests and shifting elements of the possibility space around him. As he adapted to assemblages that were forming and dissolving and shifting, Pool crafted a creative practice that he sustained over the course of the protests and beyond. Talking with Pool reinforced the importance of the relationships that form as multiple creative capacities and digital technologies engrained throughout these assemblages interact. Yet my discussion with Pool also forced me to reflect on the process of

these creative practices and their unintended consequences. It didn't appear as if Pool or any of the other practitioners I sat down with had a direct pathway or knowledge as to how their practice would evolve. Their practices were and still are emergent, ever shifting, adjusting to not only the social movements and methods of creative practice, but also adapting to changes in technology, infrastructure, and critiques from both their communities of practice and audience.

While the visual documentation of political struggle was brought to the world's attention during the Occupy Wall Street movement via new forms of digital media, as well as through traditional modes of journalism and reportage, various activists from the movement and others who live in New York City began to experiment with accessible digital video tools, online networks and mobile media. In September 2012, I spoke to Donna Lieberman, a lawyer and the director of the New York City Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU).<sup>22</sup> At the time, the NYCLU had been receiving coverage for their recently launched *Stop & Frisk Watch* application for smartphones. This smartphone application allows New York City residents, who observe officers of the New York City Police Department (NYPD) engaging in stop and frisk arrest tactics, to video record these interactions and automatically send the video to NYCLU servers, where it is stored with the potential to be used in a legal setting. As Donna Lieberman told me last September, "we really didn't know what to expect with the app. But we knew it was a good idea" (Donna Lieberman, interview with author, 9 September 2013). Could attempting to create an app in order to understand the potentiality of a technology or the capacity of a potential assemblage be a catalyst in and of itself? As I was interested in the linkages between digital video technologies and

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<sup>22</sup> Lieberman also happens to be a family friend.

documentary practices, I sat down with Lieberman to try and understand how nascent software might spark citizen media making. I also knew that an inverse to that was emerging. Select police departments in the United States had begun to test video cameras that officers wear on their person (Stross 2013).

These types of assemblages are only beginning to emerge now, as video technology in the United States becomes exceedingly more mobile. As Graham Harman (2008, p. 371) writes, ‘The fact that many strange assemblages *can* become real should not obscure the point that they are *not now* real.’ Within this same possibility space, I interviewed the software developer, Jason Van Anden. Van Anden created the *I’m Getting Arrested* smartphone application during the Occupy Wall Street movement, as well as collaborated with the NYCLU on the *Stop & Frisk Watch* application. I was interested in talking with him in the hopes of gaining a greater understanding as to how these video applications might fit within these developing assemblages.

My final interview in New York took place at a café in Harlem, where I sat down with Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, a couple who met via YouTube and the Occupy Wall Street movement. I had read about Swaye and Gonzalez on a New York City blog. The two of them use their mobile phone cameras to record interactions between citizens in Harlem and the NYPD. In the vein of documenting the stop and frisk tactics of the NYPD (which are a daily occurrence in Harlem), Swaye and Gonzalez are pro-active and almost confrontational with their video recording. Though their practice can be interpreted as controversial, even they acknowledge that, the two of them are self-reflective about the pros and cons, failures and successes of their distinct video practices. They record footage and new kinds of documentation. But in common

with Pool, they offer the possibility of bypassing conventional documentary practices to achieve localized political change. These three interviews, examined in the next chapter, present a well-rounded case study as to how ideas, technology, creative practices and the anticipation of possibility spaces may or may not assemble.

In June 2012, wanting to begin to get a sense of possibility spaces for online documentary storytelling, I spoke with Jigar Mehta, the creator of the website, *18 Days in Egypt*. Mehta's high profile web template for citizen documentary media collates videos and photos from the Egyptian protests in Tahrir Square that led to Hosni Mubarak's departure. Mehta, based in San Francisco and whom I spoke with on Skype, sensed that much of the footage from Tahrir Square was being captured on cell phones and smartphones. *18 Days in Egypt* gathers digital imagery and encourages citizens to situate their own footage within an online narrative. Mehta's relatively well-funded project is another example of sensing the emergence of an important possibility space and recognizing a knowledge gap for alternate narratives. My discussion with Mehta illuminates some of the unforeseen and critical challenges to citizen-based-collaborative online media.

In July 2012, intrigued by the evolution of experiments in online media and human rights, I spoke with Catherine Colman, who currently works at Google and helped to craft an early media sharing mobile phone project when she was in the Interactive Telecommunications Program (ITP) at New York University (NYU).<sup>23</sup> Back in early 2006, she and a few of her classmates conducted an early experiment with cell phone cameras, human rights and the uploading of footage to

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<sup>23</sup> Colman is a family friend.



the Internet. Nokia eventually funded a project they worked on in New Orleans. As Colman told me, it wasn't the right time for the technology they played with to take off. Perhaps the assemblage wasn't ready to form. Or it did form briefly, but it couldn't sustain due to the lack of infrastructure for Internet video back in 2006. Colman's experimentation shows that early adapters and software developers attempted to understand the relationship between digital photo and video and their connection with Web based technology in and around the birth of YouTube. Interestingly, Colman and her crew were later hired by the Brooklyn based Human Rights video organization, WITNESS, to help create an online hub for human rights video. Which leads me to Sam Gregory, the director of the non-profit organization WITNESS, whom I also interviewed in July 2012.

Created by the musician Peter Gabriel, in response to the video recording of the Rodney King beating, WITNESS offers a prototype for a new kind of documentary practice, one that bypasses conventional film based theatrical distribution and plugs directly into the political process. WITNESS is an interesting organization in that they are continually reassessing the best ways to approach online video within the context of global human rights. By no means do they confess to a complete understanding as to why certain videos have more impact than others; they are just passionately committed to the importance of video documentation and the art of dissemination.

WITNESS understands that technologies are constantly changing. Both online and offline, they share knowledge of current technologies and video skills in order to aid creative practices within a global community of non-profit organizations that support the use of video to document human rights abuses. WITNESS is not always successful in their projects. 'The Hub' website that

Catherine Colman worked on is not active anymore, yet they are an organization that understands that the relationship between technology and human agency is never static. My interview with Sam Gregory was a reminder that there are a number of individuals like Gregory, and organizations such as WITNESS, who are highly aware of the diagrams they work within and the assemblages that are forming and dissolving around them. In fact, though they may not be able to predict how these assemblages form, or why they form, part of their work is to have a heightened sense of the possibilities that are present and the vulnerabilities of those possibilities, as well as the weaknesses of present assemblages that seem to be sustaining. Furthermore, WITNESS is a globally influential non-profit organization that historically has been on the forefront of activism, politics and citizen media. Subsequently, a discussion with Gregory offered greater insight into the way that WITNESS engages with media, technology, media makers and connecting assemblages and thus helps to situate many of the other key case studies within this dissertation.

The major challenge of my New York City fieldwork was attempting to figure out which practitioners would be relevant to my research. This was made especially difficult in that New York was the birth of my fieldwork. I was learning how to focus the lens of my research and reflecting on my ambitions to map the possibility spaces of the city. Consequently, I interviewed different people from a multitude of backgrounds, many of them engaging in media making in a variety of different ways. There were a number of other people whom I hoped to interview but never received sufficient responses to set up interviews. I reached out on a number of occasions to two New York City based video education organizations, the Maysles Institute in Harlem and Downtown

Community Television (DCTV). Linkages with these two organizations never materialized.

I should mention that while conducting research in New York City, early on it became quite clear that it would be difficult to engage in observation of the creative practices of these practitioners. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, many of the media makers whose practices I wanted to observe were often engaging in their practice in other locations than New York City. Tim Pool, for example, was moving throughout the United States, documenting different protest movements (although I did observe his practice at a New York City stop and frisk protest in September 2012). Sam Gregory, the director WITNESS, was constantly traveling the world and linking up with NGOs. Matthew Swaye and Christina Gonzalez were spending much of their time occupied with legal matters as a number of ongoing cases against them were still pending from their numerous arrests during both Occupy Wall Street and subsequent protest movements that they had been involved in. When I met them, they were worried that they might have jail time on the horizon, though eventually their cases were cleared. At that time, I was not certain as to how these fieldwork challenges might affect my overall dissertation. It was more of an awareness and acknowledgement that in-the-field observation as I had imagined in New York City would be difficult, if not near impossible.

I completed my fieldwork in New York City inspired by the material that I collected, though very conscious of the holes in my research. Certainly, I couldn't interview everyone. I felt that my New York City based fieldwork included a number of intriguing key case studies that have yet been explored within the realm of academia. Basically, I had commenced analysis of select

creative practices of certain people and although many of the participants in my interviews engaged in similar creative realms, most were from very different backgrounds with equally different digital video practices.

During the four months I spent in New Zealand, after New York and before I went to India for fieldwork, I presented a number of variations of a paper that was an early reflection upon my research. The paper integrated the lens of assemblage theory with analysis of a number of interviews. I received positive feedback, specifically at the December 2012 Visible Evidence conference in Canberra, Australia. The process of writing that paper and reflecting upon New York reinforced that creative capacities and communities of practice were critical themes to pursue within my investigation. The way in which the lens of assemblage theory helped to analyze the complexities of nascent forms of digital video practices offered a new and exciting aperture in which to explore their emergence through the careful lens of assemblage theory. During these months, I decided that rather than attempting interviews of many practices, as I did in New York; in India, I would refocus the lens on one NGO. I would see how this connection would unfold and from there, if needed, I could approach other practitioners or organizations.

This was also sensible on a practical level. New York was compact in that practitioners were spread throughout a city I knew well. It was just a matter of contacting them, setting up an appointment, getting on my bicycle and meeting up in one of the five boroughs. Yet in India, the practitioners who worked for Video Volunteers and whom I hoped to interview were spread out over a large sub-continent. I would need to be more discerning in planning my research. In New York City, I could set up a couple of interviews in one day – 11 am meant 11 am.

Whereas in India, from my years studying and working there, setting up an 11 am meeting did not necessarily mean that 11 am would be the time when an interview would take place. I would need to be more patient and understanding. The landscape and expectations could be very different. Thus, what I began to hone in on through preliminary analysis of my data collection from New York, was that I needed a more focused lens and a more rigorous structure for future fieldwork.

### **3.53 - From Goa to Kashmir: Fieldwork in India**

My fieldwork in India began in late January 2013. There were a number of questions of which I hoped to gain insight from, in regards to burgeoning digital video practices centered on activism in India. How are villagers in India engaging with digital video technology and establishing the value of these technologies? How are practitioners with very little access to the Internet navigating the challenges of spotty linkages to infrastructure? In what ways are non-governmental organizations adapting to these challenges? How are these organizations calculating their approaches to sparking both local media making and dissemination of this media in a country that is both simultaneously connected to the Web in small scattered pockets and disconnected on a much larger and broader level?

Through contacts within the American India Foundation (AIF), I was in touch with Jessica Mayberry, one of the two directors of the Goa based NGO, Video Volunteers. This organization is critical to my research in that for many years they have been spearheading citizen video programs and local workshops throughout India. They have a wide network of community correspondents throughout the country and their work directly aligns with my research. Video

Volunteers is a fascinating case study of an organization that tries to be a deliberate catalyst. It is a sustaining assemblage, aiming to spark, cultivate and foster specific kinds of video practice (closely related to documentary).

Video Volunteers has done essential work, cultivating an incredibly strong and nurturing community of video practitioners that stretches throughout the country. During my time in India, I conducted fifteen interviews with video practitioners, NGO trainers, facilitators and program directors. Most interviews were conducted in English. The interviews in English I transcribed myself. Seven Video Volunteers community correspondents that I interviewed spoke minimal English. These interviews were conducted in Hindi with the help of members of Video Volunteers' staff. The Hindi language interviews were transcribed and translated by either Kayo Kalyanwala, project coordinator for Video Volunteers, or Amrita Anand, program coordinator for Video Volunteers, or by Jaya Kaushal, a good friend based in the city of Dehradun. All three were paid for their transcribing and translating. With both Hindi and English language interviews, I have approximately 200 single spaced pages of transcriptions.

While in Goa, I interviewed Jessica Mayberry and her husband, Stalin K. The two of them are the co-directors of Video Volunteers. One of my goals was to set up interviews with a number of Video Volunteers' community correspondents throughout India. As I had sat down with video practitioners in New York City, I was interested in talking to community correspondents in the hope of getting a better understanding as to how they approach their practice within differing national, regional and local Indian possibility spaces. Both Jessica and Stalin were open to this idea and very helpful in putting me in touch with their office staff who helped me organize a research itinerary. I began to

craft a schedule in which I would be able to meet up with a number of established community correspondents during Video Volunteers' training workshops. Attending portions of this training allowed for the possibility to interview multiple community correspondents in one location, rather than travel vast distances in the hopes of interviewing just one or two correspondents. Importantly, I aimed to interview community correspondents with established practices. I intended to engage in conversation with correspondents who had been part of the organization for quite some time, individuals who had been consistently producing new stories and who could offer insight on the evolution of both their own practice and their extended relationship with the organization over time. In Goa, there are two prolific community correspondents, Sulochna Pednekar and Devidas Gaonkar. I interviewed Sulochna one morning before the Video Volunteers' office opened. As well, with the help of Kayo, I sat down with Devidas and conducted an interview in Hindi. I have a working knowledge of Hindi, though my Hindi language skills are not strong enough to conduct an interview. Therefore Kayo, who is a project coordinator for Video Volunteers, helped conduct the interview with Devidas.

At the beginning of February, I attended a Video Volunteers training outside the city of Nagpur, in the eastern region of the state of Maharashtra. While there, I interviewed the principal trainer for Video Volunteers, Manish Kumar. Additionally, I interviewed the community correspondent, Zulekha Sayyed in English and the correspondents, Amol Lalzare and Bhan Sahu in Hindi. An assistant trainer and program coordinator for Video Volunteers, Ayush Kapur aided those Hindi language interviews. In late February, I interviewed Laxmi Nautiyal, a community correspondent based in the state of Uttarakhand. That

interview was conducted in Hindi and facilitated by two good friends, Manto and Jaya Kaushal. In March, I attended a Video Volunteers training in the city of Lucknow, in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. While there I interviewed a further three community correspondents, Shankarlal, Ajeet Bahadur and Saroj Paraste. These interviews were conducted in Hindi with help from Amrita Anand. Finally, the last community correspondent I interviewed was Kashmir based media maker, Sajad Rasool, who lives in Raitan village of the Budgam district, about 30-40 minutes from the city of Srinagar. I stayed with Sajad and his family for about three days and conducted a comprehensive interview in English with Sajad about his creative practice. The challenges present in the state of Jammu & Kashmir are significantly different than those in states with less conflict between citizens and security forces. Our interview explored many of the Kashmir specific limitations of Rasool's video practice.

Additionally, I attended segments of two Video Volunteers training sessions – one in Nagpur and one in Lucknow. Video Volunteers conducts two-week long training sessions and at both of these, I observed the final three days. The reason for this was that established community correspondents were themselves being trained to be mentors for newly trained correspondents whom were present in Nagpur for the first ten days of training and in Lucknow were present for the entire two weeks. During the last three days, there were moments of downtime in which I could conduct interviews. Thus in addition to conducting interviews, I also observed portions of Video Volunteers' training sessions. Although these sessions were conducted in Hindi, I often sat next to one of the facilitators who would explain to me what was happening in case I had specific questions. Generally, I understood the content of each workshop during the



course of these sessions. I maintained running notes during my observations of these workshops.

Video Volunteers is an organization that is very aware of the possibilities for creative video practices within India. The directors, staff and community correspondents are all continuously reassessing the way in which they approach video production and how they can improve dissemination of their videos through social media, mainstream media, and within the localized areas where the videos are being produced. Video Volunteers is aware of emerging factors and capacities to connect, with a similar consciousness of the potentialities that an organization like WITNESS comprehends. Video Volunteers provides an entry point to consider localized assemblages, even in situations where agendas and training are common. Of course, limitations to my research approach exist. My analysis of Video Volunteers focuses on specific practitioners within the organization and certainly other community correspondents might confront challenges that I was not privy to within the context of the particular case studies I examined.

To get a wider sense of the ways in which NGOs are engaging with documentary media, I also conducted a number of interviews with directors of other organizations that use video in the hope of spearheading change throughout India. I sat down with Roopak Chauhan, who manages the Adobe Youth Voices media program via the American India Foundation. Adobe Youth Voices is a worldwide program whose mission is to “create with purpose” (Roopak Chauhan, interview with author, 21 March 2013). Although this youth program engages with multiple forms of media, it integrates documentary concepts into its storytelling workshops and youth programming. As well, I interviewed Piali

Bhattacharya, assistant campaign manager for the international NGO, Breakthrough, which harnesses digital video to address issues concerned with women's rights throughout the world. Yet much of Breakthrough's work is based in India. Their main area of work is to create Public Service Announcement (PSA) based videos in order to spread awareness about violence against women. I was intrigued by the ways the organization negotiates mainstream media distribution networks. Finally, I interviewed Akbar Gulzar, deputy director of training for the NGO, Digital Green. Digital Green evolved out of a project with Microsoft Research India and their basic goal is to distribute informational videos to farmers about good farming practices. I was interested in how they are utilizing mobile digital video tools to disseminate information throughout rural India. Digital Green and its partners use small Pico projectors and travel through rural India, screening short videos on the walls of people's homes and in community centers. These three interviews took place in New Delhi at the respective offices of each organization. Though Video Volunteers is the core case study of my India fieldwork, sitting down with other organizations allowed for a broader understanding of the larger India diagrams and presents greater context for the work of Video Volunteers.

A number of challenges were present during my time conducting fieldwork in India. As mentioned before, at times a language barrier existed. Yet with the help of translation, these obstacles were navigated. Although issues can arise with the use of translators (such as incorrect translation or filtering of questions), I felt that the semi-formal structure of the interviews, along with the fact that the individuals helping me out worked for Video Volunteers, only added to their understanding of the issues discussed with community correspondents.

As well, Kayo, Amrita and Ayush would ask follow up questions, without my prompting, which often turned out to be inquisitive and investigative queries that added further substance to the content of the interviews. My experience with the translators I used for this PhD far surpassed the Indian translators I have used in the past. I should mention that some of my interviews were difficult in the sense that it was hard to extract much of a response from a few of the participants. Perhaps they were shy or felt intimidated by the interview process, thus there are a few interviews in which many of the answers are just “yes” or “no.” Reading my follow up questions, you can sense I was working hard to re-phrase the questions in the hope of getting more descriptive replies.

Small challenges were also present in India. Although in late January, Video Volunteers had a tentative schedule for future training, this schedule changed multiple times over the duration of my three months of fieldwork. Therefore, it became hard to make a definitive plan as to where I should be situated. It meant that I often needed to arrange travel a week or only a few days before a training workshop was confirmed.

A further challenge while in India was similar to that of New York. Although, I knew that Video Volunteers was a key organization to link up with, I still found it difficult at times to gauge what organizations or individuals might be a good fit for an interview. I believe this is not abnormal during the course of PhD research, but it is something that I was aware of while in India. Certainly there are emails to my main PhD advisor, Dr. Craig Hight, explaining the background of an organization and asking him as to whether or not he thought it would be worth my time to sit down for an interview with a certain organization. I was reflexive during my fieldwork. Constantly assessing my research practices

as they developed, I reflected on the possibility space of my own research. While challenges were present, there is a wonderful and unique richness to the interviews I conducted in India, which as we will later see, makes for fertile case studies in which to explore emerging digital video practices in India.

### **3.54 - Distant Linkages: Fieldwork in New Zealand**

Identifying case studies to examine in New Zealand produced a number of challenges. Possibility spaces throughout the country are much more permeable, politics can be less localized and infrastructure is still in the process of catching up with a city like New York. Additionally in New Zealand, there is no comparable organization with the scope and scale of Video Volunteers. However from previous fieldwork in the United States and India, it was clear that sustainable assemblages revolved around the connections between creative capacities, supportive structures and digital video technologies. Subsequently, it was critical to approach New Zealand fieldwork with that insight and therefore direct my exploration in regards to how these relationships were forming in case studies throughout the country. As I began preliminary research on organizations and individuals, it became apparent that digital video practices in New Zealand seemed to be at a much more embryonic stage than the case studies I had examined in the United States and India. My cues from overseas exemplars provided a foundation to commence fieldwork in New Zealand, yet the assemblages I encountered were much different than those I had studied in my prior field research.

I commenced my New Zealand based fieldwork during three months living in Wellington in late 2012, as well as finalized this fieldwork from April

2013 and into late 2013. Conducting previous research in New York and India allowed my New Zealand based fieldwork to be more selective in the participants I chose to interview. In some ways New Zealand infrastructure is a strange technological hybrid of both India and the United States, as there are urban pockets of the country with relatively high-density populations where digital technologies, such as smartphones, are commonplace and connected. Yet much of the country is also very rural. There are many places where mobile phone coverage is minimal and a smartphone would not be of much use. As well, traditions of protest are very different in New Zealand, than in the United States or India. There are practitioners and communities of practice who are engaging with activism based video work, yet either they are few and far between or they are using more traditional methods of documentary storytelling, such as the highly produced Public Service Announcements (PSAs) of Greenpeace New Zealand. Though I find the work of Greenpeace New Zealand interesting, their practices are quite different from those that I had explored in other parts of the world.

In New Zealand, there are however, a couple of organizations attempting to catalyze video making based on a sense of optimism associated with new technologies. Based in Wellington (the capital of New Zealand), the charitable trust, Inspiring Stories, runs youth documentary video workshops throughout the North and South Islands of the country. They conduct one-day workshops at schools and community centers in the hopes of encouraging young people to go out and craft documentary stories about inspiring people in their communities. I interviewed the director and founder, Guy Ryan, along with two of their workshop facilitators, Lu Davidson and Komako Silver. Inspiring Stories does not seem to be worried about the dissemination of their videos, as they are

focused on sparking and inspiring the creative documentary practices of youth throughout New Zealand; yet the work of Inspiring Stories confronts numerous dilemmas. Along with conducting interviews, I also sat in on one of their youth workshops in Tauranga (a small city on the east coast of the North Island). In comparison to Inspiring Stories, I sat down with David Jacobs, the director and founder of a similar youth education organization called, The Outlook for Someday. I also attended one of their video workshops for youth in Hamilton (a small city in the central North Island). Although The Outlook for Someday is not exclusively devoted to documentary filmmaking, it plays an influential role in promoting documentary storytelling amongst New Zealand youth. These two case studies offer insight into New Zealand specific challenges cultivating youth documentary practices and the ways in which these organizations are navigating these challenges.

In contrast to these two organizations, I sat down and interviewed Dr. Max Schleser, a lecturer at Massey University in Wellington, who runs the Mobile Innovation Network Aotearoa (MINA). MINA holds an annual conference on shifts and creativity in mobile media and mobile filmmaking. Though not exclusively devoted to documentary media making, MINA is one of the few New Zealand organizations that aim to address the creativity and challenges of mobile-based storytelling.

In July 2013, I interviewed Nick Young, the director of digital at Greenpeace New Zealand, about the role that video plays in their larger online media campaigns. From its inception, Greenpeace's historic mission has always been to 'bear witness' and lens based technology has played a critical role in their mission. The evolution of lens based photography and video have challenged

Greenpeace to think of imaginative ways to get the public's attention. Additionally, Greenpeace New Zealand is continuously thinking of ways in which they can push digital video technology in order to make a wider impact. Analyzing the online video practices of Greenpeace New Zealand offers a valuable case study of a different kind of embrace of accessible technologies, such as video editing software and dissemination of remixed videos on YouTube, as one piece of a broader strategy to assemble environmental awareness and activism. Similar to WITNESS, Greenpeace is a more corporate paradigm, protecting and building its brand, while looking to increase recruitment through sophisticated marketing and high profile events and a more focused set of political agendas.

Why might an assemblage emerge in New York and a similar assemblage struggle to survive in Auckland? In July 2013, I sat down with Linda M., who runs the YouTube channel, ActioNZMedia, which mainly documents activist movements and actions supported by the organization Socialist Aotearoa. Linda, who is the main contributor to her YouTube channel, is highly aware and conscious of the ways in which she approaches her media making. Evolving from the Occupy Auckland movement, the ActioNZMedia channel and Linda's practice help delineate a number of elements present within the Auckland possibility space that test the evolution of both regional assemblages and globally centered assemblages which at once challenge and contribute to a broader understanding of the specifics of New Zealand citizen based digital video practices.

New Zealand has been a difficult place to conduct research. Digital video practices are present in New Zealand, yet they don't seem to be as prolific as I

found in other locations. One reason for this might be that New Zealand has a very different engagement with activism than say the United States or India. These were initial hunches I had while conducting fieldwork in New Zealand and I will expand upon these thoughts in upcoming chapters. Language wasn't an issue in New Zealand as all my interviews were conducted in English. My main dilemma was finding case studies that I believe shine light on the ways in which digital video practices are evolving in New Zealand. Yet part of my analysis is that there appears to be a lack of engagement with meaningful video practices rooted in activism. A key question in this part of the project became: why are these practices scarce in New Zealand? If democratic citizens have access to such sophisticated tools, why have more innovative and prolific digital video practices not emerged within these possibility spaces?

### **3.6 - Methodology of Analysis of Fieldwork**

As explored in the previous chapter on theoretical approaches, I have examined my data through the lens of assemblage theory. Each creative practice examined in this dissertation is often an element of a unique assemblage that has emerged from the singularities present in a diagram. Diagrams are possibility spaces in which elements consist of inherent properties that may or may not emerge based on their relationship and capacity to interact with many other elements within the possibility space. Though there might be the same digital camera available in both New York and Mumbai, it is probable that the capacities of this camera are very different in those two locations and places within those locations. These capacities will have relationships with the capacities of other elements within each diagram. So in a sense, it's not really the physical camera at



all that plays a role in how a creative practice evolves, it is the relationship of its capacities to the capacities of other present potentialities which could be such elements as supportive structures, the creative practice itself, other technologies, etc.

Those capacities may change in an instant. An example of this would be September 11, 2001 in lower Manhattan. Though mobile digital video technologies were limited at that time, those with cameras who recorded the terrorist attacks experienced an almost instantaneous shift in capacities to connect. In a split-second, what was simply a digital video camera became a tool to document a horrible but historic moment in world history. The camera and the person had been part of the possibility space of Lower Manhattan at that time, momentarily morphed into an emerging, but transient, assemblage. So as footage was disseminated throughout the globe, further capacities of elements within diagrams connected and assemblages emerged, although these capacities never coalesced into something resembling documentary. Yet the task to follow those multifarious relationships and then emerging assemblages from that moment on is almost too intricate and boundless an undertaking to navigate. As it is not possible to do a comprehensive analysis of the entirety of each diagram, my intention is to extract and examine the relevant elements of emerging assemblages in order to study the ways in which particular creative practices may or may not emerge at particular times in specific locations. Sometimes these singularities will be pointed out in interviews with the participants themselves and at other times my investigation will identify elements within the diagram that are present but not immediately evident at first glance.

Assemblage theory prepares an interpretive lens in which to examine the ways in which assemblages form, sustain and dissolve. The many interviews I have conducted for this project have strengthened my realization that assemblages have different levels of involvement in respect to the elements fluctuating within a diagram. One assemblage might be more fuelled by technology, whereas a different assemblage may rely more specifically on infrastructure or on the creative capacities of the practitioner. A good telecommunications network might be critical for capacities to connect in one diagram whereas assemblages in a different possibility space might depend on a consistent postal service. Although assemblage theory has demonstrated the necessity to analyze multiple factors, the interviews I've conducted have reinforced the value of creative capacities within communities of practice as a cultivator of multiple elements in order to sustain digital video practices. Yet also, assemblage theory has elucidated the constraints of creative capacities as well. The role of creativity, not fuelled by technology, but sparked by an individual's imagination and intuitive sense seems to be a crucial factor in the formation of these practices. The involvement of a living creature in a sea of possibilities builds upon multiple factors *that exist* in order to form a working assemblage. These dynamics are at the heart of the interest of this dissertation.

The analysis of these localized possibility spaces has examined relationships between relevant elements that may influence or inform the ways in which assemblages that form the key case studies of my chapters emerge and at times, sustain. Analysis has also explored the ways in which technologies and communities of practice work together, either consciously or unconsciously, in order for capacities of the singularities within diagrams to potentially connect and

form assemblages. The analysis of these assemblages has been unique and singular to each assemblage. Each of these further investigations is regional in their focus. Yet this dissertation will compare and contrast emerging assemblages throughout, in order to make connections, present comparisons, and further situate the case studies explored. As we will see, singularities within diagrams are different in various locales and often these differences allow for a number of unintended consequences in the ways in which creative practices assemble and evolve. These particulars will also be covered in each case study.

With some of these case studies, I briefly outline the content of the practitioners' creative video work found on the Web. An analysis of this video material is not central to my research and is used here only to supplement interviews and provide supporting analysis of video practices.

I would like to stress that the key case studies in the following chapters are not meant to be nor pretend to be representative of larger trends of digital video practices or documentary media making. This dissertation examines why certain practices form in specific areas of the world and analyzes those practices. At times, there might be larger themes emerging within a specific possibility space and those themes will be discussed. However, every chapter examines particular case studies and does not assume that these case studies provide significant insight into broader trends of digital video practices. Nevertheless, this dissertation offers detailed insight into the ways in which certain and specific digital video practices are emerging. As we will see, situating these practices within wider historical, technological and creative contexts allows for detailed explorations of the shifts in digital video practices centered on human rights,

social justice issues and protest movements as video technology becomes more mobile, widespread and affordable throughout the world.

## ***CHAPTER 4 – Case Studies in New York City***

### **4.1 - Possibilities Around Digital Video & Protest in NYC**

New York City presents a vast and diverse space of possibilities for media of all types. Pinpointing a specific diagram that might encapsulate a finite definition of what might be involved in defining ‘the New York City diagram’ almost goes against the notion of a diagram itself; a diagram or possibility space being a nonfigurative, non-active abstract melting pot of non-realized functions and embryonic matter. When these individual entities of the possibility space are actualized into formed or forming assemblages, only then might tangible physicalities or expressive structures begin to interact and emerge from the immense diagram of New York City. As a researcher, engaging with the enormity of possibilities present in New York City was challenging, especially so early on in my fieldwork. Of course, not all thirteen participants that I interviewed will be discussed in this chapter, yet a number of the case studies I engage with offer preliminary glimpses into the diverse opportunities present in the possibility space of a highly networked melting pot like New York City.

Assemblage theory is critical to this dissertation in that the multi-faceted formations of the assembling of creative practices allows for analysis of numerous variables that play roles in the emergence of these practices. New York City, as a starting point, offers the possibility for a creative space highly interconnected with networked infrastructure, online platforms, mainstream media and potential routes to employ these technological capabilities in their multiple capacities. These potentials are not just limited to geographic locality, but open to possibilities from across the globe. The case studies examined in this chapter are not necessarily exemplars of these possibilities, instead they present ways to analyze how certain

individuals and organizations have attempted or are attempting to engage with the multiplicity of factors that are at times available in the construction of these practices.

New York City is an ideal beginning for the examination of digital video practices and their place within emerging documentary media spaces in that the scope of possibilities in New York are many and this potentiality also extends outward from the city and into the global realm. This extension is flexible, integrating the ability of these practices to expand worldwide through the Internet, as well as acknowledging the role of the privileging of western media organizations and their involvement in the dissemination of media practices of their choosing. Furthermore, New York City is a center of global media. Not only are New York based media makers present, but also global video practitioners seek out exposure and acceptance within the creative spaces of New York. As such and for the purposes of this dissertation, New York City offers a diagram of immense possibility for nascent digital video practices that can soon be globally connected through multiple routings. This patchwork of connection is an element of assemblage. It is alive, at play and also emerging during the formation of these practices. The existence of many possibilities, both visible and invisible, in the creative assemblings of New York City allows for the later chapters of this dissertation to analyze how less abundant diagrams might adapt their emerging creative video practices within working spaces that are innately less dynamic and interconnected, yet seem to be producing equally challenging video practices that present possibilities to reconsider the ways in which documentary media is itself evolving.

Perhaps more than any other urban area in the United States, New York City is a metropolis of pedestrians and street life. In front of bodegas throughout the five boroughs, on subway platforms in every corner of the city, walking the avenues and side streets in this city of just under ten million people, one can't help but feel the energy it exudes. It is a place where pervasive public spaces are everywhere and so too are video cameras. Look up and one sees closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras attached to the sides of buildings and on top of traffic lights. Look around, on street corners, in parks, on city buses, on the stoops of brownstones and one observes citizens recording all types of human interaction. Sifting through what feels like limitless online content, there is a small minority of video makers, curators, activists, citizen journalists and facilitators who have recognized that a developed relationship between citizen and camera can play an essential and complementary role in the documentation and consequential crafting of visual narratives around social justice movements, community activism and human rights in New York City.

The vitality of New York City street life ensures that one is almost forced to assume the role of a flâneur, an unseen observer to a wide range of public spectacle, both at once part of the fabric of the city yet an equally detached onlooker. Dynamic public interactions between citizens and figures of authority are commonplace in New York and bystanders are often forced to confront these moments, sometimes uncomfortably. Jason Van Anden, the software developer who created the *I'm Getting Arrested* smartphone app, shared a disturbing anecdote that speaks volumes about the role of the public as witness:

I also saw a terrible incident, in fact shortly before I met with New York Civil Liberties Union. I was standing on Newkirk Plaza train station, I saw a black kid come down the stairs crying, the cops following him. He was just walking, like sulking, crying, trying not to look behind him, knowing

the cops were there. Two cops were behind him. Then, at some point it seemed like there were five cops on the platform surrounding him and they finally say like, “Will you please empty your pockets.” And he’s like, “Fine,” and he empties his pockets and he empties his backpack and it’s like, and he’s crying and he’s like, “I was just visiting my grandmother, why don’t you people leave me alone.” Meanwhile all these people on the subway platform, nobody is sure where to look, like you’re not sure if you should be witnessing what’s happening for the sake of the kid or looking away because the kid feels awful. Like it was this really, awkward, horrible situation. (Jason van Anden, interview with author, 11 September 2012)

In all probability the majority of these witnesses, including Van Anden, had some sort of mobile device with video capabilities within reach. As of January 2014, 90% of American adults owned a cell phone and 58% of adults in the United States owned a smartphone (Pew Research 2014). Yet the disconnect between witnessing an incident like the one above and making a conscious decision to grab one’s mobile phone camera resting in a pocket or handbag is tremendous. In the United States, rarely do people upload digital footage they have recorded to the Internet (Pew Research 2013).<sup>24</sup> However, the proliferation of accessible mobile digital video cameras has presented a citizen public the technological capacity to more easily document these types of discomforting and legally questionable public moments, as well as offering this same public the potential to publicly share what they have captured online. In recent years many scholars, press and technology companies have raved and applauded that the innate power of emerging digital video technologies, as well as other forms of digital social media, have turned the tide on power structures, challenging the reach of authority by placing diverse technologies of lens based documentation

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<sup>24</sup> A Pew Internet survey from July 2013, showed that only 18% of the U.S. population has uploaded a video that they themselves recorded (Pew Research 2013).



into the hands of the people and those attempting to stitch these moments together. Yet the reality throughout the world is that what may seem to be a linear linkage connecting the propagation of video technologies with forward-thinking usage within the realm of social justice and human rights is actually much more complex than it might at first seem.

The rare individuals and organizations who are actively experimenting with the possibilities of these new technologies and online platforms within the context of human rights and issues of social justice are committed to playing with the various potentials of this new media in the hope of crafting workable and far-reaching video practices that at times challenge and expand traditional definitions of journalism, citizen journalism and perhaps even documentary media. These experimental engagements with video technology are approached on multiple fronts. They include individuals seeking out stories in the field, uploading or live streaming footage to the Internet and incorporating a wide range of editorial decision-making. Additionally, a number of organizations recognize that expansive and relevant video documentation is actively taking place in New York City and throughout the world. These organizations understand that a bounty of footage is either available online or possibly never uploaded and have crucially identified that without context or a narrative structure these recordings are relatively ineffective. Subsequently, the power of these recordings can easily be lost. One of the goals of these organizations and individuals is to make better sense of the raw footage that is out there by crafting narratives from found footage, as well as supplementing these experiments in documentary storytelling with further, more directed video recording in the hopes of crafting well rounded narratives.

Being present, as Sam Gregory states, ‘in the wrong place at the right time,’ (Gregory 2012) in a momentary situation (such as in Jason Van Anden’s example) in which a split second decision to record might shed light on a much larger story is very different than actively embracing the same technology in order to craft documentary narratives and potentially form nascent video practices. This intimate relationship between accidental citizen videographers and deliberate citizen videographers is complementary and indicative of the strong bonds between our online and offline worlds. Mobile video cameras, the Internet and small screens are in our pockets and globally this connectivity has penetrated through wide cross sections of society.

How might connections between mobile digital video technologies and human creativity produce a documentary effect? Relationships between the creative capacities of practitioners, technology, established creative practices and emerging practices are dynamic and shifting, complex and multi-faceted. Firstly, this involves considering New York City as a possibility space with a number of key features – global interconnectivity, digital infrastructure, protest movements, etc. Beginning to get a sense as to how these connections evolve is critical to understanding the ways in which these influential technologies have been approached, are used and might be engaged with in the future. Explicitly focusing on the formation of these assemblages, this chapter examines a number of New York City based case studies that emerged from the Occupy Wall Street movement, focusing on the evolutionary practices of ordinary citizens and the ways in which they have begun to establish innovative and influential creative video practices centered on integrating the use of recent digital video technologies. Many of these practices experiment with appropriate methods of

visual documentation, narrative creation and approaches to creative practice. Beginning in New York City and subsequently moving outward to specific interrogations in very different areas of the world, this dissertation continues to return to the critical questions that bind these many chapters together.<sup>25</sup> How and why are some citizens engaging with accessible video technologies and what might the implications be within the wider mediascape of New York City as well as in each particular setting explored in this thesis? Critically, how might we begin to identify, determine and analyze emerging digital video practices? Furthermore, in what ways might these emerging video practices relate to documentary media practices or possibly connect to our understanding of what documentary is or might become? Do practices that don't seem to fit within traditional definitions of the documentary still produce a 'documentary effect'?

#### **4.2 Occupy Wall Street & Digital Video Practices: Tim Pool, Live Streaming & Experimentations in Citizen Journalism**

In June 2012, seven months after the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement was displaced from Zuccotti Park, I interviewed Tim Pool, the

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<sup>25</sup> The New York City fieldwork discussed in this chapter commenced at the beginning June 2012 and ran into early September 2012. This time frame is important, as the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement was still fresh in the minds of the thirteen participants who agreed to sit down for interviews over these three months. As well, I was still processing the OWS movement and trying to understand how digital video technology and online media helped to play a role in the spread of information during the height of the occupation of Zuccotti Park which took place from September 17, 2011 to November 15, 2011. While in New York City, I focused on OWS as a specific high-profile movement within this space, centered on social justice issues as a means of exploring the possibilities of various technologies widely available in New York City and how people are applying these practices beginning at a grassroots level.

prominent live streamer, in Crispus Attucks Playground on the edge of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn. In the latter part of 2011, when OWS made its way into the global consciousness, Pool had become the prominent face of what had been described as a new wave of citizen journalism that emerged during the movement. His video practice exemplified recent experimentation that harnessed an ever-fluid relationship between mobile video tools, online platforms, on-the-go reporting and mainstream media within the context of rapidly shifting protest movements. Although Tim Pool and his live streaming was lauded by mainstream media as the quintessential union between mobile video technology and the Internet, an analysis of Pool's work exposes a complex case study in emerging video practices that challenges preconceptions of the simplicity of empowerment through technological democratization. Examining the assembling, disassembling and reassembling of Pool's practice provides a critical link to begin to understand and make sense of the ongoing transformations and relationships between mobile digital video, protest movements and creative documentation that seemingly sit outside, and at times work to re-formulate traditional definitions of citizen journalism, journalism and documentary media.

Technology and the ways in which we interact with technology are constantly changing. The Internet and the mobile phone are both great examples as to how technology can be re-invented and re-imagined by both users and inventors. Often digital tools created for one purpose are reappropriated for other uses. The definitions of these technologies and the practices that engage with them are often hard to pinpoint or clearly situate within traditional frameworks. When I talked with Tim Pool, he consistently expressed frustration as to how mainstream media presented his work to the wider public:

And when my coverage comes out and they don't want to pay, you know, give credence to what I do, they'll say a citizen journalist filmed this video, instead of saying, "Well known journalist, Tim Pool, active on the scene..." or something like that. (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012)

Since late 2011, Pool's practice has changed dramatically and has co-evolved with new technologies and changing circumstances of the times. And though Pool questions the representation of his work within mainstream media, it is not as if he himself can necessarily pinpoint what definitions might surround his video making. The digital hardware he uses and the online platforms he employs to share his work on a global scale are changing and rapidly emerging as new potentials. The fluidity of Pool's video experimentation reinvents itself at such a swift pace, integrating new technologies and modes of narrative, that whatever the definition of his practice might be, it would be fleeting and frustrated to rest within the confines of a predetermined definition. Nevertheless, Pool's practice is important. He was an early adopter of live streaming technology and a strong believer of documentation as important on its own. He is highly reflective of his craft and skeptical of mainstream definitions of his practice. Pool's work transitioned monumentally over the course of this dissertation, from live streaming to a practice that more clearly intersects conventional documentary. His evolution as a storyteller and this transformation indicates the scope of engagement required to cultivate sustainable documentary practices.

Tim Pool began his career in an unassuming manner. He had been living in Newport News, Virginia and as he explained, 'had been staying there with my brother, working with friends to create a community skate park and producing videos to show how to do some of my favorite skateboard tricks' (Jardin 2011).

Digital video technology was not new to Pool. Some of the skate videos he produced go back to 2006 and a number of them are still found through a simple YouTube keyword search. The videos, *Tim Pool – Day at a Chicago Warehouse* (Novak, 2006) and *Tim and Tom – Park Session and Mini Session* (Novak, 2006) are examples of short videos that present Pool as the main skateboarder, actively engaging with the camera, small productions that he presumably had a role in helping make.<sup>26</sup> Fast forward to mid-September 2011, Tim Pool is at home in Virginia, and it is the first few days of the occupation of Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan, the beginning of the OWS movement. Pool, browsing through uploaded YouTube videos of the protests, begins to wonder why a larger audience isn't seeing the online videos that seem to document police abusing their positions of power. As he explained, 'But then, I saw this video of police brutality at Occupy Wall Street. The officers were arresting a man, and they grabbed him by his ankles and started dragging him by his hands. When they let go, you could see that his hands were bleeding. That really riled me up' (Jardin 2011). Incensed, Pool bought a bus ticket north and headed to New York City.

Upon arrival, Pool began to document the protests the only way he knew how, recording with his mobile phone camera, saving the footage, recording again and saving the footage. A young skateboarder with an ever-present knit cap, backpack and smartphone, he roamed in and around Zuccotti Park recording whatever he found interesting. Pool and his energy fit right in with the vibe of the movement. He linked up with Henry James Ferry, who within the first two weeks

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<sup>26</sup> *Tim Pool – Day at a Chicago Warehouse* can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LgfyUeFlzw> and *Tim and Tom – Park Session and Mini Session* can be seen here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zM-HlaForQ>. Accessed 31 December 2013.

of the occupation had received small donations that he in turn had used to create an online media start-up, [wearetheother99.com](http://wearetheother99.com), inspired by the phrase, ‘We Are The Other 99%’ which had become one of the slogans of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

Collaboratively, Ferry and Pool began live streaming footage of the protests. Ferry, who had been a realtor and immediately prior to OWS had lost his job with an academic publisher, was more of a stereotypical one percent looking character.<sup>27</sup> As Ferry remarked, ‘I had a six-figure job. It was a charmed life’ (Captain 2011). Accordingly, Ferry assumed the role of on-camera reporter and they worked as a team. Pool recorded with his Samsung Galaxy II, live streaming via the Sprint 3G/4G wireless network. Yet their method of a pseudo-traditional broadcast didn’t seem to be working. The protests were ever shifting and constantly fluid. Setting up shots with Ferry as a reporter as protestors confronted walls of police wasn’t doing justice to both the portability of the technology nor the protest itself. Viewers from around the world who tuned into Pool’s Ustream channel were commenting through a live chat function that they did not need nor want to see Ferry in the frame. As Pool mentioned in the interview I conducted with him in 2012, “that just presents the same old same old. Might as well be on CNN, if you’re just going to watch some guy talk” (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012).

The compact mobility of his smartphone offered Pool an ease of documentation that traditional methods of reportage were struggling to keep up

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<sup>27</sup> 1% refers to the population of the United States who earns a disproportionately large amount of the nation’s income (in 2009, were those whose annual income was approximately \$344,000 USD or more). For further reading: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We\\_are\\_the\\_99%25](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/We_are_the_99%25). Accessed 17 November 2014.

with as OWS progressed and became global. As Pool explained, ‘A cell phone is actually better for what I’m doing than a video camera. It’s funny – there was a gentleman from Channel 5 down in Long Beach and he looked at me, and he said, “Are you live right now?” And I said, “Yup.” And he goes “Man, I’m jealous”’ (Fox 2011).

It wasn’t merely the portability of Pool’s mobile tools that differentiated his reporting and access from that of the mainstream press; it was also the relationship between Pool and his audience. Referring to the problems Ferry and Pool encountered with Ferry in front of the camera, Pool remarked, “I had people in the chat who were talking, who were trying to ask questions or make corrections [...] but it was really difficult what he was doing, the one way broadcast, like the old school thing” (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012). The engaged dialogue that Pool cultivated with his live streaming audience was critical to his approach and central to the dissemination of his reporting. This relationship between audience and citizen reporter can be important to citizen journalism, citizen centered reportage and citizen fuelled digital video practices. Mark Glaser reinforces the importance of audience in an early *PBS Guide to Citizen Journalism*:

One of the main concepts behind citizen journalism is that mainstream media reporters and producers are not the exclusive center of knowledge on a subject – the audience knows more collectively than the reporter alone. Now, many of these Big Media outlets are trying to harness the knowledge of their audience either through comments at the end of stories they post online or by creating citizen journalist databases of contributors or sources for stories. (Glaser 2006)

Traditionally, audiences have privileged the reports of mainstream media over those of citizens. When I was in primary school in the 1980s, I remember watching the five o’clock ‘Eyewitness News’ on WABC (American Broadcasting



Corporation) – Channel 7 in New York City. The first hand accounts of witnesses to major news events were often tracked down and interviewed by a professional reporter. The stories of these witnesses would almost always have to be filtered through mainstream media because television, newspapers and other forms of traditional media offered the few platforms in which newsworthy information could be easily disseminated. Although WABC’s New York City five o’clock news is still marketed as ‘Eyewitness News,’ citizen witnesses (both accidental and intentional) now have multiple platforms that are less controlled than conventional broadcasting channels in which to disseminate their stories.

Glaser’s (2006) discussion of the relationship between audience, citizen journalism and journalism is perhaps more relevant today than ever before, yet the relationships that connect these power structures are complicated. Local, regional and global news reports in the United States regularly integrate citizen-recorded videos, photographs and tweets. The reporting of citizen produced live streaming, blogs and websites supplement mainstream media and contribute to the larger discussion. The accessibility of various publication platforms makes demarcating the specific differences between professional and citizen journalistic characteristics ever more hazy. Pool is cognizant of the difficulties implicit in the definitions of citizen journalism:

Back in the day citizen journalists would be writing down on a pad and paper too. They’d be like, Oh my God... Or, I mean, they most likely wouldn’t. They would see something happen and they would supply the source or the tip to the reporter or whatever. They would call their buddy and be like, “Dude, come down here this is happening,” and there’s the tip. They’d give a statement. So they were just considered eyewitnesses. Now they are called citizen journalists because they have the means to broadcast or share the information. (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012)

With such rapid changes affecting the linkages between citizen, audience and traditional media, placing labels on, or producing definitions for nascent video practices like Pool's becomes increasingly problematic. Pool is also critical of these definitions. He renounces that his work is frequently defined as citizen journalism and believes that definition diminishes a style of reportage he has deliberately nurtured over time. Labels have the power to relegate or elevate a creative practice within certain parameters. This thesis tries to remain aware of the limitations of these designations. Reflecting on his creative practice, as well as the work of his colleague, Luke Rudkowski, a self-described "journalist" and founder of the website, [wearechange.org](http://wearechange.org), Pool remarked to me as we sat in a Brooklyn cafe:

Citizen journalism is defined as someone who used to be a member of the public using the tools available to him at the time to tell a story. Take, for instance, this young man right here. He's a server here. If a car explodes in the front of the building and he pulls out his cell phone camera and starts filming it, that's citizen journalism. He's just a member of the public who is like, 'Wow, what's happening?' And he films it. What I do, what Luke does and Luke's been doing this longer than me, is we specifically go places to find the story and tell it. That's just regular journalism, to collect and disseminate information. (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012)

However Pool's work might be framed, his live streaming practice is really about chasing possibilities and reacting to new creative potentials. Live streaming seems to fit into a number of contrasting and overlapping traditions of media (from live broadcasts to amateur video). Yet his work isn't necessarily specific or precise to any previous labels of journalism. Pool is continuously reinventing his practice and though people try to classify it, he is constantly experimenting and re-working whatever definitions might be imposed on his video making techniques. Tim Pool's assembling, disassembling and

reassembling of his creative practice is at the core of the dynamism of his approach. It is here that Manuel DeLanda's interpretation of Gilles Deleuze's assemblage theory offers useful guidelines to analyze how the elements that surround Pool's practice aided his journalistic engagement in the assembling of an emergent, cohesive and influential method of video documentation.

Discussing the concept of 'mechanisms of emergence,' Manuel DeLanda (2006, p. 10) writes, 'Allowing the possibility of complex interactions between component parts is crucial to define mechanisms of emergence, but this possibility disappears if the parts are fused together into a seamless web.' Tim Pool's use of his smartphone, his quick comprehension of a live streaming application and the nurturing of his connection to his audience relays key examples of Pool's rapid understanding of the emerging and versatile relationships between singularities (i.e. component parts) present in the communication structures of mobile video hardware and software, as well as his grasp of other variables alive in the New York City possibility space. He didn't see live streaming as just live streaming, a seamless entity. Instead, he exercised parts of its capacities with other elements present in order to begin to craft and fine-tune a new form of reportage that has links to existing practices. Pool's comprehension of these multiple tools and the capacities for these tools to connect in new ways amplified him to the status as a live streaming pioneer, a nascent form of media making that was integral to the documentation of OWS.

Certainly, there were unseen elements that played major roles as individual and supporting parts of this emerging assemblage. The comprehensive 3G/4G wireless mobile networks that allowed for live streaming to even happen were crucial to the work of Tim Pool. If these networks had not been robust

enough to allow for real time data uploading or had failed or had been disabled for whatever reason, Pool's practice might have faltered or perhaps would have needed to adapt to the changes in infrastructure.<sup>28</sup> Yet many of these tools were developed and available prior to OWS. Why then did Pool's practice assemble and emerge, sustain and evolve, while other forms of budding reportage, citizen journalism and media making practices ostensibly faded away?

Let us return to the genesis of Tim Pool's media making. As Pool began to independently live stream, mainstream media such as *Time Magazine* and *The Guardian* both embraced and questioned his style of reportage.<sup>29</sup> Though at times Pool is skeptical of mainstream media, there is no doubt that the media exposure gave legitimacy to Pool's practice and must have reinforced his confidence. This is in stark contrast to Henry James Ferry's vision and his media company, *weartheother99.com*, which all but disappeared after the occupation of Zuccotti Park ended. Quite possibly, Ferry's model was too ensconced in the mainstream media model; the site is now defunct and Ferry has returned to the real estate

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<sup>28</sup> In chapter 7, this dissertation will examine certain New Zealand case studies where limitations in wireless networks present complications for digital video practices that are similar to those of Tim Pool.

<sup>29</sup> In 2011, *Time Magazine* person of the year was 'The Protestor.' Pool was part of the magazine's online coverage. See 'The Media Messenger of Zuccotti Park': [http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745\\_2102134\\_2102359,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2101745_2102134_2102359,00.html). Additionally, the magazine nominated him for the *TIME* 100 issue (most influential/important individuals) and his twitter feed was chosen by *TIME* as one of the top 140 twitter feeds of 2012, see here: [http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2107952\\_2107953\\_2110184,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2107952_2107953_2110184,00.html) and here: <http://techland.time.com/2012/03/21/the-140-best-twitter-feeds-of-2012/slide/tim-pool/>. *The Guardian* also covered Pool and his work in late 2011 and early 2012. See 'Occupy Wall Street's "occuicopter" – who's watching whom?' here: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2011/dec/21/occupy-wall-street-occuicopter-tim-pool> and 'Occupy Wall Street: "There's a militant animosity bred by direct action"' here: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/03/occupy-wall-street-animosity-direct-action>. All articles accessed 10 January 2014.

business. During OWS Pool persevered, experimenting with the ways in which new video technology could be adapted to journalism and reportage. How did Pool's creative drive begin to further evolve and mature in the early days of the OWS? What role did Pool's emerging relationships with other media makers play in strengthening the conviction that his creative practice was vital to the media discourse that surrounded OWS?

In Zuccotti Park, Pool linked up with Vlad Teichberg, who at the time was running Global Revolution, an online live streaming channel that aggregated the work of live streamers in and around OWS, as well as live streams from other social justice based protest movements around the globe. Both Pool and Teichberg were passionate about the importance of broadcasting these live streams as counter-narratives to the mainstream press. As Teichberg said, 'If everyone is watching, the state can't just crush people. That's what kept Tahrir Square from turning into Tiananmen – they knew people were paying attention' (Marantz 2011). Teichberg's statement is arguable. Although governments are often aware of the presence of cameras, the consideration of video documentation is also frequently disregarded.<sup>30</sup>

When Pool heard of Global Revolution he had just begun to live stream. As he mentioned in an interview from 2012, 'One day I was in the park and Vlad jumps up on a table in front of me and shouts, "Where's my mobile app? They're going to arrest us! Someone has to keep streaming!" And I looked at my phone

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<sup>30</sup> Evgeny Morozov's book, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, takes both perspectives into account. Governments themselves often document protest movements or re-frame footage captured by citizens in order to present their case to the public. Although digital video cameras are plentiful throughout the world, police, army and governments still consistently disregard the presence of cameras in order to confront protest movements.

and thought, “OK, I’m going to try to do this” (Heaf 2012). The origins of the precise moment that Pool began to live stream often contrast in interviews Pool has given. Was it at this exact instant Teichberg yelled for someone to grab a camera or prior, when Pool detached from collaborating with Henry James Ferry and began to cultivate his own independent reporting? Most likely, it was an evolving process that matured over a number of days as Pool began to feel more comfortable with the workflow needed to utilize live streaming software most effectively.

The idea that a police presence played a role in the proliferation of, and interest in, the video documentation of OWS is important. In the United States, the ubiquity of mobile phones with video capabilities has allowed for countless episodes of police brutality to be documented and presented within such online public platforms as YouTube.<sup>31</sup> Once this footage is uploaded (or in Tim Pool’s case, live streamed), it becomes an animate element of a larger dynamic assemblage in which meaning is malleable within the spaces it is reframed within. In the case of video that documents police brutality or the political actions of activist movements, the interpretation of the meaning of these videos is often

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<sup>31</sup> Recent prominent examples of this include the pepper spraying of student protestors in California (see, *UC Davis Protestors Pepper Sprayed* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AdDLhPwpp4>), and the shooting of Oscar Grant at the Fruitvale BART Station in Oakland, California (see, *Court releases dramatic video of BART shooting* - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2LDw5l\\_yMI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2LDw5l_yMI)). Accessed 1 January 2014. Furthermore, an awareness of the role of video within the presence of police birthed in 1992 when George Holliday captured the Rodney King beating on VHS, plays a historic role in the understanding of amateur video, power structures and the importance of witnessing and recording within the psyche of the American public.

fuelled by deep-rooted convictions that are informed by the politics and ethics of the viewers themselves.<sup>32</sup>

In assemblage theory, the role of creative expression and the emotions that sometimes inspire creative expression are influential factors in the assembling of both the recording of these moments and the attempts at gaining a better understanding or contextualizing the meaning of these video documents. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (cited in DeLanda 2006, p. 121) explain:

[...] an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, and intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand, it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away.

By quoting Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda explicates that their use of ‘content’ and ‘expression’ is similar to his use of ‘material’ and ‘expressive’ as components within assemblages. In assemblages, material and expressive ingredients play roles in the formation of relationships that have the ability to either stabilize assemblages or destabilize them into new assemblings. Sometimes these interactions are not immediately clear in regards to their direct connections to these assemblings. As often they need time to develop and form. When a Tim Pool live stream is published online, almost in real time, it becomes

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<sup>32</sup> These interpretative meanings are examined in the previously mentioned article published in *The Guardian*, see: ‘Occupy Wall Street: “There’s a militant animosity bred by direct action,”’ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/03/occupy-wall-street-animosity-direct-action>. A number of protestors believed that Pool was a snitch and that his live streaming exposed illegal activity to the police and thus allowed for the police to follow protestors’ movements in real time. Pool argued that his live streaming was about transparency and that the ethics of full disclosure were paramount to selectively choosing what should or shouldn’t be live streamed.

versatile and alive. The ways in which Pool's videos are assembled and articulated to an audience are critical to how his live streams are seen and read. Fox News, for example, might frame fifteen seconds of a thirteen hour live stream in a very different light than say, if the same clip was used in a BBC News broadcast. Pool is very conscious that his footage is often recontextualized within other assemblages. He also recognizes that he is respected and his work is privileged over that of other live streamers'. Because of this recognition, he knows he might be able to influence where, and possibly how, his footage is used. This is a rare trait for a live streamer. As Pool explained, "I'm lucky. I can make statements. I can say these things. I can say, *Huffington Post*, do not use my footage. And they'll back off. Other people don't have that option" (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012). As Pool assembles, disassembles and reassembles his own creative practice, the output of his practice is also constantly assembled, disassembled and reassembled through a multitude of transformations. Pool believes validity is ingrained within his marathon live streams because people have the ability, through a real time chat function, to take part in his live streaming, offering feedback to maintain a sense of urgency to his reporting. Later upon reflection, this same audience can revert back to his raw footage and interpret what they see for themselves. Pool's practice retains characteristics of participatory journalism, yet it is not defined by its participatory nature. Discussing the complexities of participatory journalism, Igor Vobič and Peter Dahlgren (2013, p. 17) state, 'At the same time, much of participatory journalism has no particular intended political angle, it just represents citizens trying to do journalism as they see it or to augment what they feel is missing from traditional forms.'



Pool believes his work presents unrefined actuality and that without creative treatment there is an undeniable “truth” ingrained in his footage. In a sense, Pool’s conviction about the validity of fact embedded in his live streams echoes the naiveté of the arguments that surrounded early direct cinema, some of which professed that the new direct cinema style of documentary was a window on reality, merely a fly on the wall. Pool has a fervent confidence that his live streaming offers a point of view and method of representation that is lacking from long-established methods of journalism.

Pool sees the conversations that surround his live streaming as deeply important to nurturing dialogue and inevitably cultivating understanding between people. Pool’s practice is not a one-way transmission. As he explained:

I don’t hold anything against the mainstream media, the way it functions. It’s just archaic. Where you’ve got a broadcast tower that sends a signal to everybody and that’s it. Everyone receives information, end of story. Now I’m mostly broadcasting the information but I’m taking direction, requests and corrections from people who are watching. So there is a return from the community. (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012)

The ability for Pool’s work to be analyzed as a primary text is a strength of live streaming practices. This is not to say that Pool’s work offers some sort of purity of raw data, but since Pool’s live streams are not edited into a narrative of his creation, we as an audience can interpret the footage as we see it. This allows the viewer to cross reference footage with other media makers who might have captured the same moment or allows for an investigation of the representational reframing of Pool’s footage in news reports that integrate these moments into wider stories. At the same time, live streaming *limits* Pool’s creative outlets as it dissuades him from crafting a fine tuned documentary narrative that might allow him to exercise more elaborate creative intentions.

How do we define Tim Pool's practice? Is he a citizen journalist, live streamer, journalist, documentarian? Does his practice connect to all of these definitions, some of them, part of them? Where does Pool's work fit within this recent proliferation of global citizen journalism? DeLanda's concept of deterritorialization is critical to the evolving role of practitioners such as Tim Pool within the spheres of traditional forms of journalism. Pool's integration into the world of journalism has not been smooth. As mentioned, he has been reluctant to call himself a citizen journalist. He has also been wary of embracing the mainstream media. Yet to delve into where Tim Pool, journalism, mainstream media and deterritorialization fits within all of these definitions, it is first important to start with an understanding of territorialization.

As DeLanda (2011, p. 187) explains, 'The parameter needs a name and since it partly determines defining boundaries we can call it *territorialization*. The more homogeneous the internal composition of an assemblage and the better defined its outer boundaries the more territorialized its identity may be said to be.' In the context of journalism practice, the concept of territorialization would be that of a self-imposed limitation on *what is journalism* and *who is a journalist*. A young student just out of a journalism masters program fits nicely into a formal identification of a journalist or perhaps someone who has been a copy editor at *The New York Times* and wants to expand into writing newspaper articles might fit smoothly into customary modes of journalism. This traditional pathway reinforces internal homogeneity of what journalism is and should be. Defining its own territory is almost an act of self-preservation of an assemblage. Developing these concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari (2004, p. 504-505) write:

Its territoriality (content and expression included) is only a first aspect; the other aspect is constituted by *lines of deterritorialization* that cut across it and carry it away. These lines are very diverse: some open the territorial assemblage onto other assemblages (for example, the territorial refrain of the animal becomes a courtship or group refrain). Others operate directly upon the territoriality of the assemblage, and open it onto a land that is eccentric, immemorial, or yet to come (for example, the game of territory and the earth in the lied, or in the romantic artist in general). Still others open assemblages onto abstract and cosmic machines that they effectuate. The territoriality of the assemblage originates in a certain decoding of milieus, and is just as necessarily extended by lines of deterritorialization.

As Deleuze and Guattari explain, the concept of territorialization and deterritorialization move beyond assemblages to affect other assemblages. Those that territorialize are homogenous and strengthen existing foundations. Whereas those that deterritorialize are heterogeneous and challenge tradition, presenting new approaches that re-work existing assemblages or expand outward onto other assemblages. These established and institutional forms of journalism have strong historical foundations, yet the question still remains as to whether or not the next generation of journalists situated within these institutions might recognize the boundaries of the possibility spaces in the same way as Pool and then go forth and engage with them. The work of non-professional journalism has the potential to extend the boundaries of the traditions of a creative practice. A new assemblage might deterritorialize an established assemblage; this will often challenge the definition of that specific assemblage. Pool's practice confronted the ways in which journalism assembles. Pundits and Pool alike had difficulty defining the nature of Pool's live streaming.

Deterritorialization is a means for established assemblages to confront new ideas. This idea is innate within its theoretical ontology. By nature, deterritorialization disputes the borders of an assemblage. Often it takes time for

the process of deterritorialization to be embraced by the established assemblage and sometimes it may never be welcomed. Assemblages are confronted and subsequently, they grow and expand or dissolve and re-form. As such, when DeLanda (2006, p. 10) states that possibilities disappear ‘if the parts are fused together into a seamless web,’ assemblages rooted in history and tradition can struggle and remain stagnant in their ironclad fusion. Dynamic interactions become difficult when internal homogeneity is protected.

These questions and challenges are no clearer in the context of journalism. Jay Rosen believes that utilizing available tools are an integral element to the work of ‘citizen journalism.’ Rosen’s definition of citizen journalism exemplifies the relationship between individuals and tools, ‘When the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another, *that’s* citizen journalism.’ (Rosen 2008). Yet Rosen’s definition is vast and theoretically anyone who tweets on Twitter or uploads to Instagram or posts on Facebook could be defined as a citizen journalist.<sup>33</sup> As Vobič and Dahlgren (2013, p. 18) state, ‘When the boundaries of journalism become unclear, the norms of its practices and the criteria for its evaluation in turn become slippery.’ Emerging technology plays a role in deterritorializing the press tools themselves and the accessibility of vast amounts of affordable lens based hardware further challenges the definitions of both journalism and citizen journalism. As Mark Glaser (2006) notes, ‘There is some controversy over the term *citizen journalism*, because many professional journalists believe that only a trained journalist can

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<sup>33</sup> For critique of citizen journalism, the books, *The Cult of the Amateur: How Today’s Internet is Killing Our Culture* and *Digital Vertigo: How Today’s Online Social Revolution is Dividing, Diminishing and Disorienting Us*, both by Andrew Keen, express the author’s dismay at the erosion of standards and loss of professionalism associated with social media inspired journalism.

understand the rigors and ethics involved in reporting the news.’ This is where individuals such as Tim Pool become important as the creative possibilities that he tests, challenge the labels people attach to his practice as they try to pinpoint and define the meanings of his creative practice. In turn, Pool’s work might help to inspire other assemblages, perhaps more sustainable ones (though as we will see in New Zealand, similar practices are not always successful).

Technologies offer means to expand, tools for extension and the opening of possibility spaces while catalytic connections further evolve during these experimental processes. The creative engagement with the multiplicity of singularities within these shifting assemblages deterritorializes the notion of journalism, expanding outward, and then incorporating inward to include the reportage of citizens such as Tim Pool. It is the relationships between practitioners and technology, contexts and environments, audiences and subjects that work to channel emerging methods of *digital communication through the mobility (i.e. fast upload, movement of camera & reporter, etc.) of their digital tools*. Subsequently, the communication and versatility involved in the movement of their creative practices challenges mainstream media organizations to rethink their own definition of journalism and forces them to reassemble in order to stay relevant within a shifting world of digital media practices. The reach of mobile video practices, for example, can often access places that mainstream media has difficulty connecting with. Consequently, in order to embrace and integrate the reportage of Pool and others, at least within the networked structure of the United States, mainstream media has adopted similar methods and tools of social media coverage and citizen journalism within their traditional media structure. As Vobič and Dahlgren (2013, p. 22) reinforce in their analysis of participatory journalism,

‘It is in the interfaces, the cracks, the tensions, the new alliances and collaboration, issuing from these borderlands where the new forms of journalism are thriving.’ And though mainstream media delineates Pool as a ‘citizen journalist,’ he continually takes exception to this label:

However, media companies like to use the term “citizen journalism,” to imply that these people aren’t journalists, that they have no standards and that their information is somehow tainted. It’s just not true. If you were to call someone a citizen journalist who is standing on a street corner just walking their dog and filming, you know, police, police arresting someone. That’s citizen journalism. And you can look at what they do and question it. But when I have been doing this for almost a year, I’ve been filming my whole life, and I have technique and I’m developing tools and working really hard to make this a legitimate faction of journalism. They call me a citizen journalist to belittle the work that I do. (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012)

At the time of our interview, Pool was exceedingly vocal about his distrust of mainstream media. He believed that one of the reasons his work was typecast as “citizen journalism” was that through that definition, he could be classified as an amateur and somehow that categorization absolved news organizations from offering him payment for his work or images. Interestingly, when I sat down with Pool, he defined himself as a journalist *but also* saw his reporting as a sort of “social media journalism.” As he explained, “But I call it social media journalism. We use social media tools to share information and we go there specifically to tell a story” (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012). In Pool’s case, he could cull information from a diverse audience of followers, as well as the surrounding community present in his ever-shifting workspace. He looked to exploit these supposedly democratic forms of communication; his assumption being that crowd sourcing this information presented a capacity of wisdom through collective intelligence that he wouldn’t be able to obtain through

more traditional outlets. Working from these multiple and constantly updating knowledge bases, Pool was dependent on the proficiency of the broader network (online and offline) that surrounded, fed and informed him. Mainstream media prejudiced his tech-savvy skills and mobile hardware, admiring Pool but rarely celebrating the wider support system that at the time was essential to his reportage. Jay Rosen quotes a letter from Chris Fornof, who explained how Pool's audience, during his live streams of OWS, sustained him through a variety of different means:

When his camera battery goes low, people swarm into action. Purchasing batteries, locating someone on the ground to deliver, and coordinating delivery. He's got a dozen batteries, pack and chargers just donated to him so he can keep recording. He mentions he's getting hungry and somehow people make sure he's fed with a constant stream of random strangers exactly what he needs when he needs it. This also extends to a few thousand people that will devour twitter and live news feeds to give him active intel so he can stay safe. (Rosen 2011)

Where does Pool's work fit within working definitions of journalism? Perhaps it doesn't fit into any working or long-established classifications. Journalism is a complex practice, presenting many interpretations and possible definitions. There are multiple forms of journalism, which encompass many roles, from reporting to investigative to advocacy. News organizations will often have their own independent rules and ethics. Yet within many forms of journalism there is a common thread. As Janet Jones and Lee Salter (2012, p. 15) explain:

In the first instance 'journalism' is not a single thing. There are types and forms of journalism – perhaps we can call them 'traditions' – that differ within a country, between countries and between media. That said, there are principles that all traditions claim to share, most particularly a commitment to tell the truth and to assist the public.

Upon reaching New York City, Pool identified as an activist and initially sided with the movement. Swiftly, Pool became a committed live streamer and he tried to embrace the ethical commitments of journalism. Pool feels strongly that live streaming complements and has a place within traditions of journalism. He believes that live streaming presents a vantage point the press cannot convey, a relatively unedited representation of truth. In fact, many individuals I spoke with who engage in live streaming believe that by its very nature – unedited and immediate upload – it offers the viewer an opportunity to deduce their own opinion of the events streamed live and later accessed online through the archives of these live streams.<sup>34</sup> At times, some protestors challenged Pool about his viewpoint, believing that he shouldn't live stream anything that might present the movement in a negative way. Yet Pool was and still is adamant that the role of a live streamer is to document whatever might be within the frame of a mobile phone and not to selectively choose specific moments to upload. These principles could fit well within traditional modes of journalism and its valued ethics, but are also problematic as no approval is sought from the subjects.

For journalists, citizen journalists and live streamers like Pool, making choices about content is inevitable. Editing or camera positioning occurs both after the fact and in the field. Whatever decisions Pool does or doesn't make

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<sup>34</sup> To reinforce what was mentioned earlier, it is important to note that Pool's belief in the power of live streaming and the similar viewpoints of other practitioners are reminiscent of the assumptions that surrounded the ability of direct cinema and cinema vérité practices to provide a more open democratic representational space and a clearer version of 'the truth.' Tim Pool's work is about pursuing the possibilities of the technology. With live streaming, Pool shifts the responsibility to tell a story and instead places the act of interpreting footage to the audience.



while recording, he subscribes to the rhetoric of live streaming as empowering the public more than anything. He told me:

So they decide. There's not one editor who says I'll take this ten seconds and put it on the air. You've got thirty thousand people who are actively watching, saying this portion is more important or this portion is more important and no one is stopping anyone from taking any portion they think is important. They send it all out. (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012)

Yet deducing 'truth' from a live stream can be incredibly complicated. If a police officer, a Wall Street banker, an OWS protestor and a New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) lawyer all sit down and watch the same Tim Pool live stream, they could easily end up with four different interpretations of 'the truth.' Furthermore, we know that 30,000 editors presented with a ten hour Tim Pool live stream also means 30,000 drastically different edits. Suddenly, an unedited live stream seems highly complex and open to vastly different layers of analysis. Pool's belief that live streaming conveys 'the truth' is perhaps even slightly irresponsible. It assumes a broader regulated democratic space, particular kinds of audience responses, the potential for action on their part and faith that live streaming will somehow engage the audience in thoughtful interpretation of footage.

Mainstream news organizations also experiment with harvesting new forms of citizen reportage, integrating Twitter feeds and other forms of social media (including video) into the interface of their online and television news reporting through the use of new facilities and software such as an Application Programming Interface (API).<sup>35</sup> Madrigal (2011) writes, 'APIs allow data to be

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<sup>35</sup> For a direct reflection on APIs within the context of OWS see Alexis Madrigal's article, 'A Guide to the Occupy Wall Street API, Or Why the Nerdiest

pulled from an online source in a structured way. So, Twitter has an API that lets app developers create software that can display your Twitter feed in ways that the company itself did not develop.’ In practice, the online audience (whether it be a university student in Kansas or a BBC World News assistant editor) can essentially choose the tweets of specific users or say a hashtag, (i.e. #occupy or #nypd) in order to begin a curation process or in some cases, to allow a user’s tweets or hashtags to automatically be placed in a news thread on a website. Citizen journalists, journalists and live streamers *covering* the movement and the media team *within* the OWS movement understood the power of these APIs and used their proliferation to rapidly spread news about the occupation. As Madrigal (2011) reinforces, ‘Obviously, many of these tactics owe a debt of gratitude both to organizing training (e.g. consensus decision-making processes) as well as more recent protest movements in North Africa and Europe.’ APIs demonstrated possibilities in similar social-political contexts that were sensitive to models of video activism. Protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street were influenced by similar actions in North Africa, which demonstrated various potentials for the use of digital technologies.

Practitioners such as Tim Pool in New York City harnessed the power of these digital connections. Mainstream media, recognizing that people like Pool had an exceptional knack for reporting, integrated links to their work through simple things like subscribing to Pool’s live stream. Subsequently, the mainstream media’s curation process, or anyone’s for that matter, could be

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Way to Think About OWS Is So Useful’ at  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2011/11/a-guide-to-the-occupy-wall-street-api-or-why-the-nerdiest-way-to-think-about-ows-is-so-useful/248562/>.  
Accessed 12 January 2014.

filtered through these APIs. This decision making process, choosing which citizen's reporting was most relevant, played a crucial role in the proliferation of each practitioner's multi-layered reportage and is an essential task within today's professional newsroom. Although APIs involve both manual and automatic techniques of connecting, the process offers a very different sense of political engagement and when seen online it appears more as lightly curated news feeds. Pool connects with this idea of APIs and even relates his work to it. He told me, "My stuff that exists is a collaboration. It's like open source journalism. That I'm taking, it's like, someone calls it the journalism API that people can look at it and then point to how they want me to do it. I don't have one editor, I've got you know, three million" (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012). Pool's audience certainly aids his practice as he reports on the ground and on the move. Yet Pool's vision of three million editors is both very idealistic and highly unrealistic. Publishing these live streams online yet believing he is absolved of the need to make sense of the raw footage he captured introduces a number of ethical questions that play active roles in the conversations that surround any immediate uploading of live footage to the Internet.<sup>36</sup>

During OWS, media makers could rely on crisp, high quality streaming because of the presence of robust networked infrastructure that was in place in Lower Manhattan. Not only did the 3G and 4G networks of mobile phone companies allow for excellent live streaming with infrequent loss of signal, but also the Zuccotti Park Wi-Fi network that was put in place by the movement offered journalists, activists and media makers the ability to access a strong

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<sup>36</sup> Discussion of ethics is further engaged with later in this chapter and in following chapters as well.

connection. Parallel practitioners (such as the citizen documentarian, Linda M. based in Auckland, New Zealand and discussed in chapter 7) mentioned that they had attempted to live stream, yet the signal and infrastructure didn't allow for it. The quality of live streaming in downtown Auckland produced splotchy, unclear and jumpy footage. Practitioners like Linda believed that, at present, it was basically meaningless to even attempt a live stream in this locality. Therefore, New Zealanders covering protest movements have had to adopt different methods and practices.

For practices in India (examined in chapter 6), where I also conducted a number of interviews, live streaming was barely on the radar. There, mobile phones with live streaming capabilities weren't accessible to the practitioners I spoke with and the networked infrastructure was too slow to allow for any sort of live streaming. It was clear that in both rural and urban India, a completely different type of video practice is emerging and the network, or lack of one, has much to do with this different type of emergence.

In a sense, the omnipresent-networked infrastructure that Pool relied on almost encouraged him *not to craft* a traditional narrative or perhaps something that might more closely resemble what we know as *documentary* or *documentary media*. In fact originally, Pool intended on making a 'traditional' documentary that he planned on titling, the *Occumentary*. A number of factors didn't allow for this to take place (the technology he required for this vision – a sort of road trip throughout America, live streaming, crafting a narrative, visiting other OWS encampments – wasn't available, nor were the funds or potentially the motivation to pull it off in some form or another). Again, the limitations of the assemblage weren't favorable to Pool's vision and his live streaming, in and of itself, seemed

to be contributing to the wider narrative of the Occupy movement. Yet Pool didn't believe he was merely offering documentation. As he told me, "You know, Ustream was used for showing pictures of cats and I said that I can use this to tell a story. I mean, I wasn't the first person. But I was one of the first to actually do it from, you know, a journalistic standpoint" (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012). Although Pool was not crafting his own documentary narratives, he certainly played an important role in the telling of a larger story of the time.

Tim Pool's style of reporting from OWS is remembered and enamored as a moment of confluence that fused traditional reportage with a nascent form of live streaming. This reporting (a blend of video, Twitter, chats with audience, Facebook, interviews on CNN, etc.) has persevered and is now part of the traditional reporter's toolkit. Today, alongside a reporter there might be an additional reporter present in order to live stream if, for example, a network's cameras can't live broadcast a press conference. Additionally, paid reporters often tweet key sound bytes from important speeches or for example, developments in real time from the streets of Cairo, Damascus, Toronto or London. These are supplementary and complementary forms of reporting in addition to in-depth analysis or development of a more comprehensive non-fiction narrative. Yet mainstream media struggles with ways to integrate these kinds of technologies and news organizations still control the messages they place within the public sphere. Vobič and Dahlgren (2013, p. 18) describe this control by the professional journalism sector as a '[...] tight gate-keeping function and editorial grip on submitted material, and we see little of the new angles or formats emerging in this context.' Although practices like Pool's do make their way into mainstream media, traditional journalism is nevertheless quite reluctant to

integrate too much of these practices, as they can be seen as threatening to the territories that conventional modes of journalism occupy.

Tim Pool is an innovator and he is persistent. In 2013, Pool took a position as a producer at vice.com, the controversial online fashion/ politics/ documentary/ journalism website, which itself is often criticized as lacking journalistic integrity, its intentions sometimes seen as circumspect.<sup>37</sup> As a producer and reporter for *Vice*, Pool experimented by pushing the limits of the technology he uses. In the middle of 2013, he explained to *The Guardian* (Dredge 2013), ‘I’m testing the boundaries of and trying to find the methodology and technology that works for this.’ He hacked his Google Glass, installing such live streaming applications as Ustream, the same program he used during OWS, to see the effect it might have on his creative practice. The success of Pool’s experimentations with technology and journalism are often dependent on the assemblage in which his reportage unfolds within. Discussing these differences he said (Dredge 2013), ‘When I was in Brazil, though, I didn’t have a data connection at first, so I couldn’t communicate. It was very weird going from that to Turkey, where I could translate things and talk to somebody.’

There was, in fact, plenty of live streaming emerging out of the early June 2013 protests in Brazil, a movement sparked by an increase in the costs of public transportation.<sup>38</sup> Yet as an outsider to that movement, Pool entered an unfamiliar

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<sup>37</sup> For an interesting take on the Vice media company, see Lizzie Widdicombe’s article in *The New Yorker*, ‘The Bad Boy Brand: The Vice guide to the World,’ here: [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/04/08/130408fa\\_fact\\_widdicombe](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/04/08/130408fa_fact_widdicombe). Accessed 10 January 2014.

<sup>38</sup> The work of the Brazilian journalism collective, Mídia NINJA, gained international recognition for on the ground, uncut, live streaming throughout numerous Brazilian cities during the height of the protests.

assemblage and thus assembling a linkage to the network in order to live stream with ease proved tricky.<sup>39</sup> *Vice*, notably, recognized that Pool's practice offers crucial and compatible viewpoints to the ways in which the general public digests the news of today and tomorrow. Pool collaborated with *Vice* on more traditional style documentary work. In early January 2014 (in an example relevant to New Zealand), Pool hosted a short documentary about Kim Dotcom, the Internet file-sharing pioneer who, at the time of writing, is fighting extradition from New Zealand to the United States on charges of Internet piracy.<sup>40</sup> In September 2014, Pool again shifted his career trajectory and became the 'director of media innovation' at Fusion, a 'joint online and television venture between Univision and the Disney-ABC Television Group' (Steel 2014). It is yet to be determined how successful Pool will be at transitioning to methods of video reportage situated within the mainstream.

Emerging video practitioners like Tim Pool are experimenting with the potential of their video tools and possibilities of their creative practices. As Manuel DeLanda (2011, p. 186) writes, 'Capacities, in turn, make wholes exhibit aspects of their identity that were previously hidden, as when an innocent looking plant turns out to be poisonous or, on the contrary, to possess unexpected healing powers.' The evolution of Tim Pool's practice shows that emergence of these creative wholes takes much longer time than previously thought and requires a long term commitment to cultivate its maturation. Sometimes these mediated

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<sup>39</sup> Often on Pool's Twitter feed, he will regularly ask his audience to help him locate a café with Wi-Fi or an area of the city that will provide a singular piece of the assemblage that is critical to his method of journalism.

<sup>40</sup> *Kim Dotcom: The Man Behind Mega*, can be viewed here – <http://www.vice.com/vice-news/kim-dotcom-the-man-behind-mega>. Accessed 12 January 2014.

assemblings work cohesively and this experimental creativity is influential and important. Other times these assemblages fail, become insular or perhaps lack relevance in comparison to other forms of mediated expression.

How then, has the creative practice of Tim Pool allowed us to examine emerging digital video practices and new methods of citizen or participatory journalism? Certainly from analyzing Pool's work, it is clear that the assembling of elements present within Pool's shifting workspaces is critical to understanding how emerging digital video practices form. Pool's example is complex. His creative practice relies on the relationship between the technology he uses and his own engagement with this technology. Yet this partnership is tenuous. It depends on the connections between multiple other elements as well, such as networked infrastructure, the relationship of Pool's video practice within mainstream media spheres and social media spheres and also the ways in which these dynamic interactions emerge and communicate, sometimes fluidly and at other times, haltingly or possibly not at all.

At first glance, Pool's practice might appear to be seamless and technologically smooth. Yet beginning to understand how these dynamic interactions work within these assemblages is crucial to our perceptions of how these citizen based video practices relate to the documentary form. Analyzing these new modes of participatory journalism, Igor Vobič and Peter Dahlgren (2013, p. 19) attempt a definition of what they call a *late-modernist journalism*, which emerges:

with interactive and multiplying media. This mode claims to underscore experiential witnessing, authenticity, and directness, and it allows for networking, invites potential practice, and encourages participatory narratives. The doctrine of 'objectivity' gives way to a stream of multiple



voices and more complex relations among social actors. (Vobič and Dahlgreen 2013, p. 19)

Pool's practice is still emerging, defining, redefining and not defining itself in the process. Utilizing assemblage theory in the following case studies, as well as upcoming chapters of this dissertation offers insight into the intricacies that are involved in the development of these creative practices and their relationship to documentary. As collaborations between technology, practitioners, platforms, networks and tools assemble, new forms of digital video practices have the potential to emerge, disappear and be reinvented. Emerging assemblages of digital video practices such as those of Pool offer insight into specific instances as to how these practices have produced local and global impacts on new modes of storytelling.

#### **4.3 - After Occupy: NYC Streets, Documentation & Documentary**

During the course of my fieldwork in New York City, it was apparent that a general proclivity towards espousing the 'liberating' qualities of digital video technology was abundant throughout the city. In a number of the interviews I conducted, the smartphone camera was consistently typecast as an agent of empowerment. However for a person to actively engage with mobile video in a constructive way presented a critical boundary that wasn't an effortless traverse. And so it became apparent, as I continued to talk with practitioners and organizations attempting to negotiate mobile video technologies that harnessing the supposed emancipatory qualities of flourishing digital video tools was exceedingly intricate and presented frequent ethical dilemmas that could not be ignored.

During the course of my New York City fieldwork, from June until September 2012, a number of articles in local New York City print media appeared pertaining to the use of recently developed digital video tools being used to document the interactions between New York City Police and citizens throughout the city. That summer of 2012, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) had gone live with a smartphone app that allowed users to record police stops throughout the five boroughs. Additionally, two young video activists, Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, had received coverage in a number of alternative New York City newspapers and websites about their video documentation of police tactics in Harlem. These case studies recalled a 2010 National Public Radio (NPR) episode of the show, *This American Life*, which had explored the audio recordings of New York City police officer, Adrian Schoolcraft. His documentation of police quotas at the precinct he worked had always been seared into my memory.<sup>41</sup> For much of my life, I have been captivated and interested in the relationship between video and police. My fascination with digital recording technologies and their role wedged within the dynamic between citizens and authority figures directed me towards an exploration of recent experimentation with video technologies within the wider scope of the New York City Police Department's stop-and-frisk policy (see below).

The NYCLU in collaboration with the software developer Jason Van Anden and the independent video practices of Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye are examples of those on the technological periphery that demonstrate

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<sup>41</sup> See *This American Life* episode 414, 'The Right to Remain Silent,' here: <http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/414/right-to-remain-silent>. Accessed 7 February 2014.

capabilities for creativity within the larger possibility space. They are owners of emerging video technologies unhampered by the formidable plunge into productive use of these tools within the context of social activism. It is unclear precisely where these practices fit within traditions of documentary. Yet their engagements with the tools of digital video expose potentials for new technologies and visual documentation within fluid and highly dynamic interactions with governmental authority figures.

The development of the NYCLU's *Stop and Frisk Watch* smartphone app and the experimental video practices of Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye share an interest in immediate political responses within a localized possibility space. They are separate entities connected only by the social justice issue they seek to document, the stop-and-frisk policy of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). In late September 2011 when OWS commenced, the stop-and-frisk practices of the NYPD had been in effect for twenty years. The policy is controversial. It allows for the NYPD (Turkewitz 2012) to temporarily detain individuals within public spaces of New York City (such as sidewalks, parks and even hallways within government subsidized residential housing complexes). Although in theory this policy should be evenly enforced throughout different areas of the city, the discrepancies between the racial backgrounds of those who are stopped and frisked and those who aren't highlights the complex assessment of risk and threat made by police officers in high crime neighborhoods of New York City.

One of the many problems with stop-and-frisk is that meticulous reporting by the NYPD shows that the policy disproportionately targets people of color. Although the NYPD consistently denies any sort of racial profiling, the NYPD

and former Mayor Michael Bloomberg both credit stop-and-frisk with bringing down levels of crime in New York City (McKnight 2013). In dispute is whether stop-and-frisk actually helps stop crime. Not up for debate are the NYPD's annual records (kept since 2002) of stop-and-frisks. In 2002 (the year that former New York City mayor, Michael Bloomberg, came to office), a total of 97,296 New Yorkers were stopped by the NYPD. Of this, 82% were found innocent (NYCLU 2013). In 2003, the year that the NYPD began to collect more detailed statistics on each stop, a total of 160,851 New Yorkers were stopped and frisked. Of this, 85% were either black or Latino and 87% were never convicted of a crime. In 2011, 685,724 New Yorkers were stopped by the NYPD. Of this, 88% were innocent and 87% were either black or Latino (NYCLU 2013). Yet most importantly, the plaintiffs in the class action lawsuit, *Floyd vs. City of New York*, 'contend that stop-and-frisk practices violate the Fourth Amendment's prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment' (McKnight 2013). In August 2013, a New York State Supreme Court justice ruled that stop-and-frisk violates the constitutional rights of minorities and presents a situation of complex racial profiling (Goldstein 2013).

The *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* smartphone app was developed by the NYCLU in response to citizens' requests regarding what actions they might take should they see a stop-and-frisk in progress. As Donna Lieberman, executive director of the NYCLU, explained to me:

And so the evolution of the app into something that is being marketed, pitched for bystanders, rather than people who are being stopped and frisked really reflects the priorities and sensibilities of the NYCLU. Our concern that we not heighten the tensions that are already there when a stop-and-frisk happens and our concern for the wellbeing of the people doing it, and it also reflects what we were hearing as we would go around town doing workshops and community meetings, you know what can I

do? You know, I walk by, I'm going home from the subway at night and I see, you know, kids up against the wall being searched by the cops. What can I as a citizen do? And so, you know, we're really sort of like, the evolution of the app in our thinking reflects those concerns and also our concerns for the privacy, you know, our hunger for the information and the documentation and our concerns for the privacy of the people who are doing it and for their wellbeing. (Donna Lieberman, interview with author, 4 September 2012)

In a connected city like New York, the potential to document a stop-and-frisk is very real. Possibilities are plentiful within a networked environment, allowing for experimentation, technological engagement with ideas and the capability for broad dissemination of visual documentation. Yet what spark might be necessary to energize a passive witness into that of an active and engaged bystander? Even in a country like the United States, with long-standing traditions of democracy, most citizens are unaware as to what their rights might be in regards to recording police activity within public spaces. The *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app is a smartphone application that allows an eyewitness to record police action and immediately the footage is sent to NYCLU computers. The mobile phone that recorded the interaction does not save a copy of the video. The sole copy is sent to the NYCLU. The app also allows the user to file a written report should they so desire. Additionally, the app offers a 'listen' feature, which when activated alerts users to the location of a police stop if they happen to be in the vicinity. Furthermore, the app provides a link to a YouTube, 'How To Video' (tips for good recording practices) and also offers a section titled, 'Your Rights' which provides the user with legal tips surrounding what actions can be taken should they be stopped by the police and makes available a short paragraph reinforcing their legal right to record police while on active duty.

At the time of my joint interview with Donna Lieberman and Alberto Morales, a NYCLU New Media Associate, they both reinforced the notion that the organization was still trying to figure out what to do with all the footage received from the use of the app. As with any footage, much of it was unusable. Morales and Lieberman seemed to think that users themselves were still experimenting with the interface. Furthermore, an iPhone version of the app was approximately five months away from launching.<sup>42</sup> Asked about the quality of footage the NYCLU had so far received, Morales told me:

Some people's cameras, like the footage will just come out squished and that has to do with the phone, the make of the phone and some of the footage is good. It varies all over the place. But I think that people still need to learn what this technology means and what its power can be. And I think that will come with time. (Donna Lieberman and Alberto Morales, interview with author, 4 September 2012)

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<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that in my discussion with Jason Van Anden, the software developer who collaborated with the NYCLU to create the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app, he mentioned that when creating the *I'm Getting Arrested* app during the height of OWS (a precursor app that influenced the NYCLU's stop-and-frisk app), initially the *I'm Getting Arrested* app was rejected by Apple. I asked him why and he told me that all apps rejected by Apple receive a letter. The rejection letter he received stated, "that they didn't feel it would be of interest enough to its users" (Jason van Anden, interview with author, 11 September 2012). This is important. Apple reserves the right to accept or reject an app. In contrast, Android phones are more or less open source in regards to creating and publishing apps. Subtle layers of class structure and affordability permeate our access to the technological tools people engage with and/or a citizen's accessibility to networked infrastructure. To produce the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* for Apple, Van Anden needed to adjust features of the app itself so that it could fit within the iPhone operating system. With Android, after recording a video, the phone is locked down. Only the owner's password allows access. This isn't possible with the iPhone, the operating system won't permit it. Anyone can get into the phone after recording takes place. In certain settings this might pose safety issues. Another quick note is that the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app is only available in the English language, yet a large number of non-English speakers encompass the majority of the citizens who suffer the humiliation of being stopped and frisked. As the NYCLU app is only in English, this population of citizens may have trouble engaging with the interface of the app.

The NYCLU does not promise users that footage will remain confidential. Subsequently, the release of the app presented a number of ethical issues for the NYCLU. The NYCLU legal team is still grappling with how, when or why they might want to publish or release videos that are delivered to their servers on a daily basis. More pressing are questions of what to do when *requested* to produce copies of videos. Lieberman explained:

It's one thing if we're asked by somebody who is perceived to be in search of truth, justice and equality. And it's something else when the police department calls up and says do you got any video that's, you know, needless to say, we will not provide anything to the police without a subpoena. (Donna Lieberman and Alberto Morales, interview with author, 4 September 2012)

The ability for the NYCLU to make these conscious choices is a privilege specific to the jurisdiction where the organization works. In fact, to be presented with such choices is particular to the assemblages in which this mobile application is used. There are many places throughout the world where recording a police interaction could turn into a life and death situation. Even in New York City, a user of the app must be careful as to how he or she approaches a stop-and-frisk situation. The NYCLU was deliberate that the app's interface would be intended for bystanders and not for individuals stopped by police. In the United States, reaching into one's pocket while being interrogated or about to be frisked by a police officer is a very dangerous action to take. The NYCLU is certainly aware of this. Lieberman and Morales described the thought process behind the evolution of the app and this dilemma was discussed by the organization. As Morales explained:

For instance, if you reach into your pocket, a police officer could think you're grabbing a weapon and so we thought that wasn't the best idea. But further to the point, we wanted it to sort of be a bystander app, so that the person who was getting arrested didn't have to bother getting their

phone at all but somebody witnessing the event would be able to record the event. (Donna Lieberman and Alberto Morales, interview with author, 4 September 2012)

New York City presents a fertile testing ground to introduce a mobile video app to document police action in public spaces. If say, a similar app was introduced in Florida, it might not offer the same potential to make an impact. The possibility space is very different. In most areas of Florida, there is minimal foot traffic and congregating around police activity might require an individual to drive his or her car to a location, get out and then start recording. This presents a plethora of additional safety issues.

Although the NYCLU is not quite sure as to how the footage from the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app might be implemented and ethical questions still swirl around the experiment, the organization positions this software as just one of many tools that might spark citizen engagement in the visual documentation of what they believe are hundreds of daily infringements on the civil liberties of New Yorkers. Even though in August 2013, a federal judge determined that the constitutional rights of minorities had been infringed upon through these stop-and-frisk tactics, both the legal battle and the struggle to influence the public's perception of the issues is far from over. Footage received from the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app performs an active role in the ongoing conversation and might, at some point, allow the NYCLU to craft documentary narratives from this crowd-sourced experiment. Discussing four major class action lawsuits on the horizon, Lieberman mused:

You know, if it says, do the right thing, train your cops the right way, stop stopping and frisking people without suspicion, well is it really happening? So, while we have learned in the last twenty, thirty years, I think in particular that legal victories can become hollow when they are ignored or sabotaged on the ground by the people that are supposed to



hold the law, we've also learned that change comes more better, more profoundly if you win not just in court, but in the public arena and so that's what our sort of whole way of doing business is about. Which is very different from what it was even ten years ago actually. (Donna Lieberman and Alberto Morales, interview with author, 4 September 2012)

With the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app, the NYCLU hopes to spark citizen engagement with video technology throughout the five boroughs of New York City. The organization believes that the footage will help sway public opinion and that the presence of this video software will galvanize a population into action. The project is an ongoing experiment and though the NYCLU is not specific as to what their exact objectives or outcomes from the project might be, the organization understands that obtaining citizen recorded footage will only aid in their understanding of stop-and-frisk tactics and possibly present them with the opportunity to craft more cohesive narratives either within a court of law or possibly through self produced documentary narratives online or perhaps both.

In contrast to the software development of the NYCLU, in the Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan, two videographers, Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, have been experimenting with emerging video technologies also within the context of stop-and-frisk. Their experience documenting the tactics of the NYPD is much more direct and presents further ethical dilemmas for burgeoning digital videographers brazenly confronting authority. Gonzalez and Swaye approach their video making with intentions to create moving imagery that is simple and accessible to others. Similar to the NYCLU's hope that the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app will generate video documentation, an element of Gonzalez and Swaye's intentions are to produce work that requires minimal preliminary and post-production, so that others may view the outcome of their work and not feel

intimidated by the technology. Yet in their quest for immediacy and using minimal amounts of post-production, their recordings have become hindered in the scope of their reach and online viewers have challenged their authenticity and creative approach.

The path that led Christina Gonzalez to begin to document the stop-and-frisk tactics of the NYPD began at the height of Occupy Wall Street, when in September 2011 a police officer told her that she couldn't record a march heading from Zuccotti Park to Union Square. Gonzalez was arrested and her point-and-shoot camera confiscated. As with many of the arrests during the movement, Gonzalez was held for a number of hours before she was released. As she told me late in 2012, "I was like in the back of a police van with seventeen other people, no food, no water, no bathroom, no windows. We had our phones on us though and we were taking pictures and we were making phone calls" (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012). Gonzalez sent these photographs to her sister, who shared them with one of the news channels in New York City, which broadcast them. Hours later, the NYPD released her and she walked back to Zuccotti Park, "with no shoes on, because I didn't have my shoes, no shirt on. And right away people had cameras in my face and they wanted to interview me. And I did this eleven minute video where I just talked about my experience" (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012). As of early October 2014, Gonzalez's interview has been viewed on YouTube more than 39,000 times.<sup>43</sup>

One of the people who saw the video online was another activist, Matthew

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<sup>43</sup> This interview, *Christina Gonzalez Arrested and Beat Up by Cops (Occupy Wall Street)*, can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2WJvZ1hAno>. Accessed 4 July 2014.

Swaye. The two of them had, in fact, met a number of times before. Yet Swaye, emboldened by Gonzalez's energy and spirit, went down to the park and they began to talk. Gonzalez had seen Swaye's YouTube videos critiquing the NYPD's stop-and-frisk policy, specifically one that mocked the former NYPD commissioner, Ray Kelly, on his way to an appearance at Columbia University.<sup>44</sup> Soon after reconnecting in Zuccotti Park, Swaye and Gonzalez began not only a professional relationship in which they used their smartphones to document the stop-and-frisk tactics of the NYPD within their Harlem community, but they also fell in love. Although Swaye jokes that he is part of the YouTube dating community, he is resistant to the idea that online video within the context of protest does not make an impact. He is adamant that online video is critical for protest movements. "But no one is going to tell us that video doesn't matter," he told me almost a year after the Occupy movement started, "I mean, like, we're just not ready to hear that" (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012). Both Swaye and Gonzalez believe that when someone watches one of their videos, it makes an impact; no matter what response they get from an online audience. As Swaye explained, "our assumption is that a video that someone sees and doesn't comment on and doesn't like or dislike, that's a little splinter of something in their head that they then carry around with them" (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012). Swaye and Gonzalez's belief in the networked audience comes across as naïve. Their assumptions suggest that individuals who watch their videos will side with their stance against stop-and-frisk. Yet quickly

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<sup>44</sup> This video, *Ray Kelly Receives 2011 Bull Connor Award*, uses tactics of ambush journalism and can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcOqB06uwX0>. Accessed 14 January 2014.

scrolling viewers' comments on YouTube and it is apparent that the audience is both inspired and repulsed by their work. The footage they capture is in no way crystal clear and is open to numerous interpretations. Nevertheless, perhaps the "splinter" that Swaye mentions produces a 'documentary effect' that has the potential within various assemblages to be impactful for individuals and even larger audiences.

The tools that Gonzalez and Swaye use are similar to those of Tim Pool, yet their tactics are very different. They both carry smartphones and when they happen upon a stop-and-frisk unfolding, they tend to document it independently. Gonzalez and Swaye each have their own unique style of video making. They don't live stream and their involvement in documentation is very vocal. They approach a stop-and-frisk as it is evolving, asking questions to the officers, sometimes interrogating them, very clearly announcing their presence. Passionate about police actions, they are often openly hostile. The two of them are also conscious of the fact that the citizens who are stopped by law enforcement may not always welcome their presence. As Gonzalez explains:

It's such a mixed feeling when you are out there. You feel like you are doing this service to someone. Or you know, a lot of people. But then at the same time, those young men who were there probably didn't want to be filmed. They're probably like, "Who the fuck is this lady? And why is she here making the situation worse?" (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012)

These dilemmas, of when to record and why, strip bare important ethical questions that become exceedingly more complex as citizens become further empowered and engaged with their mobile video recording devices. These moral quandaries are ever more profound when footage is uploaded to the Internet. Once placed online in the cloud, digital memories of all types are extremely

difficult to delete. There is no general code of ethics for the upload of citizen-produced video. As Gonzalez describes:

But you know, there have been people who say that they don't want to be filmed or you know, you can see clearly that they're turning away from the camera. They don't want to be part of it. And then other people are just like, "Yeah, of course, film this. This is perfect, we need this." And that makes me feel really confident. But that's something that I'm struggling with, that we should protect the rights of these people, you know. (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012)

In New York City, the internal conflict one might encounter in deciding whether or not to upload video footage might not be as decisive a decision as uploading footage from an active conflict zone. The reality however, for today's global citizens and emerging media makers, is that the state is watching video online and often the consequences of uploading videos to the Internet can be profound for both sides of any story.<sup>45</sup> Video documents, such as those of Gonzalez and Swaye, have the potential to play a part in multiple unfolding assemblages. Each situation and every moment presents an opportunity for a new iteration and dynamic assemblage.

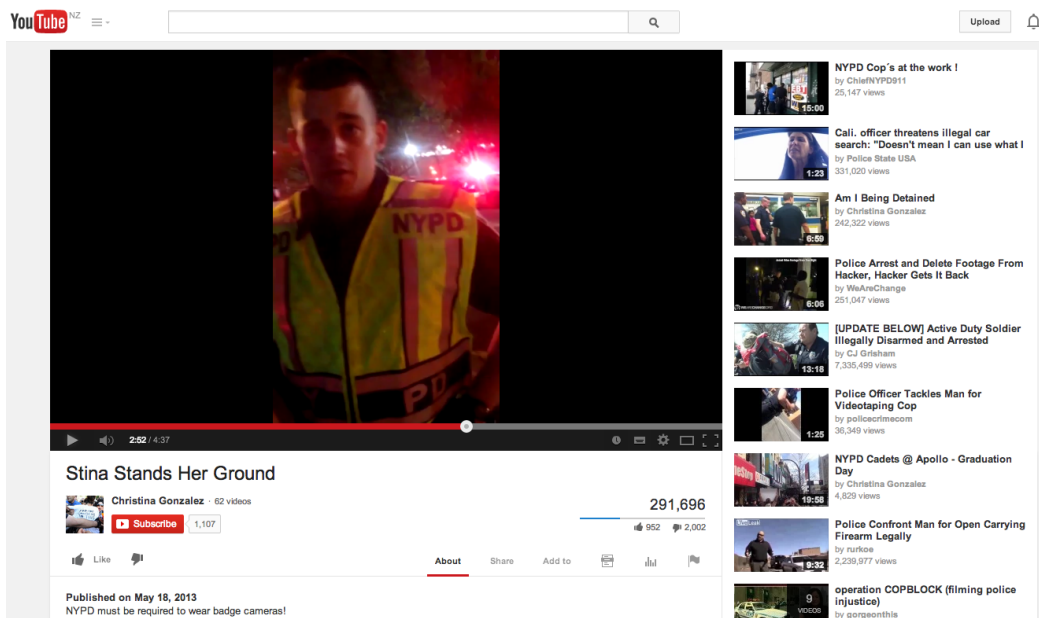
For Gonzalez, Swaye and Pool, controlling the ways in which their footage is interpreted becomes problematic in the scope of their distinctive creative practices. They seldom know exactly where the footage they produce might surface. Once uploaded these video documents are read and often reposted on platforms for which control over the re-appropriation is out of their hands. However, Swaye and Gonzalez are activists and they are well aware of the conflicts present in their work. When I sat down to talk with them, there were a

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<sup>45</sup> The next chapter will further explore the ways in which international organizations are attempting to approach questions of ethics within citizen produced online media.

number of pending legal cases against them. The use of video as evidence would be a part of their defense. Both of them understood that the use of video recordings for evidence presented a vastly different arena for interpretation. For the two of them, recognizing the rules of engagement for the presentation of video in court allowed them to reassess their approach to video making. As Swaye explained:

It was like, you know the cops were accusing me of blocking traffic and I was able to say, “For the record, I’m not,” and document that. Like, I just understand how the courts work now and, you know, we have all these open trials and they’re accusing us of a variety of things. Had I known those would be the accusations and that it would be consistent every time they continue to write this on us. I would have simply turned around during any one of those protests and documented, “Here we have four feet of sidewalk that is clear. Here are eight pedestrians walking by smiling, nodding, no problem.” (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012)



**Image 1: A frame from Gonzalez's smartphone, a moment before she is arrested.**

Christina Gonzalez’s video, *Stina Stands Her Ground* (Gonzalez, 2013), is

a good example of their recording technique.<sup>46</sup> A four and a half minute video, recorded walking home from dinner on a bridge between the Bronx and Harlem, Gonzalez and Swaye observe a NYPD checkpoint. Perturbed by what they see as an infringement on the rights of citizens in their neighborhood, Gonzalez decides to record the numerous police cars and officers milling about. Around minute two (Gonzalez 2013), she asks one of the officers from a distance, ‘Is everything alright out here? Something gone wrong? Officers... Hello, a citizen is trying to ask you a question. Is everything alright?’

One officer (Gonzalez 2013) responds, ‘It’s a vehicle safety checkpoint,’ and Gonzalez replies, ‘Safety? Whose safety is in danger right now?’ The officer states that he has nothing else to say to her, which irks Gonzalez who begins to provoke the officers by insisting that they work for her, a citizen. The officers then ask Gonzalez for her identification and she responds that she is not obliged to present it. Arguing with the officers, she calls out to Swaye, ‘Baby, take your phone out and film this’ (Gonzalez 2013). Ten seconds later one of the officers grabs her camera, a struggle ensues and both she and Swaye are arrested and held for 25 hours in police custody. As of October 2014, *Stina Stands Her Ground* has been viewed more than 292,000 times on YouTube. Gonzalez herself uploaded this video and her written description (Gonzalez 2013) of the video begins with, ‘NYPD must be required to wear badge cameras!’ Gonzalez and Swaye seem to feel that video cameras from both angles (citizen and police officer) are valid and legitimate means of documentation and visual evidence.

Gonzalez and Swaye’s videos are short, typically under five minutes. They

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<sup>46</sup> *Stina Stands Her Ground* can be viewed here - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=unhRGGHQx3s>. Accessed 1 July 2014.

are rarely edited, besides some minimal trimming at the beginning and end. Their practice deliberately rejects integral aspects of traditional documentary practice. Though their reason for this is not necessarily clear or convincing. “We’ve tried to keep all this stuff as amateur as possible,” Swaye told me. Continuing he said:

[...] we don’t have any, we’re not editing in any, any, there’s no editing really that takes place at all. We want to just make it as much stripped down citizen journalism, kind of, just stuff as possible. That shouldn’t, no one should see our stuff and go, Oh, I’d like to do that but I don’t know how to edit. Like, I don’t think that’s a concern of this generation anyway but, we want to make it so that forty year olds could adopt this as a living hobby too [...]. (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012)

The two of them use techniques that are quite different than those of Tim Pool. Pool live streams directly to the Internet in real time, whereas Gonzalez and Swaye record footage on their smartphones and then return to their home in order to upload the footage to the Internet.<sup>47</sup> The actions and protests that Pool live streams are often much more high profile than say a young black man being patted down, questioned and at times arrested on an obscure street corner in Harlem. The difference in the general global consciousness of Occupy Wall Street in contrast to the stop-and-frisk tactics of the NYPD in high crime areas of New York City plays a role in the ways in which assemblages emerge from the dissemination of these two practices. Pool live streamed a New York City event that quickly went global, whereas Gonzalez and Swaye continually document stop-and-frisk throughout their community. They are resolute and insistent that they must record. They believe they are doing a public service, wondering who will record these moments if they don’t. Certainly, the ghost of Rodney King

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<sup>47</sup> We will examine similar practices found in both India and New Zealand in later chapters.



permeates their video practice, though in different ways than King's memory might inform the global organization, WITNESS, which will be discussed in the ensuing chapter. The question remains, might there be a moment in the future in which their practice achieves a global distribution similar to the ways in which Tim Pool's practice spread worldwide?

Both Gonzalez and Swaye believe that history surrounds and informs their video practice. It is not merely the historic use of video in the United States to document police brutality that lays a foundation for their work; they are also passionate about valuing the visual documentation of subtle and overt forms of discrimination and racism within the context of America's history. Their comprehension is, in part, merely insisting on playing a role in the video documentation and dissemination of these moments, no matter if the work is far-reaching or not, either in the present or the future. As DeLanda (2011, p. 185) states, 'The identity of an assemblage should always be conceived as the product of a historical process, the process that brought its components together for the first time as well as the process that maintains its integrity through a regular interaction among its parts.' Swaye reflected on this idea:

I'd like to think is that if Stina and I were bouncing about, you know, during the lynching period, we had smartphones, we'd be some of the few people who'd be documenting right now. And calling it out for what it is and not saying like, "Hey, what a nice picnic." You know, this is not a picnic. (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012)

Quotes like these, which come in both conversations with Swaye and Gonzalez, as well as during the videos they upload to YouTube, give fodder to their detractors as it reinforces that their creative approach seems to be misinformed by attempts at naïve historical interconnections. It is important to

note that Swaye and Gonzalez's practice can be interpreted as highly antagonistic. The range of comments on YouTube sways from anger at the police to anger at the video makers. Moreover, New Yorkers are divided as to whether stop-and-frisk is a policy that should continue or cease. Many support it. Matthew Swaye and Christina Gonzalez's work has garnered only minimal coverage in local press, a stark contrast to Pool's prolific international profile within protest circles. Pool sees his work as "social media journalism" or "open-source journalism" yet shuns the idea that he is a citizen journalist. For Pool, he sees being defined as a citizen journalist not only as a way for mainstream media to avoid criticism for not paying him for his footage, but also as a means of belittling the hard investigative, on-the-scene-journalism that he practices. Swaye and Gonzalez identify closer to the idea that they are citizen journalists, even mentors in the sense, with the hope that more people will use the omnipresent digital cameras on their mobile phones to capture the tactics of stop-and-frisk. Yet this type of digital video is in opposition to documentary practice. This kind of real time footage tends to overwhelm narrative construction and undermines more careful and detailed perspectives. It is doubtful that in the long term, digital video practices like those of Gonzalez and Swaye, are really serving the kinds of political goals they want to achieve.

As mentioned, Gonzalez and Swaye tend to document police interactions in Harlem, the neighborhood that they live in. This relationship to their workspace is important and possibly adds an additional layer of passion to their work. Observing stop-and-frisk in Harlem is a common occurrence. Their video documentation follows the work of a number of other Harlem residents who are engaging in similar practices. A YouTube user who goes by the name

Nycresistance has maintained a YouTube channel with the same name for over five years and has been documenting police interactions with citizens throughout New York City.<sup>48</sup> He records from a distance, often witnessing from inside his car and narrates what he sees in the short edited videos he produces and uploads. On video, people have asked him what his name is and he has responded, ‘NYC Resistance.’ He embraces his roll as a video documentarian by staying anonymous and identifying with his YouTube name. Likewise, the seventy-one year old Joseph ‘Jazz’ Hayden, a Harlem resident, has been documenting interactions between police and the public throughout Harlem for a number of years.<sup>49</sup> Hayden calls his work Cop Watch and maintains a Cop Watch page on his website, *All Things Harlem*.<sup>50</sup> Hayden also has an *All Things Harlem* YouTube page, which contains over 500 videos. Not all of these videos document police interactions, but those that do are simultaneously posted on his Cop Watch homepage. Both Nycresistance and Hayden’s videos are lightly edited, often with intertitles describing the place and situation of the documentation. Hayden, as well, integrates videos that other people have recorded, edits them and places them under the Cop Watch banner. The work of Nycresistance and Hayden is similar to an archive and constitutes years of video documentation of police interactions throughout New York City. Yet for this

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<sup>48</sup> The work of Nycresistance can be viewed here: <http://www.youtube.com/user/nycresistance> and here: <http://nycresistance.blogspot.com>. Accessed 19 October 2014.

<sup>49</sup> This article goes into more detail on Hayden and his relationship with police, ‘A Watcher of the Police Says He is Now a Target’ by Kia Gregory, here: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/10/nyregion/chronicler-of-police-says-his-arrest-was-payback-for-harlem-video.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed 19 October 2014.

<sup>50</sup> The Cop Watch section of Hayden’s website can be found here: <http://www.allthingsharlem.com/copwatch/>. Accessed 19 October 2014.

work to transcend into that of documentary media requires more direction and creation of a narrative that would allow these years of recordings to be placed within traditional concepts of a documentary agenda.

Watching videos that have been produced by any of these Harlem based media makers, it is clear that when a camera is placed within these contexts where police have stopped citizens, the dynamic can often change drastically. Police, when they become aware that a camera is present, are much more guarded and self conscious about the stop that is taking place. Both Gonzalez and Swaye see their cameras as weapons, yet they don't necessary believe that their cameras can protect them from being arrested or confronted by police, but perhaps offering protection or evidence after an encounter. As Gonzalez explained, "You know, so I don't, no I don't feel safe with the camera, but it's definitely a tool. It definitely feels like a weapon to me. And it feels, it feels way more powerful than their guns, you know" (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012). As we will see in chapter 6, a number of community correspondents of the Indian NGO, Video Volunteers, express a similar connection to their cameras. Although their circumstances come from a very different political context, the concept of the camera as a weapon or a protector resonates with a number of case studies found later on in this dissertation.

The use of digital video cameras within the context of stop-and-frisk in Harlem is a creative practice of empowerment. Watching a Cop Watch video or one by Nycresistance or videos crafted by Swaye and Gonzalez, there is almost a reverse process of ownership of the moment and a check on power structures. A sense of fear can be seen and felt in these videos and an active process of documentation almost seems to emancipate and cushion what can be excessive

and violent encounters between citizens and police. A sense of entitlement to document, that ‘this is my neighborhood and this is a public space and I have a right to record’ pervades the aura of these videos and their makers. In a way, this is an assembling of a moment of empowerment that is rarely captured on camera. Stating that ‘I have a camera and I am recording,’ is a powerful sentence that provides defense in the face of potential indignity. Though often the citizens on camera seem confused as to what is happening, only appearing to hope that they can move on from their temporary and forced indignity. Discussing the evolution of these Harlem video practices, Swaye stated:

Like we sort of know the procedure now, so we’re leaving more room for other people to enter their voices into the moment. I feel I’m not, I don’t feel like I have to m.c. the whole damn thing because, I think, it seems to me community is coming together. So like, in a recent Cop Watch, a guy stood behind me and he started filming and he said, “I got you covered.” He was filming me filming them and it’s like without knowing it, I think he had adopted the perfect like, the way the Black Panthers used to do this, like the coverage. He understood. He got the coverage of the moment. (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012)

Swaye makes a good point. The use of digital video cameras as a method of visual documentation within the context of law enforcement against citizens in the United States is a growing practice. Citizens are highly aware of the power of the video camera and recognize that digital video can play an important role within legal frameworks and in the court of public opinion. The video practices of Tim Pool, Matthew Swaye and Christina Gonzalez are all very different. These three individuals are examples of media makers who emerged from the Occupy Wall Street movement and have attempted to integrate mobile video technology into a wider debate about a number of social issues in New York City. Their intentions are also different, yet they share the motivation that recording

interactions between people and authority is critical to the unfolding narrative of the city and the wider world. Although the practices of these Harlem based videographers are not as developed or supported as the creative practice of Tim Pool, these practitioners believe that they are doing their bit to document the power structures at play when police stop-and-frisk citizens in Harlem. Of course, the ways these moments are documented are also a reflection of the videographers themselves. All the Harlem videographers have prominent and vocal roles behind the camera. As Swaye reflected, “I’m almost documenting myself in the moment. I think that’s apparent in some of the stuff. I’m not comfortable with that either. I want to be more about the moment, but it’s, I’m almost documenting my impression of power more so than anything else” (Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, interview with author, 12 September 2012).

In contrast, the NYCLU’s *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app is an attempt to introduce software, specifically a mobile application into the mix that might spark bystanders to become more active participants in the documentation of questionable police actions. On some level, they are trying jolt those who aren’t cop watchers into a similar role. Yet as the NYCLU will admit, merely creating software doesn’t necessarily spark people into suddenly becoming media makers. The NYCLU, however, understands that there is also a political imperative to simply recording and documenting in order to chronicle intangible moments of political history and historical injustice. The process evolves and assembles over time and with much prodding and encouragement and support. A smartphone app like *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* is a beginning to a larger assembling. It is an element of what could, at some point, assemble.

#### **4.4 - Conclusion: New York City & Beyond**

The individuals and organizations explored in this chapter are just a few of many throughout the world who are trying to make sense of social issues, digital video technology, the Internet, creative capacities and the ways in which these elements can contribute to growing conversations about social justice issues in New York City. Attempting to negotiate how these emerging assemblages form is tricky. There is no written formula to crafting a viral video or creating an influential video practice. What does this mean for documentary? In the context of the case studies throughout this chapter, it appears as if these practitioners are accepting the concept of networked media as a route forward towards a method of visual documentation that allows for ‘true’ narratives to surface and be disseminated with the help of the audience. The Occupy Wall Street movement operated on a set of assumptions about how open, democratic spaces and transparent political activity could fuel change. In a way, Tim Pool’s practice mirrored those ideas. He believed that by seeing and documenting, people watching his live streams would be able to deduce the reality on the ground for themselves. Initially, many of these practitioners presumed that visual documentation alone would spark a ‘documentary effect’ through dissemination of videos on YouTube and that there would be no need to marshal evidence, to construct meaning and present material in a persuasive way. These assumptions underestimate the art of documentary making itself and seek to bypass it; as such, these video documents are relegated to the interpretation of the audience, prone to re-appropriation and easily lost in the complexities and vastness of the Internet.

Nevertheless, a ‘documentary effect’ whispers throughout these digital video practices. Technological experimentations with smartphone apps and live

streaming platforms encourage mobile methods of broadcasting while confronting traditional methods of journalism. New ethical questions surface as both subjects and audiences come face to face with exploratory forms of visual documentation and developing forms of narrative. These shifting crossroads provide the potential for new possibility spaces to form as notions toward documentary delicately expand within these morphing terrains.

If documentary practices are traditionally rooted in ‘the creative treatment of actuality,’ then the emerging digital video practices examined in this chapter do not yet sit within the confines of John Grierson’s early definition of the documentary (Hardy 1966, p. 13). Yet distinctive approaches to digital video hardware, methods of tactics in regards to subject matter and a discernible consciousness of an evolving and nurturing relationship between maker and audience are beginning to mature. The case studies in this chapter hint at numerous potentials, either present or possible, emerging in the relationships that have formed or have almost formed throughout the many diverse strategies of citizen generated human rights and social justice based video practices. Although these practices are still far removed from documentary, as it has been known, there seems to be inklings yet tenuous linkages to the potential for a *documentary effect* that permeates these multiple forms of digital video practices. Mainstream media and news outlets attempting to dance on the frontier of documentary practice while generating a large audience and advertising dollars (such as Vice Media) have acknowledged that the work of individuals like Tim Pool have validity. Pool is an exception. However, that doesn’t mean that video practices like those of Gonzalez and Swaye should be disregarded. Locally, their work might produce a direct effect within their community or even within a specific



court case in which their footage is used as evidence. Furthermore, it is yet to be seen whether Gonzalez and Swaye's footage becomes part of a documentary project, which could conceivably happen. In the following two chapters, we see a contrasting sense of purpose in the work of WITNESS and Video Volunteers, which is a reminder that for many of these digital video practices, a documentary effect might take years or even decades to emerge and assemble.

The work of Tim Pool has shown that for nascent digital video practices to thrive, multiple elements must form and assemble in order for sustainable practices to emerge. Yet the idea of sustainability is also conflicting. In Pool's case, with the help of informal support systems, his live streaming practice sustained itself for the duration of the Occupy Wall Street movement and for a number of months after. Yet Pool has shifted to a more traditional model of reportage situated within the confines of mainstream media and it is yet to be seen whether his new methodology will sustain itself. Importantly, we must remember that the assembling of these practices are evolutionary processes, constantly shifting as practitioners experiment with new technologies and modes of representation. Though informed by traditional methods of media making and surrounded by them, these practices have not necessarily built foundations from them. These digital video practices negotiate unbalanced relationships that are evolving as the new tries to understand its place within the old and the traditional tries to comprehend practices that are emergent.

Fluid creative practices and dynamic experimentations discussed in this chapter require a motivating force behind them to remain sustainable. The drive behind these practices is not the technology but the practitioners. These practitioners often rely on specific technologies and manifold connections to fuel,

maintain, sustain and grow their practices. Negotiating these complexities is complicated and these video practices often fail. However, unlike traditional creative practices such as mainstream journalism, these digital video practices cannot rely solely on established connections or traditional methods of creativity. They must experiment with their relationships to these connections and with their creative engagement to the video tools accessible to them. In the case of Tim Pool, his video practice evolved and matured over a number of weeks. A dynamic and global possibility space centered in New York helped to reinforce the assembling of his practice and aided the dissemination of his work. For Matthew Swaye and Christina Gonzalez, they continue to work in a diagram in which the global distribution of their video documentation is much more difficult to achieve. Yet they are determined to continue their video practice (while also pursuing other aspirations), perhaps working to identify a clearer, more directed and engaged audience. The NYCLU is still very early on in its use of the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app. It will be interesting to see which route, if any, they choose to take with the hundreds of hours of footage they have already accumulated. Will the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app sustain itself or will future problems emerge in its aspiration to spark citizens to document police interactions? The following chapters will begin to explore and analyze different types of digital video practices in varying possibility spaces that present divergent video tools and their relationships to traditional modes of media making. Moving outward from New York City, these upcoming chapters will expand our notion of what emerging digital video practices might be, but most importantly, how they form and potentially sustain. These chapters will examine more directed, localized and focused digital video practices, supported by strong non-profit organizations that

experiment with differing methods of digital video practices and multi-platform online documentary narratives. As many of these practices are in a continuous state of growth, each chapter will analyze the birth of the practice, its evolution and potential to remain sustainable as it evolves into the future.

## ***CHAPTER 5 – The Global Possibility Space of New York City***

### **5.1 - Directors, Curators, Organizations: Documentary Guidance Through Vast Seas of Digital Video**

As emerging digital video practices develop, multiple elements present within a possibility space must assemble in order for these practices to surface and sustain. For nascent digital video practices, this emergence involves relationships between the interconnectedness of multiple technological components, linkages to networked infrastructure and approaches to the creative process. As these assembling connections flourish, possibilities for sustainable video practices begin to appear. Through an examination of two case studies (the video based human rights organization, WITNESS and the website, *18 Days in Egypt*), this chapter will explore the relationship between technological possibilities, the role that creative capacities and social contexts play in the engagement with these potentialities and the ethical dilemmas that emerge as evolving forms of documentary media are born. How do potential connections evolve as new technologies play important roles in the creation of digital video practices? Why might certain practices sustain, while others struggle? And critically, what types of ethical questions have emerged as the potentiality to record and share becomes available to more and more media makers? Finally, how might these growing relationships influence evolving traditions of documentary culture?

The relationships between creative capacities, supportive structures and digital video technologies play a fundamental role in the development and assemblage of emerging digital video practices. Creative capacities involve multiple levels and layers of decision-making that surpasses the simple action of

pressing the record button on a video camera. Although other factors are essential to the creation and sustainability of these assemblings, imagination conceived during the formation of these possibilities includes the essential ingredient of the creative capacities of the practitioner as he or she engages with digital technologies, while being supported by either traditional foundational pillars (such as an organization) or non-traditional support structures, such as an online audience, or sometimes both. In the context of digital video practices, a collective process of creative expression often informs the creative capacities of practitioners. As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987, p. 88) explain:

We may draw some conclusions of the nature of Assemblages from this. On a first, horizontal axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a *machinic assemblage* of bodies, of actions and passions, and intermingling of bodies reacting to one another; on the other hand, it is a *collective assemblage of enunciation*, of acts and statements, of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then, on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both *territorial sides*, or reterritorialized sides, which stabilize it, and *cutting edges of deterritorialization*, which carry it away.

The case studies examined in this chapter reinforce the notion that the emergent processes of these digital video practices are, as Deleuze and Guattari describe, ‘a collective assemblage of enunciation.’ As we will see, the development of assemblages involves not only collaborations between multiple media makers, but also the relationships between the numerous interconnections of both material elements (for example, camera technology and networked infrastructure) and expressive elements (such as creativity, social structures, etc). In the previous chapter we saw that although the live streamer, Tim Pool, worked on his own, the emergence of his practice relied on numerous factors that played roles in the development of the assemblages that evolved around his work. Pool was supported by strong online viewership; a number of mainstream media

outlets and individuals both on the ground and ‘in the cloud’ supported his practice with monetary funds, food and even apartments to sleep in.

As I have noted previously in this dissertation, my approach to examining the New York City possibility space was extremely broad as it was my first foray into interviewing practitioners. Subsequently, I used an exploratory approach and ambitiously attempted to map the diagram of New York. It was critical, however, to begin to understand what sorts of extended possibilities were beginning to surface within and around New York City. Thus it soon became apparent that it would be conducive to consider the ways in which a globally connected New York attracts a variety of models of digital video practices from both inside and outside of its geographic boundaries. These linkages can serve as a demonstration of possibilities for practitioners working within a New York City possibility space; a space that is intimately connected to the global and seems to gain inspiration by looking outward.

Certainly in the context of human rights and social justice campaigns, organizations examine how other regional and global movements are adopting technologies to aid their specific causes. Hence, the profiles of *18 Days In Egypt* (a project that Tim Pool initially suggested I have a look at) and WITNESS (the Brooklyn based global human rights organization discussed later in this chapter) are organizations that look beyond their roots in the United States to hopefully achieve desired global dissemination and worldwide exposure. Although it is possible to delineate specific elements in what can be described as a ‘possibility space’, I would like to suggest that the complexities of the possibility spaces that assemblages emerge within are difficult to study because they are not bounded spaces with clear borders, but are interacting with geographical spaces in complex

ways. The extension of possibility spaces becomes farther-reaching through Web based video platforms and networked global infrastructure. Furthermore, a possibility space is an interpretative construct. This research delineates its boundaries and uses these limitations as a frame for further analysis of complex phenomena. The lens of assemblage theory integrates time and space into an identifiable arena to study.

The creation of assemblages discussed in this chapter relies on elements that are often beyond the control of these citizen authors. One can launch a boat, raise a sail and set off. Yet the speed, path and even final destination of a journey might also depend on a myriad of factors that shift, change, appear and disappear constantly, though not necessarily consistently. We can only understand how to use these tools to harness the wind; where the wind blows is out of our control.

Jean-Jacques Lecercle (2002, p. 188) writes that assemblage:

[...] involves multiplicities of various kinds: population, territories, becomings, affects, events. There is an interesting consequence to this, one we have already briefly evoked: being collective, the utterance is not within the speaker, but always already outside her, floating among the constituent parts of an assemblage as the event floated above the battlefield.

Lecercle's description of assemblage as utterances beyond the reach of human creativity surrounds the evolution of the case studies of this dissertation, yet for these utterances to connect with elements of a possibility space and the audience on the periphery, a cultivation of creative capacities must emerge then sustain from the experimental enunciation of the artist, the documentary maker, the live streamer, the journalist, the citizen. This chapter will attempt to analyze how media makers engage with recent digital video technologies, yet it will also take into account the more intangible but nonetheless crucial aspects of these

assemblages that initially might be hard to identify in the formation of digital video practices. To understand how these case studies of collective creative action assemble, we must begin to understand the interplay between the many components at hand. In the context of social justice and human rights, these creative pursuits have the power to retain memories, share stories and at times to balance narratives of justice. Yet as Lecerle (2002, p, 188) notes, ‘The most individual type of utterance, the literary utterance, is always the product of a collective assemblage of enunciation.’ Following Lecerle, this chapter argues that creative capacities mature in assemblages that form through nurturing possibility spaces that provide supportive structures which balance both material and expressive elements and subsequently encourage distinctive forms of creative expression.

This chapter focuses on key examples of organizations, online platforms and creative projects that believe possibility spaces emerge when digital video and human creativity are harnessed and guided, often through exploring the potentials of supportive structures. This chapter asks how and why assemblages form within the context of mobile video technology and traditions of the documentary. The possibilities examined in this chapter reinforce the understanding, as Lecerle mentions, that creative capacities combined with new technologies are portions of a larger collective of material and expressive elements that form, connect and assemble, subsequently presenting spaces for nascent digital video practices that might contribute to the ways in which documentary media is approached in a number of specific global settings. The following examples show that although the necessary singularities might be available to develop recipes for the emergence of video practices; commonly,



some sort of organizational and long-term guidance is critical to direct these practices into mature forms of media. This chapter examines where these relationships emanate from and investigates how these creative capacities evolve into sustainable forms of emerging digital video practices.

## **5.2 - From Documenting to Documentary?**

In July 2012, I interviewed Sam Gregory, the program manager of the Brooklyn based video advocacy non-profit organization, WITNESS. Towards the beginning of our hour-long interview, Gregory made an obvious yet critical point about the current relationship between citizen and citizen produced video. He said (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012), “Like you know, I think again, it goes to the issue of volume of media, the ability to create video is not a rare commodity. At this point, plenty of people can do it now. Can lots of people do it really, really well?” For WITNESS, being able to support and sustain a global network of human rights organizations that use video to propel change and bring issues of social justice and human rights to the forefront requires juggling multiple factors in order to balance a complex strategy so that WITNESS can adapt to constant change and multiple challenges that the organization faces. These elements might include but are not limited to using information as a means of persuasion, integrating entertainment or storytelling values, fusing genre demands such as aesthetics, maintaining sustainable filmmaking practices, addressing multiple types of registers of efficacy, offering a presentation of counter narratives, and publishing videos in spaces of strategic placements that offer directed exposure of the topic or topics addressed. Furthermore, WITNESS specifically recognizes the need to embed practices in the local to make them

relevant; the organization targets political outcomes within localized settings and because of this local focus, centers on developing human capital, investing in people whose agency can be nurtured and supported in ways that will make their video advocacy more sustainable in the long term.

Gregory's question lies at the heart of WITNESS, an organization that is deliberately trying to make sense of broader digital ecologies and citizen video practices throughout the world. WITNESS believes that video plays an important role in the struggle for human rights. Yet WITNESS' journey and its pursuit of relationships between future strategies and digital technologies that might offer the best possibilities for its global partners, an international network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the communities that these NGOs work with, uncovers a complexity of experimentation with developing multiple elements and the difficulties involved in the assembling of digital video practices around the globe. These challenges have been present since the inception of the organization. WITNESS' strategies are constantly evolving as new video technologies morph, change and emerge in many different ways and at various speeds. At its core, the organization is trying to craft sustainable video practices that focus on human rights and social justice campaigns. Although these video practices do not necessarily fit within definitions of the cinematic documentary, WITNESS' main focus is the cultivation of sustainable video practices.

In the United States, the utilization of affordable video recording devices have often been used to present counter truth-claims to mainstream narratives.<sup>51</sup> The use of video technologies such as the VHS camera in the 1980s and 1990s

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<sup>51</sup> For a simple and clear timeline of video-related technologies, see David Buckingham and Rebekah Willett's book, *Home Truths? Video Production and Domestic Life*, pp. 8-12.

and recently, mobile phone video cameras have challenged what Manuel DeLanda might define as the territory of an assemblage. Initially, these video technologies were outliers to the professional camera technology being used within television and filmmaking production. Furthermore, the individuals using these video technologies were often regular citizens within a home setting or tourists traveling or an individual who happened to own a VHS or digital camera. The collaborative relationship between citizen and camera challenged the traditional territory of moving image cameras and video recording. Although affordable cameras such as 8mm film technology brought the possibility of camera technology into the hands of everyday people, VHS and now digital video technology readjusted the demarcation of the boundaries of a previously defined domain. In assemblage, this process is an example of what DeLanda would describe as *detrterritorialization*, a method or relationship or process that disrupts the internal homogeneity of an assemblage. As DeLanda (2010, p. 20) writes:

Technological innovation, on the other hand, can destabilize this identity, detrterritorializing an organization, and opening the assemblage to change. Transportation and communication technologies, for example, can have detrterritorializing effects on organizations similar to those on face to face interactions, allowing organizations to break away from the limitations of spatial location.

I would argue that it is not merely technological advances that can open up an assemblage towards new formations, but it is the relationship between a technology and the user of a technology that offers new potentialities and possibilities for assemblages, subsequently detrterritorializing processes of digital video practices and challenging modes of documentary media. Yet crucially, this sort of reassembling of territory is not immediate but builds up over time, through layered experimentation. WITNESS, as a global organization that facilitates these

multi-faceted relationships between technology, storytelling and human creativity, understands that these processes are generative, formative and long-term. Placing a camera in someone's hands means nothing unless that relationship is nurtured through education, advocacy, as well as via creative, emotional and at times even financial support.

### **5.3 - WITNESS: The Evolution of an Organization**

WITNESS is a video advocacy organization founded in 1992 by the British musician, Peter Gabriel. The creation of WITNESS was a response to one of the most well known cases of 'amateur' video footage within the context of police enforcement, that of Rodney King, beaten on the side of a highway by the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) in 1992. The beating, captured from a distance on a grainy VHS video recording by George Holliday, presented visual evidence that seemed to contradict the LAPD's official report. This footage, along with photographs of a severely injured Rodney King, were shown over and over again on nightly news programs for days, weeks and months throughout the United States. The video seemed to offer clear evidence of police brutality, yet in April 1992 the police officers that went on trial were acquitted of wrongdoing. Bill Nichols (1995, p. 32), reflecting on historic processes in the context of Rodney King, writes that history, 'is always a matter of storytelling: our reconstruction of events must impose meaning and order on them, assign motivations, assess causes, and propose moral judgments (in this case, guilt or innocence).' In court, prosecutors framed Holliday's video footage as violent police brutality, while the opposing counsel reframed the footage as appropriate use of force against a civilian perceived as a threat to law enforcement. Incensed

by the verdict, riots broke out throughout much of South Central Los Angeles.

Writing about the recording, Leshu Torchin (2012, p. 144) observes:

Viewing conditions, audiences, narrative context, and the very shape of the video contributed to registers of efficacy (one could say the tape became “effective” for the defense) and failure as these devices found different ways of anchoring an otherwise indeterminate image. There was a lesson from this event: what was necessary was not merely the exposure of abuse, but strategies to place video within a promotional movement that took into account multiple factors in order to best direct attention and to produce action.

Multiple factors contributed to the verdict in the Rodney King case and although the failure of the video recording to sway the jury seems to contradict the effectiveness of lens based evidence, the extensive circulation of the video on news channels in the United States and throughout the world produced important lasting effects within the psyche of American culture. Firstly, the video exposed harsh and violent police brutality to a wide cross-section of America who had never been exposed to it. The debate over Rodney King’s situation sparked dialogue about racial inequality and the role of police in minority neighborhoods throughout the United States. Secondly, the dissemination of the video unequivocally laid bare the power and importance of ‘amateur’ footage and its profound influence on the general public. Holliday’s video opened up possibilities for amateur video technology, presenting new potentials for VHS and the multiple digital media that came after. With video, it now appeared more difficult for dominant media structures or law enforcement to easily disregard the words and stories of the less powerful. Understanding the ways in which these stories might surface and then be disseminated most productively are two key goals of WITNESS.

As we saw in a number of case studies from the previous chapter, documenting police within a public space is still a high-priority in New York City neighborhoods with a strong police presence. Since the Rodney King beating, video documentation has played an exceedingly important role in the presentation of counter-narratives in the United States and throughout the world. The almost omnipresence of mobile phones with video capabilities has allowed for countless episodes of police brutality in the United States to be documented and presented within such public and online platforms as YouTube.<sup>52</sup> Once this footage is uploaded it becomes an animate element of a larger dynamic assemblage in which meaning is malleable within the spaces it is reframed within. In the case of video that documents police brutality or the political actions of activist movements, the interpretation of the meaning of these videos is often fuelled by deep-rooted convictions that are informed by the politics and ethics of the viewers themselves.

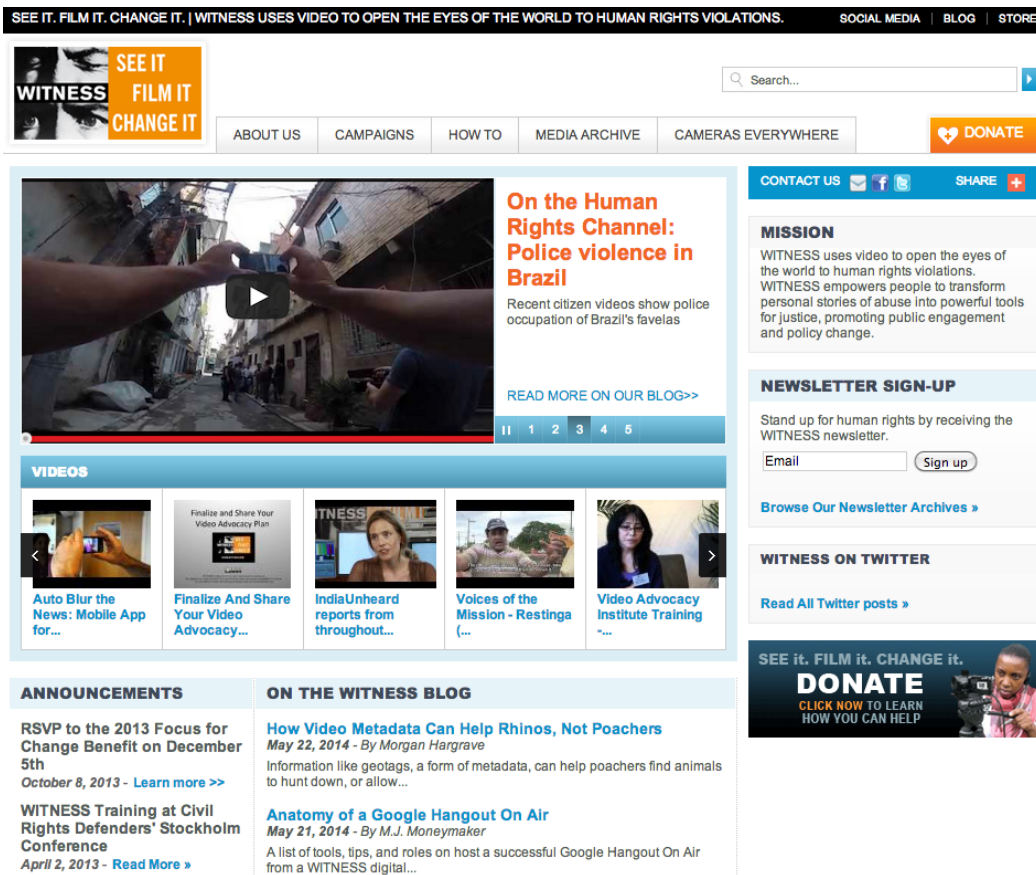
WITNESS is a very different case study than those of the individuals and organizations explored in the previous chapter. The digital video practices of the last chapter materialized in and around the Occupy Wall Street movement. Generally, these emerging practices were based on an individual's ability to utilize mobile video technologies to document protest movements and the use of excessive force by the New York City Police Department. The presence of technology, infrastructure and interconnectedness to social media, digital

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<sup>52</sup> Recent prominent yet tragic examples include the pepper spraying of student protestors in California (see: *UC Davis Protestors Pepper Sprayed* - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AdDLhPwpp4>), and the shooting of Oscar Grant at the Fruitvale BART Station in Oakland, California (see: *Court releases dramatic video of BART shooting* - [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2LDw5l\\_yMI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2LDw5l_yMI)). In Chapter 7, the Auckland based documentarian, Linda M., discusses the influence of the Oscar Grant shooting on the development of her video practice. Accessed 1 January 2014.

networks and platforms was inferred to be more or less available to all the practitioners, organizations and developers discussed, because they were all working in New York City (yet for WITNESS, who have a broader understanding and long experience working in a variety of global settings, this is not the case). As examined in the previous chapter, the New York City based digital video practices focused more on *video documentation* rather than crafting documentary narratives. Certainly, there were glimpses of the prospects to create documentary narratives or evolve these practices into work that more clearly resembles traditions of documentary media making (for example, Tim Pool's progression). Yet generally, these New York City based practitioners embarked upon the use of their digital video tools with a host of assumptions as to their practice's impact in the hope to further engage in the act of 'meaningful witnessing'.

Headquartered in Brooklyn and utilizing the international profile of New York to its advantage, WITNESS is part of the New York City possibility space that allows for its projects to gain global dissemination. WITNESS works in both the spaces where video documentation is taking place, as well as in the areas where documentary storytelling is happening and the potential for it to be utilized exists.



**Image 2: WITNESS Homepage (May 2014)**

WITNESS’ slogan, “SEE IT, FILM IT, CHANGE IT” is prominent throughout their website and printed materials. This motto displays an effort to motivate through an accessible slogan, but also suggests a ‘cause and effect’ approach toward using video within broader advocacy strategies. Yet the core function of the organization is the exploration of multiple possibilities for the use of human rights video advocacy throughout the world. The organization acts as a catalyst for generating sustainable video advocacy practices, but it also struggles to understand and adapt its strategies for different assemblages that emerge in different possibility spaces.

WITNESS’ tactics for the utilization of digital video practices are often drastically different in various areas of the world. The digital divide can be stark in multiple geographic locations. Access to digital video tools and the Internet is



quite different within the case studies in the three countries where I conducted fieldwork – the United States, New Zealand and India. Even throughout these three countries, there are still multiple discrepancies regarding the accessibility of video tools and digital technologies. As the director of WITNESS, Sam Gregory remarked, “You know, because there’s lots of video from the Occupy movement there, of course, is going to be hundreds, the access to technology and there is going to be hundreds of thousands of videos. There is only going to be one or two videos from the Central African Republic” (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012).

WITNESS attempts to pinpoint the strengths and limitations of various global assemblages and accordingly adjust the ways in which documentation or documentary might be approached. The organization emphasizes developing individuals and communities of video practice in order to facilitate and train media makers to create politically meaningful videos that speak directly to the relevant issues in each global setting. Identifying and exploring these strategies are at the heart of the work of WITNESS. As Gregory explained:

I think there is a real continuum at the moment of people who create video for human rights purposes, who share it for human rights purposes, who then edit it or otherwise craft it for human rights purposes. It’s interesting; WITNESS’ starting point was very much the idea of essentially almost citizen witness. So one who sees something for various reasons believes they have an obligation to film it and to share it. This was one of our starting points, but the other starting point was Peter Gabriel’s experience of meeting human rights advocates who worked often in long-term struggles and saying why are their stories not being heard? So actually, we started from a place that was actually about, really, kind of both universes, the accidental or the citizen witness and then the human rights advocate who maybe has spent thirty years trying to make people aware about, you know, the struggle for education or housing or water in their community or you know, police violence, whatever it might be. A lot of our history has been about how to balance between supporting both of these constituencies. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

This journey, as Gregory explains, began from two very different starting points – the accidental witness and the human rights advocate. A core goal of the organization is to empower individuals to utilize the video technologies they might have access to and situating what they visually document into a meaningful frame. These similar yet at times divergent trajectories have never presented a precise nor straightforward recipe for successful video based media making. Identifying, utilizing and then implementing video for advocacy relies on a plethora of variables that change and are often changing in many of the global geographies where WITNESS’ core partners are located.<sup>53</sup> The repercussions that citizen videographers might face documenting the current civil war in Syria would be extremely different than the ramifications might be for someone recording police activity in New York City.<sup>54</sup> Though both spaces for

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<sup>53</sup> If we go back to chapter 2, over time, photographic practices in the Congo raised the profile of human rights through meaningful framing.

<sup>54</sup> Sadly, there are many examples of citizen journalists killed in the line of duty since the beginning of the ‘Arab Spring’ in late 2010. The Syrian live streamer, Rami al-Sayed, killed in the city of Homs in early 2012 is just one of many citizen journalists that have died during the current civil war. See, ‘Syrian Video Blogger Reportedly Killed in Homs as Shelling Continues,’ here: <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/21/syrian-video-blogger-reportedly-killed-in-homs-as-shelling-continues/>. These risks are also inherent for traditional reporters working within conflict zones. In the same city, in the same week, the American reporter, Marie Colvin, and French photographer, Rémi Ochlik, were also killed in Homs. See ‘Two Western Journalists Killed in Syria Shelling,’ here: <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/23/world/middleeast/marie-colvin-and-remi-ochlik-journalists-killed-in-syria.html>. The activist organization, Reporters Without Borders, keeps a website listing journalists killed in the line of duty, here: <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-barometer-netizens-and-citizen-journalists.html?annee=2013>. The organization includes journalists, media assistants, as well as netizens and citizen journalists killed. Although Reporters Without Borders tries to integrate the geographic locations of these deaths, each and every fatality is not meticulously documented. The majority of the incidents listed on this page have taken place in conflict zones. It should be noted that citizen journalists also put themselves at risk in many areas that are not conflict zones. As citizen reporters often lack press credentials, they are prone to arrest

engagement with video recording present the potential for a dangerous encounter, the tactics and use of video for advocacy in these two places need to be approached in very contrasting ways. Moreover, the presence or absence of seen and unseen singularities contributes to the ways in which video advocacy might be undertaken in these and many other global and local spaces. A singularity being, as Claire Colebrook (2005, p. 196) writes:

the potential to produce relations, but these relations cannot be determined from the singularity alone, for it is always possible that new encounters will open up new relations. Consequently, there can be no point from which spaces are drawn, because a point only takes on its determination from the unfolding of a certain space (an unfolding that could always be redrawn). A singularity is, however, a tendency or potential and for this reason a space or field is always more than its relations; there are always singularities or potential that could open further spaces *or* allow for the thought of any space whatever, space as such, or the sense of space.

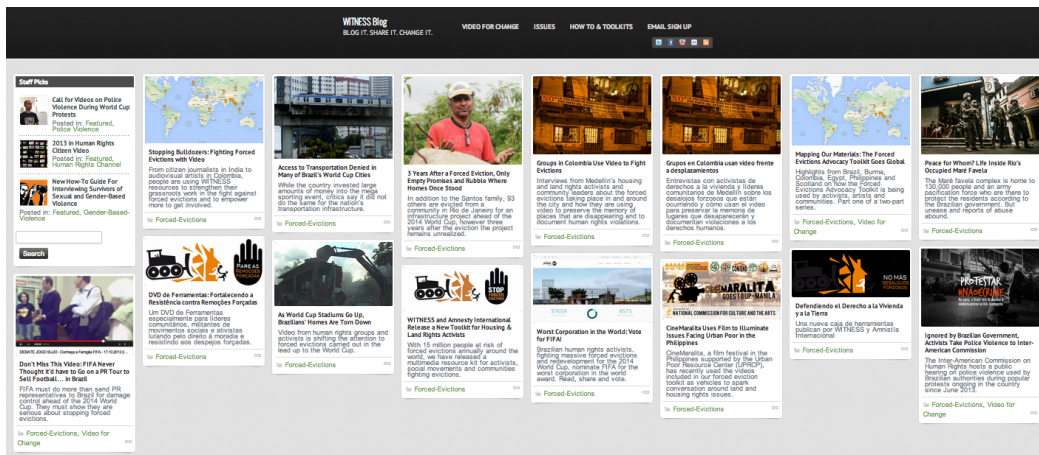
Availability of infrastructure, access to digital tools, security of online networks, safety of the subjects who appear on camera, the role of video within the wider advocacy campaign and many other variables play important roles that WITNESS and its twenty years working as an advocate of video in the context of human rights takes into account. Some of these elements and their relationships might open up new possibilities and in turn, these relationships might sometimes block possibilities from emerging. WITNESS' comprehension of the complexities at play, its effort to maintain sustainable documentary advocacy and the high stakes of the issues at hand offers a unique angle to examine the role of

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and tend not to receive the same protection from authorities that an established journalist might be offered. Many of the individuals I interviewed, in the United States, New Zealand and India, expressed fear of repercussions for their reportage from police and other individuals in positions of authority. Yet most certainly, the stakes are higher in crisis areas of the globe. All websites accessed 9 February 2014.

assemblage within the evolution of digital video practices and their place in the opening up of ever evolving documentary media spaces.

Curation and facilitation of online documentary media performs a vital role in the dissemination of citizen-produced video centered on human rights and social activism. Yet a citizen utilizing his or her digital video camera for documentation is merely the starting point of an act that may or may not be seen by a wider audience and which may struggle to be contextualized within the larger issues that surround specific footage. For recorded footage to make an impact, it must become part of a greater assembling or multiple assemblages. This is often where the creative capacities of practitioners come into play. WITNESS inquires as to how this footage might surface and the organization itself experiments with ways of purposefully attempting to bring the narratives that surround these recordings to light. For WITNESS, navigating this process on a global scale can be exceedingly problematic and complex. Over the duration of my PhD fieldwork, WITNESS embarked upon a global forced evictions campaign, helping to produce videos in numerous countries including India, Brazil, Cambodia, Egypt and Mexico.



**Image 3: Screenshot of the WITNESS blog covering the forced evictions campaign - <http://blog.witness.org/category/campaigns/forced-evictions/> Accessed 2 July 2014.**

Each campaign required a different approach. For example, WITNESS and their partners in Brazil crafted videos that focused on the many forced evictions that led up to the 2014 FIFA Soccer World Cup. The strategy in Brazil was quite different than their strategy in Mexico or India and possibly because of the high-profile nature of the World Cup, a number of the videos produced by their Brazilian partners have received much more YouTube views than videos produced in other locations. The New York City centered headquarters of WITNESS provides a global focal point from which the organization conducts campaigns and draws support throughout the world.

Websites such as YouTube are key starting points for uploading video. Yet the algorithms that fuel its search engine are complicated and can be problematic for human rights video. Although it is the largest video sharing service in the world, the use of YouTube can present many ethical dilemmas for organizations such as WITNESS. A quick YouTube search incorporating the words ‘protestors police occupy wall street’ brings up a number of possible video clips to watch. Clicking the second video from the list of results from that search

loads a clip of the infamous raw footage of New York City Police Department deputy inspector, Anthony Bologna, pepper spraying penned in protestors during an Occupy Wall Street protest. On the video's YouTube page, beside this main video are other videos that YouTube recommends, the first one titled, 'Pretty Much Defenseless – Action Figure Therapy (Featured),' the third one called, 'Pharmacist sprays robber in face with pepper spray... meant for GRIZZLY,' the fifth one is, 'Underwater Hunter Goes Deep Sea Fishing Without Air!,' the ninth one is, 'Crazy Black Women Pepper Sprays White Guy in Convenience Store, 10fail,' and almost at the bottom of the list is an interview with the Harlem based video activist, Christina Gonzalez, from the Russia Today – America news channel.<sup>55</sup> In between these seemingly unrelated, yet 'suggested' videos, there are a number of clips that are more in tune with the original search, perhaps offering links to videos that might be better connected to my original YouTube enquiry. The purpose of this search exercise is merely to show how difficult it is for human rights videos to be placed in a space where the potential for them not to be sensationalized or possibly re-contextualized within another extraneous dimension becomes extremely limited.<sup>56</sup> The diversity and irrelevance of some of these search results are also key parts to the online ecosystem of video sharing websites. Furthermore, oft-befuddled linkages and navigation of video sharing websites can introduce difficulties in directing specific meaning towards human rights video.

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<sup>55</sup> This search was conducted from my personal computer on 20 January 2014.

<sup>56</sup> The additional possibility for viewers to place comments beneath these videos is also highly problematic. Racism and xenophobic commentary are commonplace and further amplify the fact that much of the footage on YouTube can easily be taken out of context and thus prone not to be situated within a larger, more crafted and potentially better balanced narrative.

Nevertheless, uploading a video to YouTube also presents users with the ability to re-work footage. Harnessing the technical literacies of the YouTube audience can allow for the possibility that viewers themselves might craft constructive recreations of original footage. At once, YouTube is ethically complex and also a platform in which footage might reassemble and soar. As Gregory (2012, p. 530) writes of YouTube, ‘it is a pushing-out point for footage that finds homes in many other subculture-specific media systems, including human rights, where it is embedded and recontextualized in ways that may be much richer than their first home on YouTube.’ Attempting to navigate questions and dilemmas of surfacing, remixing and recontextualizing online videos presents hard contradictions. On one hand, uploading a video to YouTube may offer the most widely accessed platform, yet once footage is uploaded it is out of the hands of both the creators and organizations that have published the footage. These problems are tricky. As Gregory (2012, p. 530) wonders:

Add to these the concerns about commercial exploitation of human rights imagery, the safety and security of the uploaders and the filmed, surveillance by corporations and the state, inflexibility in redistribution, downloading, and sharing, and where editorial control is vested. Against these worries users must consider the opportunity to engage an audience that goes beyond preaching to the choir and the technological capacities of a space that is backed by the creative engineering power of Google, a massive corporation.

Gregory reinforces the importance that complexities are manifold and often subtle within the spaces of human rights video. Simply recording video doesn’t do justice to the value of the moving image. Video documents must be actively engaged with and then harnessed through well thought out methods, which can have far reaching impact both locally and globally. Numerous ethical dilemmas are still plentiful within the sphere of emerging digital video

technologies and practices. Historically, documentary filmmakers have more or less embraced the ethics of consent. Meaning that if an interview is conducted or someone appears on camera, filmmakers have attempted to get that individual to sign a consent form or in some way agree to appear on camera. As video technologies become more ubiquitous, the recording and uploading of video to the Web has at times forgotten that ethical quandaries exist when publishing the visage of citizens online. As noted in the previous chapter, Tim Pool rarely asked the people he interviewed or documented if they were okay that their image was being live-streamed in real time. Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye also seldom presented that question to those they documented on camera. Working in geographies where the consequences of appearing on camera can be life threatening, WITNESS is extremely conscious of the ethical dilemmas at play when it comes to citizen produced visual media. However as Gregory acknowledges, ethical questions continue to unfold, yet are not always addressed.

As he explained:

I think there are some foundational issues that are still being grappled with and the reason its sort of been described as a witnessing literacy question is I don't know if we've fully started to tease out what are the ethics of people being able to like, you know, witness a lot of these things which happen very rapidly, you know particularly, the ethics around consent and privacy. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

In the scope of the history of lens-based technology, the evolution of digital video tools has been rapid. Although the manifestation of new creative practices has been complicated and at times slow to form, there has been an overabundance of the visual representation of the regular lives of citizens throughout the Internet. New methods and platforms for video documentation can be at once liberating and exciting, yet also morally problematic. Live streaming,



in its immediacy, presents tangled questions of representation. WITNESS sees compelling possibilities of live streaming, yet is hesitant about its use, specifically when violence is documented on camera. As Gregory remarked:

Live video in terms of, you know, a lot of the ethical issues we grapple with around consent and privacy, get further complicated when you think about live video and also ethical questions around the ethics of immersion. Is it good that we feel like we're in Homs watching what's going on? Does that create a false sense of you know, in doing something because we're watching it? Are we doing something? I think there are some quite significant ethical issues that go in a couple of directions, but as an advocacy tool, I think that we are just starting to see the effectiveness of it. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

Documenting, and then publishing online, acts of police brutality or violence in conflict zones is critical and potentially effective in regards to the dissemination of alternative vantage points of possible human rights violations. Yet many questions remain. Might acts of violence, perpetually available to view online, possibly reinforce the pain of the victim? Should consent of those documented be sought out before a video is uploaded? And if an individual requests for a video to be taken down from an online platform, should a system be put in place for this process to occur? These questions will only become more pressing as mobile video technologies proliferate and questionable moments and events are uploaded without consent of the subjects documented.

For WITNESS, the role of curation also means embracing the role of facilitator as well. As Gregory mentioned, WITNESS began by supporting two constituencies, citizen witnesses and human rights advocates. This meant that from its inception the organization had to figure out how to make sense of the video documentation emerging from citizen witnesses, as well as situating its role in supporting the production of documentary narratives and then throughout, continuously reassessing ways to integrate video into larger advocacy campaigns.

Each situation calls for case specific methodology and as mentioned, techniques behind the success of video advocacy in one locale might be very different in a separate location or possibly even different in the same location. These situations might seek to address a different or even similar type of human rights campaign under completely contrasting circumstances.

In certain contexts, WITNESS tries to identify and work with multiple elements that might surround specific video in the scope of human rights campaigns. This work may involve trying to make sense of published video documentation on YouTube and in the process of analyzing this ‘raw’ footage, regularly crafting documentary narratives from both newly recorded video and previously recorded video. WITNESS works with its campaign partners to achieve these goals. As Gregory states:

So it’s like you know, you’ve got this flow of breaking footage from Syria. How do you verify that? Contextualize that? Present that in a way that’s easier for people to look at? And at the same time, how do you surface the videos from Cambodia that only get a hundred views which you know, really, egregious violations of human rights and forced evictions. Or video from, you know, rural India that exposes injustice or shows corruption or something like that. How do you surface those up alongside it? I think that’s the classic curation role. Increasingly, we think that curation is a key skill set, particularly for human rights organizations. Because it may be that they’re not necessarily filming the footage themselves but they may be the people that can help contextualize, give meaning, sort out a lot of citizen footage. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

Curation is a broader skill set that digital video practitioners are still trying to grapple with. For WITNESS and their local partners on the ground, the challenge becomes designing interactive strategies so that users can navigate their way to video material that is meaningful curated. In many ways, WITNESS engages with the singularities of these emerging assemblages in the hope that

utilizing their years of wisdom in the field might aid international organizations in crafting distinct and singular digital video practices that can contribute to specific and localized human rights campaigns. Identifying online recordings that might make the strongest impact, along with formulating raw footage into more cohesive narrative structures, while analyzing the best methods of dissemination for videos that are part of larger human rights campaigns become evolving processes that require geographic, language and cultural specific methods that are prone to change in regards to shifts in current events and fluctuating political situations. Discussing the emergent properties of neo-assemblage theory, Graham Harman (2008, p. 371) writes that it, ‘allows for an infinity of levels, and presumably for an infinite regress and progress of different-sized assemblages.’ In the context of the work of WITNESS, the assemblage of these video practices can be seen as amplifying levels of a dial. DeLanda (2011, p. 187) writes that:

This can be achieved by *parametrizing* the concept of assemblage, that is, by providing it with “knobs” with modifiable settings the values of which determine the condition of the identity of an emergent whole as any given time. This will make it easier to picture in our minds an entire population of assemblages each possessing a slightly different identity depending on the setting of the parameters. And it will also facilitate thinking of the population as an entity that can undergo an intense shock from the outside that drastically changes those setting producing variants that go beyond the normal range of variation.

In the context of assemblage and WITNESS’ work throughout the world, the role of DeLanda’s concept of ‘knobs’ or ‘parameters’ might relate to elements that a WITNESS partner organization addresses in regards to the intensity of their approach to balancing multiple factors present in their trainings. For example, the ways in which WITNESS and their partners might adjust their trainings in specific locations, say documenting police actions in New York City in comparison to Egypt, would most likely be quite different yet at the same time

might share similar attributes. WITNESS encourages conducting the video documentation of police in public spaces in teams. In both geographic areas, NGOs would encourage citizens to carefully consider the implications of their practice themselves, however in Egypt documenting police in the streets could become more dangerous much quicker than in New York City and as such the ‘dial’ of that element of the assemblage would be toned down in Egypt and possibly amplified in New York City. This might be similar in the uploading of footage. In the United States, repercussions of the online publication of the video documentation of police brutality would most likely be minimal. Whereas if an individual uploaded footage of police attacking a citizen in Egypt or Syria, then WITNESS and the applicable local NGO might encourage footage to be uploaded anonymously and possibly through file transfer methods that further protect the user’s anonymity. Again, these modes and levels of the parameters being engaged with in different possibility spaces are the manifestation of DeLanda’s notion of ‘knobs’ in the context of the documentary practices of WITNESS.

WITNESS actively attempts to engage with different forms of human rights video in a number of meaningful ways. From producing short documentary films, to situating raw footage within the wider framework of a human rights issue to deliberately trying to spark video practices in situations where these practices might be scarce. This purposeful engagement with citizen-produced video can aid in the assemblage of far-reaching media making or video practices that might not multiply at the same pace. At once, WITNESS engages in the intentionality of these video practices on a number of levels, yet the ebb and flow of the assembling of these practices moves in and out of formation and dispersion due to surrounding elements that aid in the creation of these assemblings. The

WITNESS website is full of multiple types of training tools for global NGOs. There are training videos that focus on such themes as video advocacy, filming protests for evidence, video for change toolkits and general filming tips.<sup>57</sup> WITNESS also provides five and ten day video training curriculums that cover numerous issues that might emerge when promoting video advocacy in politically unstable areas of the world and conflict zones. All of these training materials are available in English and some of this information is available in other languages such as French, Spanish, Russian, Swahili and Arabic. WITNESS works with its international partners to share knowledge and trends about emerging digital video and online platforms, as well as offering expertise in effective ways to use mobile video cameras and other forms of technology with the ambition that experimenting with these tools might spark meaningful contributions to human rights issues throughout the world. WITNESS ponders how footage might be curated so that it will capture the attention of individuals who can make even better sense of the issues at hand in order to act upon the unjust realities of human rights violations throughout the world.

For WITNESS, its partners and the citizens who craft their videos, experimenting with video is a dance within and around the multiplicity of these assemblages. Video technology alone has never been the solution. These digital tools merely offer the potential for nascent documentary alternatives to emerge. Cultivating creative capacities through supportive structures is critical. The possibilities of using older techniques with new technology or new techniques with traditional forms of documentary storytelling or the possibility for something

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<sup>57</sup> For further exploration of these how-to videos and training publications, see: <http://witness.org/resources/>. Accessed 14 May 2014.

entirely novel are manifestations of the relationship between creative capacities and digital video tools. As Harman (2008, p. 372) persists:

More generally, if things themselves were a seamless whole, it is difficult to see how anything new could ever emerge, since the whole would contain nothing in reserve beyond its current state of affairs. Things engage in feedback, not fusion. Relations are a matter of symbiosis, not of organism.

Although WITNESS attempts to insert itself into a symbiotic relationship, which includes digital video, human rights, online platforms, citizen media makers, NGOs, and people in positions of power, this negotiation with the limitations and challenges of technology and infrastructure is intricately fluctuating. Questions are abundant. For example, where does raw footage fit within these relationships and how might it be approached or situated in terms of advocacy? Gregory explains:

At the same time, I wouldn't say that a piece of raw footage is less important, it simply has a different place in that structure, so you know, if you have, if you're you know, a curator of footage from Syria, you maybe have got a lot of raw footage but you're thinking how do I curate this and present this for people in a way that will speak to audiences, be placed in front of people at the right time. So I think although we have strong experience very much on the strategic advocacy side, raw footage often fits within that kind of structure. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

Curation and directing the viewer to footage becomes critical. Both raw documentation and documentary creation have the potential to produce a 'documentary effect'. In this case, challenges to new forms of curation become a documentary effect of these video practices. WITNESS and its campaign partners want to know how footage can be situated or framed so that it makes a strategic contribution to an overall human rights campaign. This often includes contextualizing the footage within a documentary narrative and directing viewers

to the story via a social media campaign. Yet what is most crucial for human rights campaigns that integrate video is that the right people, often those in positions of power, get the opportunity to view these videos. The next chapter further analyzes these relationships through the India based case study, Video Volunteers, an organization that also negotiates the dilemmas that surround the broadcasting and narrowcasting of citizen crafted documentary media. Even the act of publishing a video online and directing people via social media might still miss the intended viewers. Most of WITNESS' partners have minimal resources (monetary, technology, creative) and WITNESS believes in the screening approach of 'smart narrow-casting, speaking to a particular audience at a particular time, and seeking a distinct change in policy, behavior or practice' (Jenkins 2008).

This belief in direct and focused screenings is very different than the screening priorities that surround the work of Tim Pool, Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, all who believe that by placing their raw footage in the public sphere – change and 'the truth' will emerge. These practitioners (and others we will meet in chapter 7) don't seem to find sense in targeting the right kind of audiences to generate change. Yet as we saw in the previous chapter, the experiences of these three practitioners shows that publishing raw footage online allows for the possibility of the original intent of the video to be exploited for other purposes and often the intentions of these media makers gets lost in the density of clips found on platforms such as YouTube. WITNESS and its partners believe there are other ways to broadcast the work of citizen-produced video. As Gregory explains, they often use video:

[...] to engage with particular audiences. It might be within your community or externally to get them to do things and to engage them in

action, to mobilize them, to communicate to them. So in that sense, narrowcasting continues to make a lot of sense. Is it always the right solution? No. But particularly in the context of groups who are in positions of generally lacking power or lacking a lot of resources, it's a good strategic response to how to make the best use of the tool. Um, and it's still along the thing we do, you know, we're working with groups recently in a number of contexts where they're trying, pushing for war crimes investigations, so you know, they're trying to put their video in front of someone who can push for that investigation. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

WITNESS understands that there are numerous factors at play and the organization actively attempts to insert the use of citizen produced video into these assemblages, whether that might be within the morass of YouTube or tracking down a transport minister to watch a video about the scarcity of quality roads in a specific region or seeking out a national prosecutor who might have the time to watch a short video and possibly have the power to bring charges against an individual or a corporation or the state. Understanding the potentiality of frameworks *and* the potentiality of digital video goes hand in hand. WITNESS attempts to further the creative capacities of their partner organizations by offering specialized skills in video in the hope that it will enhance their political effectiveness. Navigating these shifting assemblages is one of the essential contributions that WITNESS offers in its partnerships with global NGOs such as the previously mentioned Indian organization, Video Volunteers, which will be discussed comprehensively in the following chapter.

In essence, WITNESS attempts to read multiple mediascapes and human rights situations in order to experiment with the mobility and fluidity of assemblage in the desire to help craft videos that will spark change within the communities that its partners are located. Analyzing departure points for the most efficient methods of broadcasting or often in WITNESS' case, narrowcasting, is



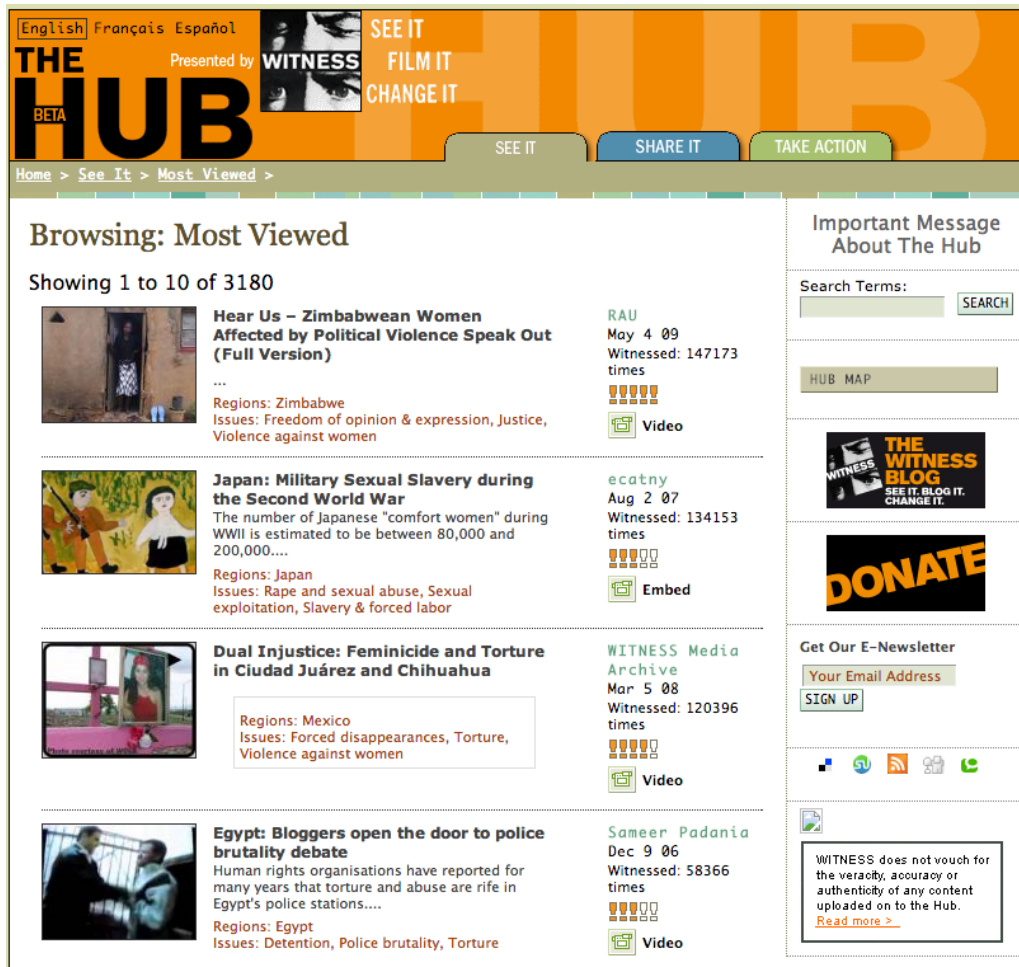
one way to spark further assemblages that might be influential. Yet there are plenty of other factors that WITNESS takes into account in its approaches to video making and video distribution in the hope of pinpointing emerging methods and nascent technologies that might have the possibility to connect and engage with other elements that swirl in and around assemblages. As George E. Marcus and Erkan Saka (2006, p. 103) write:

Assemblage is the source of emergent properties of what Deleuze and Guattari call machinic processes. Assemblage is a topological concept that designates the actualizations of the virtual causes or causal processes that are immanent in an open system of intensities that is under the influence of a force that is external (or heterogeneous) in relation to it. Assemblages are thus the causally productive (machinic) result of the intersection of two open systems, and their properties are emergent in the sense in which that concept is deployed in logic, that is, not part of, and so not foreseeable in light of, either one or the other system considered in isolation, but instead only discernable as a result of the intersection of both such systems.

The open systems that Marcus and Saka mention consist of numerous possibility spaces that move in and out of material and expressive roles, re-emerging and engaging with one another, fluctuating between potentialities and actualities, balancing internal and external factors. WITNESS integrates methods of citizen video production, strategies for broadcasting and development of technologies, intermingling them within these systems, online platforms and utilizing digital tools to intentionally prompt the formation of dynamic assemblings. WITNESS experiments with capacities to connect in an attempt to ‘gain the upper hand to the point that external causes become mere *triggers or catalysts* for an effect’ (DeLanda 2006, p. 20). WITNESS seeks to pre-determine impactful routes of video production and dissemination of video that might work as catalysts to create change within communities, yet as Marcus and Saka

reinforce above, these attempted predictions are also prone to influences from numerous external forces that might negate or stymie WITNESS' work. For example, many of the videos that WITNESS publishes online have less than one thousand views. And although the organization conducts multi-faceted social media campaigns, seemingly these multi-platform campaigns encounter complications in regards to channeling large numbers of viewers to WITNESS published videos. External forces that might impact lack of viewership are multitudinous, reinforcing the daily challenges WITNESS faces merely in regards to maintaining a sustainable online audience.

Additionally, WITNESS has attempted to generate assemblings of human rights video through the development of online platforms that work as central nerve centers for human rights video to exist and be screened, as well as creating new technologies for digital cameras that might encourage citizen media makers to record footage of human rights violations without the fear of legal or personal repercussions. In 2007, WITNESS went live with an online platform that they believed would be a center for human rights video. This platform, first envisioned in 2005 (the year YouTube began), was called the Hub.



**Image 4: Though now defunct, WITNESS' The Hub platform can still be accessed online - <http://hub.witness.org/>. Accessed 2 July 2014.**

Although the Hub went online in 2007, its content uploads originated in late 2006 and ended in late 2010 when the website no longer continued to accept videos and WITNESS began to direct resources elsewhere. Essentially, the Hub offered an online platform where users would hopefully feel comfortable and safe; uploading videos to a community that would support the nurturing and dissemination of these human rights based videos. It was an experimental space that WITNESS believed would evolve into a place that might spark dialogue and further conversations about human rights issues through key citizen produced videos. WITNESS strongly believed that a platform for curation could offer a frame for meaning. When the Hub was live, the individual pages for each video

also contained links to ‘Take Action,’ as well as links to ‘Related Media.’<sup>58</sup> Yet the Hub was complicated to maintain and its role as a destination site didn’t seem to be the best method to direct both traffic and eyes to human rights issues. Instead, WITNESS decided to redirect its energy and adapt the work it does within the online platforms that *already* exist. As a WITNESS blog post from the middle of 2010 describing the end of the Hub and their shift in strategy explains:

Very practically this means that we will more proactively go where people are, as opposed to asking them to come to us. To achieve this, we will use our own and third party websites to highlight best practices and lessons learned, and to provide resources, such as online toolkits. We will also engage social media platforms and technology providers to adopt policies and practices that enhance the safety, security, and effectiveness of human rights defenders using video for change. Furthermore, we will collaborate with existing technology developers to ensure the needs of human rights defenders are taken into consideration as tools and platforms continue to proliferate. (WITNESS 2010)

This shift meant that WITNESS would invest in more concrete relationships with established media spaces, companies, platforms and hardware, rather than attempt to build infrastructure from the ground up. The organization recognized that it would need to adjust its work and develop a different curation model. In May 2012, WITNESS launched a human rights channel on YouTube in collaboration with the website Storyful, which purports to be the ‘first news agency in the social media age’ (Storyful 2014). The channel works in a similar way as the Hub and allows for WITNESS to position crafted documentary narratives, interviews and video documentation within the broader contexts of human rights issues. Situating this footage involves everything from writing summaries about the human rights issues at stake within their specific

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<sup>58</sup> The site can still be viewed and explored at this website: <http://hub.witness.org/>. Accessed 21 January 2014.

frameworks, to curating videos so that they are placed under the same human rights banner and thus contextualized in the appropriate sphere with supporting written documentation and further video documentation as well. The presence of a human rights channel gives WITNESS some control over footage, allowing the organization to verify that footage uploaded is true to its description. ‘Citizen Watch: January 2014,’ ‘Watching Syria: January 2014,’ ‘Watching Advocacy: January 2014,’ ‘Ukraine Protests,’ ‘Guide to Conducting Interviews with Survivors of Sexual & Gender Based Violence,’ ‘Saudi Arabia: Crackdown on Undocumented Foreign Workers,’ ‘Cuban Filmmers Document Political Dissent’ are just a few examples of the categories that WITNESS has launched on the YouTube human rights channel.<sup>59</sup> The opening titles of their ‘Human Rights Channel: 2013 Year in Review’ state that the channel is ‘Filmed by Citizens, Verified by Storyful, Curated by Witness’ (WITNESS 2013). Recording, verification and curation are all part of the human rights digital video workflow that WITNESS is spearheading globally. Through this human rights channel, WITNESS is making a conscious effort to situate and surface human rights video within a consistent political frame.

WITNESS has also encouraged YouTube to go further in regards to ethical issues when it comes to human rights video. It was successful in advocating for anonymization technology and in July 2012, YouTube integrated a face-blurring tool under the enhancements section of the video editing options that they offer. The tool allows for faces within a video to be obscured before publication and thus in essence, also the possibility for individuals who appear on

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<sup>59</sup> These were just a few of the categories present on the home page of the Human Rights Channel during the course of my research. See: <http://www.youtube.com/user/humanrights>. Accessed 23 January 2014.

camera to remain anonymous without the need for time consuming post-production. This is important and suggests that WITNESS is not just an early adopter of new technologies, but alongside this work, the organization is also an active participant in creating new technologies which can help to generate new assemblages – which suggests WITNESS is savvy enough and has the ability to link with multiple types of partners (from NGOs to YouTube to software and hardware companies). Importantly, WITNESS does not have a naïve understanding that the technology itself is enough to generate the right kind of sustainable practices that they require. The organization recognizes the necessity of interaction with multiple layers of these growing assemblages, from content to online platforms to software. WITNESS is conscious they must proactively cultivate linkages and experiment throughout an assortment of possibility spaces pertinent to their global partnerships.

The role that WITNESS plays in encouraging the development of video technologies mirrors similar approaches seen within the possibility space of New York City. In New York, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) developed the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch App* in a deliberate attempt to engage citizen witnesses into recording police stops. Similarly, other YouTube users throughout Harlem created YouTube channels, blogs and websites that focused on documenting police brutality in New York City. As these genre specific pages or channels didn't exist, users created pages themselves, harnessing the YouTube platform for their own purposes as a space to share digital video documenting questionable police tactics. Mobilizing current possibilities of technology and identifying technological gaps where the creation of technology could play an important role are central to the formulation of these emerging video assemblages.

Additionally, this multi-platform online presence also has the ability to produce a documentary effect, in the sense that it might encourage neighbors to act through further recording of police actions or by regular protests against stop and frisk in Harlem.

WITNESS has launched two tools for human rights activists to use in the field. In 2012, partnering with the open source app and mobile security company, The Guardian Project, WITNESS helped to launch *ObscuraCam*, a photo and video app for Android smartphones that allows users to automatically pixelate faces after taking a photograph or mobile video. WITNESS has also collaborated with The Guardian Project to create *InformaCam*, which uses a plethora of metadata to authenticate citizen-produced footage. As the project's information page states:

InformaCam uses the built in sensors in modern smartphones as well as wi-fi, bluetooth and cell tower information to create a snapshot of the environment in which an image or video was captured. This validates the date, time and location of capture. Digital signatures and encryption ensure that your media hasn't been tampered with and can only be opened by the intended recipient. (The Guardian Project 2013)

Although possibilities emerge from new technologies, with these possibilities come both positive potentials as well as complex complications. These mobile applications present two contrasting assumptions about digital technology. The development of *ObscuraCam* shows that a surplus of video or too much information about a video can be dangerous. Video can be repurposed to create additional harm and new ethical dilemmas can emerge from the online publication of videos. Yet an application like *InformaCam* can provide greater levels of authenticity in a 'post photographic era,' (Mitchell 1992, p. 224). Automatically captured metadata provide additional levels of indexicality, but it

also suggests that the network itself is a space where the factual is in flux (anyone can fake photographs). The smartphone apps that WITNESS works to develop attempt to employ the possibilities of the technology and at the same time address ethical quandaries that are simultaneously visible.

As of June 2014, *InformaCam* was still in beta stage. Yet WITNESS sees the promise in pursuing technological possibilities of mobile platforms, but also directs these development efforts for specific purposes relevant to their work in human rights. Although these two mobile apps present opportunities to make individuals on camera anonymous or allow for technologies integrated into smartphones to further authenticate footage, offering the potential for more comprehensive reporting, there are still a number of safety concerns that WITNESS emphasizes. They are adamant that these technologies should not be taken for granted and inherent risks are nevertheless still very present when shooting within human rights contexts. WITNESS is also very clear that there are many elements within a video that could allow for the identities of either the user or creator to be exposed. They insist that footage is prone to seizure from the moment it is created. As well, there are multiple factors within a video that might hint at the identity of the individual on camera or the identity of the maker, these identifiers can include but are not limited to distinctive voices, clothing or locations. They also reinforce that distinguishing digital fingerprints present in a mobile phone or via a computer upload are also very real concerns.<sup>60</sup> These digital fingerprints work twofold, as there is also a need to inscribe metadata

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<sup>60</sup> Many of these potential problems are discussed on this WITNESS blog post, “Tips for Activists Using the YouTube Face Blur Tool,” which is available at this link: <http://blog.witness.org/2012/08/tips-for-activists-using-the-youtube-face-blur-tool/>. Accessed 23 January 2014.



within these videos in order to authenticate footage. The complexity of variables that emerge when new technologies are developed within the context of citizen produced video shows that not only do new assemblages and further possibilities evolve, but also there are dangers and problems that present themselves as these nascent assemblages form.

In the previous chapter, the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) discussed similar concerns that emerged during their collaboration with Jason Van Anden in the production of the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app. In my interviews with Sam Gregory and Donna Lieberman, they both noted that although their respective organizations had worked diligently to identify potential ethical dilemmas, they acknowledged that many of these quandaries were still present and emergent after the creation of these mobile phone video applications. Gregory and Lieberman believed that although risks are there and continue to evolve, the promise afforded from these new applications was too important to withhold their introduction. As these new spaces for publication and software tools are born, it becomes critical for these organizations to develop new teaching methods so that citizen practitioners are aware of the inherent risks in utilizing these emerging tools.

Although issues of security are paramount when new tools for digital video recording within the context of human rights and conflict areas become available, there are also many unforeseen uses of these technologies as well.

Discussing *ObscuraCam*, Gregory notes:

I think a lot of people use it [*ObscuraCam*] because you can put a Groucho Marx face on your kid. And that's in line with our thinking that in fact this goes beyond human rights activists. This is a human rights privacy value that is about, is most relevant to the human rights activists that are mostly on the front line, like if you're in a repressive country you

might need it to protect your life, but you know, the kind of continuum of way you might want to think about that runs through, into, you know, into the everyday lives of almost anyone, particularly in an era where there's a lot of visual media where there is facial recognition. (Sam Gregory, interview with author, 12 July 2012)

These questions of ethics, representation, digital video and the Internet are often dismissed or glossed over in the rush to validate the importance of digital technologies and social media. Rarely do constructive discussions of the ethics involved in regards to Tim Pool live streaming the Occupy Wall Street protests ensue within mainstream media. Recording video in public spaces such as a sidewalk is a legal right in the United States. Yet implicitly articulated in this statement is Pool's assertion that live streaming footage presents an unedited truth that almost surpasses any ethical concerns, a statement that even he perhaps would now acknowledge as naïve. Pool's argument that transparency is paramount to questions of ethics is reasoning not easily dismissed within the context of the Occupy movement. Yet when it comes to documenting human rights or protest in places like Syria, Egypt or the Central African Republic, ethical issues of recording and publishing video online become very real and incredibly important.<sup>61</sup> This is one of the primary reasons why WITNESS offers such a valuable contribution to the field of human rights video and evolving documentary practices; the organization takes into account the complexities of

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<sup>61</sup> I should note that my interview with Tim Pool was also conducted, the first part of it at least, with his friend and colleague, Geoff Shively, who had recently been on a reporting trip to Syria. The two of them were certainly cognizant of the role of ethics and online video within the context of war zones. Pool had not been to Syria and unfortunately in the course of our conversation we didn't get a chance to discuss the ethics of recording and publishing in conflict zones. See 'Crossing Syrian border, illegally, & Free Syrian Army (FSA) Plea,' for William Gagan, Geoff Shively and Amine's report from Syria, available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzhsv8ElWDo>. Accessed 23 January 2014.

emerging citizen documentary video practices in multiple locations worldwide. They are constantly analyzing current and future approaches to technology, infrastructure and documentary narrative within a field that in a multitude of ways is incredibly fluid and unstable. WITNESS believes that their video advocacy has the potential to produce numerous documentary effects within courts of law, through government intervention and by imparting the video making skills and documentary storytelling to global citizens throughout the areas of the world in which they work.

WITNESS exemplifies the complicated role that these organizations embark upon when immersing themselves into the complexity of nascent video assemblages. WITNESS has been working in this field for more than ten years, yet their tactics have changed considerably over a decade and they continue to change. Critically, their approach to encouraging the production of human rights based video is not a single-track methodology. Their work adjusts to different situations and new assemblings. These circumstances and geographies produce multiple variables pertaining to human rights situations, changes in technological infrastructure, access to video tools and the context of these geographies and human rights conditions within a wider global perspective. WITNESS constantly experiments with different forms of broadcasting and public presentation of media. They are working to create new software, training and tools for video practices, yet the introduction of these new tools, trainings and software also produce new assemblages that can further shift and adjust WITNESS' tactics. The organization carefully cultivates the relationships between digital video technologies, creative capacities and supportive structures, while providing specific frameworks and particular methodologies to distinct campaigns and

geographic settings. Assembling of new technologies and practices is intricate and deliberate. The experience of WITNESS illustrates that although organizations and practitioners can intentionally generate multiple methodologies in order to spark creative video practices, variables persist that are far beyond the control of the practice and the assemblage. This constant changeability and an organization or practitioner's ability to adjust to shifting assemblages is critical to the naissance and sustainability of emerging digital video practices.

#### **5.4 - The Crowd Sourcing of *18 Days in Egypt***

In pursuit of emerging digital video practices in New York City, my research began to evolve out from the city and into a wider global perspective. Perhaps this was due to the international links that I found myself confronting as I sought out new practitioners to sit down and talk with. As I interviewed media makers in New York, I sought out practitioners they recommended. Yet also conducting textual research, I was already aware that globalization linked digital video practices via multiple platforms and online connections. In December 2012, Tim Pool appeared on a WITNESS sponsored panel about human rights and activism moderated by Sam Gregory.<sup>62</sup> Earlier that year in May 2012, Pool and Jigar Mehta (the co-creator of *18 Days in Egypt*) both spoke at a South By Southwest workshop titled – ‘But Are You a Real Journalist? #jan25 #occupy.’<sup>63</sup> It became apparent that the New York City diagram, by its very nature, was global in scale. WITNESS, based in Brooklyn, worked throughout the world.

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<sup>62</sup> See: <http://www.witness.org/about-us/events/witness-at-paley-center-december-2012>. Accessed 26 May 2014.

<sup>63</sup> See the archived webpage for this event here: [http://schedule.sxsw.com/2012/events/event\\_IAP100706](http://schedule.sxsw.com/2012/events/event_IAP100706). Accessed 9 February 2014.

Jigar Mehta, of *18 Days in Egypt*, experimented with collaborative online storytelling focusing on Egypt from his base in San Francisco, but was often traveling to New York for meetings. Therefore early on, the New York City diagram took on a global perspective and as a researcher, knowing that I would be engaging with case studies in New Zealand and India, I felt the need to embrace and examine the differing global perspectives that appeared in my frame of vision.

Consequently, a very different project yet an interesting contrast to the work of WITNESS is that of the crowd sourced collaborative online documentary, *18 Days in Egypt* (18daysinegypt.com). *18 Days in Egypt* was co-created by Jigar Mehta, a media innovation strategist and journalist, and Yasmin Elayat, an interaction designer, new media artist and creative technologist. Both had followed the Egyptian Revolution that took place in early 2011 and led to the resignation of the then president, Hosni Mubarak. Mehta, who had been a video journalist at the *New York Times*, watched the news of the gatherings in Tahrir Square via online news networks and social media. Like many individuals, the number of people using mobile phones to record these events throughout Egypt intrigued Mehta. He started to think about the legacy that might come from all of these video documents. Millions of people were recording what Mehta believed was iconic imagery, yet he wondered whether these memories would be crafted into narratives or be lost in the mire of technology. Discussing his early vision, Mehta asked:

What will become of all this material, right? Like, does it just end up on a hard drive somewhere? And you know, to me it was like, well there is actually a lot richer of a story behind these photos. And like these photos are important, because yes they're iconic and yes, they're of that moment, but what is more rich and what is not being told is the story behind the

photos and the people behind them. Who is actually taking them? Who are the people in them and what about them? (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012)

Mehta's inspiration to experiment with new forms of digital media was sparked in similar ways to that of the work of Tim Pool and WITNESS. The initial motivation of WITNESS was prompted by the Rodney King footage and the potential of citizen recorded human rights video. In Tim Pool's case, he wondered why YouTube confrontations between police and Occupy protestors weren't been shown to a wider audience. Mehta had similar concerns. He recognized that a considerable amount of raw documentation was being recorded in Egypt. These recordings were immediate, but once these moments began to fade, if the footage wasn't framed by its creators or by other individuals who were there it might have been forgotten. Mehta believed a platform was necessary to form and archive these visual recordings. Yet the attempt to actualize *18 Days in Egypt* shows that cultivating a sustainable online space where 'documentary' narratives created from, and centered on, archived YouTube videos and other online visual material can be complicated and difficult. *18 Days in Egypt* encountered many roadblocks as it evolved from an idea to an interactive website.

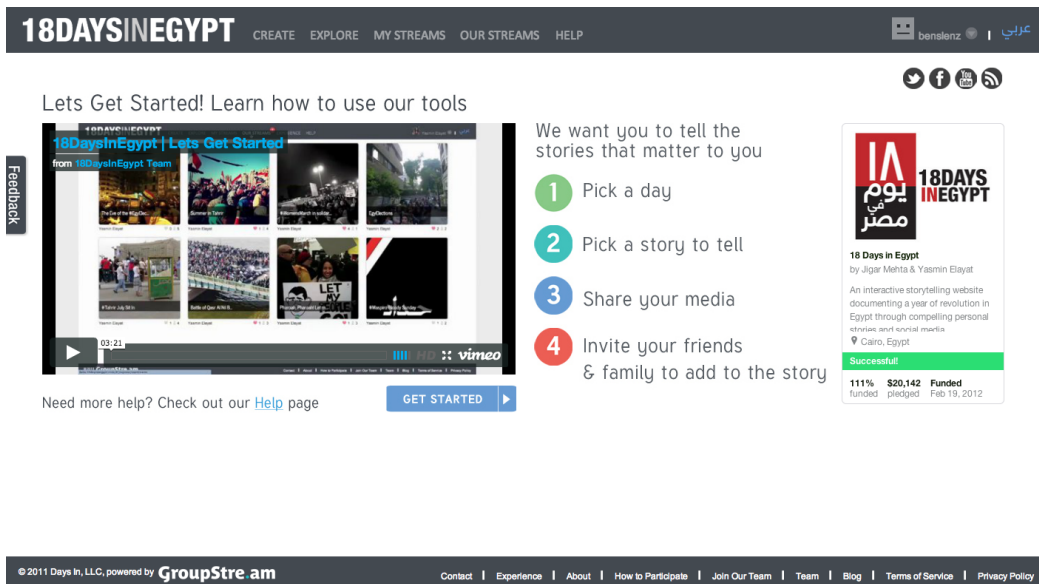
Mehta collaborated with Elayat and they worked together to create a beta website called, *18 Days in Egypt*, in the hope that it would form a space where Egyptians could come to either upload their own media or select media that was already online (from YouTube, Flickr, etc.) and then re-work that media to form their own stories and memories. *18 Days in Egypt* received support from numerous established film and social change organizations including the Tribeca Film Institute, the Sundance Institute, the Ford Foundation and the Brooklyn Law Incubator and Policy. *18 Days in Egypt* launched on January 25, 2012, exactly a

year to the day that protests initially erupted in Tahrir Square in Cairo and throughout Egypt. A month later, Mehta and Elayat ran a successful crowd funding campaign via the website, Kickstarter, raising over \$20,000 U.S. dollars to further support the project. Prior to the site going live, *18 Days in Egypt* worked with a small group of Egyptians to produce content from previously captured footage so when the website launched, there were already published projects in place in the hope that Egyptians might feel inspired to produce new stories to upload.

*18 Days in Egypt* is an experiment in crowd-sourced citizen produced online documentary. The project is another act of assembling – utilizing available technologies and collective enunciation. It is an example of the material and discursive entanglement of an assemblage, offering new capacities for evolving relationships. When a user starts an account with *18 Days in Egypt*, the website assumes a networked identity and user base, immediately asking individuals to link to their Facebook, Twitter, Yahoo or Google account (there are also a few other options). When a user wants to craft a story, the template begins by asking, ‘What day did your story take place?’<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> The requests of *18daysinegypt.com* can be seen after starting a user account and logging into the website.



**Image 5: First page of *18 Days in Egypt* after login.**

Then *18 Days in Egypt* asks the user to create a written name and description for the story. Finally, the website wants to know where the story took place. A Google map appears with Tahrir Square and a Google location pin, which the user can move around to choose a location. Then the website asks the user to select family and friends to invite, essentially people who can help the user tell his or her story. A template appears and users can then connect to media from their own Flickr, Facebook or Twitter accounts. Additionally, the template allows users to search YouTube for any clips to add to their story. Essentially, the website allows for digital photographs, video, tweets and the option to integrate written slides in between these different visual media to create a linear narrative about the user's experience of that time and place. It assumes a multi-platform user and seeks to integrate multiple sources of information from social media. Yet, *18 Days in Egypt* does not allow users to edit YouTube videos. If a user integrates YouTube clips, then the entire video appears within the linear narrative, loading a video when the timeline reaches that stage in the story.



As Mehta remarked, “We encourage, the people to tell the story and what we do is we make it easy for them to find their video, photos and tweets” (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012). *18 Days in Egypt* has faith in the integrity of footage captured by citizens and the accuracy of User Generated Content (UGC). Trust in the concept of collective intelligence within the frameworks of citizen-produced video is a pivotal value that links practitioners such as Tim Pool and projects like *18 Days in Egypt*. As Pierre Lévy (1997, p. 13) famously asked, ‘What is collective intelligence? It is a form of *universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills.’ *18 Days in Egypt* has a persistent faith in the ability of online audiences to gain insight and understanding by analyzing unedited footage through collaborative methods. As Lévy (1997, p. 13-14) continues, ‘No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity. There is no transcendent store of knowledge and knowledge is simply the sum of what we know.’ Yet entrusting the extraction of knowledge to the masses can also result in divergent ideas and visions, especially when it comes to documentation that can be easily interpreted or misinterpreted in various ways or through prior convictions. Even when a documentary is carefully crafted and positioned with a certain context, it is still open to divergent interpretations.

Although *18 Days in Egypt* built a website from the ground up in order to make it easier for Egyptians to use their own media and supplement it with media found online, the project still needed to hire a number of Egyptian journalists and students who worked as field producers on the ground in order to reach out to

citizens in Egypt and encourage people to go on the site and contribute stories.

As Mehta expressed:

But you know for the general population, you know I think it's one of these things where they go, Oh yeah, yeah, I want to do that but haven't done it yet. So what we need to do is figure out, well okay, what's it going to take to have them actually do it? How much handholding do we need to do? (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012)

In fact, the project's belief that merely formulating a platform to create stories was the key to its success seems to be misguided. Similar to the previously mentioned WITNESS Hub, the online platform that struggled to retain its significance and which WITNESS eventually shut down to focus on better ways to disseminate their videos through preexisting channels, *18 Days in Egypt* has had difficulty remaining relevant.

The evolution of *18 Days in Egypt* asks important questions about the sustainability of crowd sourced online documentaries and the quandary that many similar online projects face. WITNESS knows well that citizen-based media is often far from self-sufficient. Besides understanding the importance of contributing personal stories and reportage to a wider collective, citizens are rarely rewarded for the work they do. Even though the *18 Days in Egypt* template makes it slightly easier to track down media as a curatorial exercise or a simple narrative that generates a timeline, it still requires work, patience and a good Internet connection to begin to realize the history of a moment in time. *18 Days in Egypt* envisions a world where the use of media will allow for multiple angles and stories to emerge from places where individuals are documenting in the same space but aren't necessarily crafting their experiences into narratives. Expanding upon its vision, Mehta reflected:

This idea of like, how do we make sense of the media that we are creating? You know, I create media in my own way. You create media in your own way. We both might not use the same services. We both might not use the same language. But we might, we might have both experiences, whether it's going to Occupy, or to our sister's wedding, or whatever it is... We both experienced it and documented it in some way. So how do we actually bring together all, those individual experiences collectively? So that's the world we're kind of experimenting in. (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012)

*18 Days in Egypt* had difficulty getting Egyptians onto the site in order to produce stories. The most recently uploaded stories seem to be from late 2012. Making the leap from documenting to storytelling presented more of a challenge for the creators of *18 Days in Egypt* than they expected. This difficulty seems to be a common predicament for many organizations trying to spark nascent forms of citizen documentary media. It is also a key insight into the digital ecology of emerging documentary practices. Though there has been an abundant proliferation of digital video tools, software and online platforms, for digital video practices to emerge and sustain, the profusion of these technologies requires long-term strategies to cultivate documentary skills. In the case of *18 Days in Egypt*, the online platform was given priority over training or workshops. If anything, the project has seen embryonic glimmers of the possibility of a citizen centered online documentary practice. Yet *18 Days in Egypt* did not do enough to support the necessary skills and guidance required for citizens to experiment with the platform and subsequently the website, though still working, rarely gets new contributions.

Jigar Mehta explained that in the course of the project they noticed that although many people expressed interest in the possibility of contributing, they didn't seem to have the time or even the motivation to craft a story. Perhaps this was the fault of the website, the overall project or maybe more of an overarching

boundary of intimidation that ostensibly stymies people from taking that extra step to craft creative documentary media online. It is almost as if people have more faith in the power of online communities to make sense of the footage or photographs that they upload, than they themselves might have in experimenting with the making of creative narratives. Mehta explained:

Because you know, the percentage of people who go from just being able to say like I did this thing and then wanting to go and actually kind of craft it, is like, you know, ten percent. Most people are just happy to have it all together in one spot so they can send the link like, “Hey I went to the Giants game last night, here it is.” As opposed to being like, crafting together like a unique webpage for it. (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012)

Why has the emergence of new video technologies not directly correlated to a renaissance of digital documentary media? What factors might constrain the formation of these assemblages? Simply, the introduction of new forms of lens based media technologies does not necessarily equate to the formation of new creative practices. Certainly production of new imagery proliferates, yet the potential to devise new documentary practices relies on numerous elements that reach far beyond the technologies themselves. Cultivating and sustaining human interest, for example, is a crucial element in the creation of emerging documentary narratives. Specifically, engendering the relationship between the creative capacities of an individual with those of a technological tool requires a support system to provide a long lasting foundation that will allow for these creative relationships to flourish. The act of creating a website or putting a digital camera in someone’s hand provides only the tools of hardware and software. Much more is needed to elicit sustainable video skills that support long-term creative practice. Stepping beyond documentation and into the realm of narrative construction requires knowledge of editing software, insight into methods of

documentary storytelling and pathways to share this creativity with a larger audience. Mehta is right. It is easier to take a photograph and share it on a social media platform such as Instagram, than it is to meticulously engage with the creative thought process necessary to deliver a photographic essay. *18 Days in Egypt* seemed to disregard the long-term necessity required to fuel a project of such a scope. These sorts of missteps hampered the enduring progress of the project. As we will see throughout this dissertation, the digital video practices that sustain are those that embrace the dynamics between the creative capacities of hardware and software, but also the creative capacities of emerging media makers as well.

Although *18 Days in Egypt* received bountiful accolades throughout the interactive documentary community as a trailblazing platform to integrate citizen created media, the project has evolved and shifted from its original intention. One of the initial goals was to have *18 Days in Egypt* be a place where people could explore and remember the days leading up to the ouster of the then Egyptian president, Hosni Mubarak. Describing the project's initial goals Mehta believed it would attract, "a long tail audience, someone who wants to actually get in deep and actually understand it, and an audience, international, but also Egyptians fifty years from now" (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012). Mehta now wonders what *18 Days in Egypt* will eventually become? Where should it go from here? How can it shift and be sustainable? How might it stay relevant, especially when those 18 days have turned into months and years? Mehta wonders if the project needs to transition to a model that is similar to that of a StoryCorps, the digital audio and oral history project that has recorded more than 45,000 interviews and personal histories in the past ten years throughout the United

States.<sup>65</sup> Certainly Mehta believes that *18 Days in Egypt* needs to be more about teaching a new generation of Egyptians, “to become storytellers. And for them, to own their craft by going out, talking to people and capturing their stories” (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012). However, the project does not appear to be actively seeking methods to train or aid in the training of Egyptians to cultivate their documentary storytelling skills. The website appears to be more of an archive of the possibilities that surround online documentary platforms, a shell that received a vast amount of nurturing but might have been approached via multiple alternate methods which might have allowed for it to achieve a better chance at sustainability.

For all of the roadblocks that *18 Days in Egypt* has confronted in the last two years as a collaborative documentary project and although it appears to be on hiatus and restructuring, the project has continued to experiment with new ways to try and spark citizens to craft documentary stories. Mehta explains this process well and acknowledges the importance of adapting and not necessarily approaching this experiment with a traditional documentary mindset:

I don't think we saw this when we started, but this is, we are really experimenting with this new way of trying to tell a story collectively. And you know, we've always said from the beginning, that this is an experiment and you know, we're not going to get it right the first time, we're not going to get it right the second time, but we're gonna be very open about the process. So it's really interesting, I think, you know, talk about challenges, is from a documentary community side, from the storytelling point of view, people are confused by the project because they think it is done. And to see to that it's an iterative process but also it's a living thing. So we have to be open because we need, you know, the only way it can be a living project is if we open it up and you know, the contributors come in and contribute stories and the site changes based on

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<sup>65</sup> See the *Story Corps* website here: <http://storycorps.org/>. Accessed 26 May 2014.

that. And we learn how people share and use the site, then we can make changes along the way. Rather than, you know, I think a lot of the narrative online works still very much, kind of like film, where they will have a big release. And you know everything will be done behind closed doors and it's like, hey, well here's the project and it's a big release. And you know, we're kind of like, being very open about the process. (Jigar Mehta, interview with author, 14 June 2012)

*18 Days in Egypt* is really about looking for strategies to develop open sourced documentaries from citizen generated archival material. The ability for citizen recorded video documentation and citizen produced documentary media to thrive and stay relevant involves an acute understanding by citizen practitioners and facilitators that these practices cannot remain stagnant in a specific or traditional process. Digital technologies are constantly evolving and assembling. The platforms being used, the hardware and software are continually changing, shifting, emerging, dying, becoming and reinventing. And often it is the users themselves that adapt technologies or elements of these technologies for their own purposes. Mehta's reinforcement that *18 Days in Egypt* is a "living project," is an affirmation of the project's existence as a constantly assembling experimentation, one that is open to ebbs and flows. This is one of the reasons why *18 Days in Egypt* is so relevant to this dissertation in that it is a vital example of assembling and its dynamics.

All creative processes, whether it is the invention of a specific technology or that of documentary media, are fluid and their development is alive, shifting and morphing, adapting, adjusting and readapting. The ways that these projects, individuals and organizations rework and reframe their documentary practices highlight how tenuous our relationships are with emerging digital video tools and the creative capacities that go hand in hand with the use of these digital devices. In the case of *18 Days in Egypt*, assemblage is elemental to how its creativity and

process has evolved. As Jigar Mehta openly shares, the project is constantly assembling and reassembling, openly seeking out a methodology that might remain sustainable and pertinent to its intentions and audience. It is an experiment. *18 Days in Egypt* began with the idea that since many Egyptian citizens documented the uprising in early 2011 then this plethora of footage could be framed within memory and narrative. Yet accomplishing this concept has been more complex than originally thought. The tasks involved in tracking down footage, citizens and their individual desires to integrate visual structure to their memories of that time involve the assembling of many variables. This has not been an easy task to embark upon. Just because all the elements appear to be present does not mean that (narrative-centered video) assembling will occur, or that it will be easy. Often it does not happen. Unseen constraints might lie beneath or even on the surface of these mediated assemblages, shifting and testing their ability to sustain or even form. *18 Days in Egypt* is an example of the complexities and difficulties involved in maintaining and forming these sorts of citizen centered digital documentary media practices. As such, the creative practices that appear to maintain a sense of sustainability are the ones that acknowledge the dynamism of the spaces they work in, yet they persist and adapt with the hope that their documentary or digital video practice will remain important, vital, cutting edge and relevant within the realm of the ever shifting creative space that is the current transitional moment of evolution within work spaces and play spaces of multi-faceted digital video practices, online platforms and digital technologies. Cultivating these relationships is essential. Without structured, sustainable and holistic foundational frameworks, what is possible in relation to digital video practices remains limited.



## 5.5 - Conclusion: The Multiple Pathways Towards Assemblages

The case studies of WITNESS and *18 Days in Egypt* show that when multiple elements assemble into working forms, the diverse art forms created allow for new stories to be told, while giving room for significant experimentation in visual documentary representation. WITNESS and *18 Days in Egypt* have both engaged with digital technologies, methods of storytelling and platforms of dissemination in a variety of ways. The diversity of the ways in which these different creative processes approach documentary media shows that there are no direct or common paths for sustainable and emerging documentary media spaces. The variables pertinent to these expressive relationships are inconsistent and only relevant to each specific assemblage. WITNESS specifically targets organizations and groups that are already operating in an activist practice and looks to extend this with video skills. WITNESS does not create feature films, but seeks to embed video making within particular localized practices. In contrast, *18 Days in Egypt* is targeted towards a completely different group of people. The project is much wider and lacks the similar motivations to the work of WITNESS. The website seeks to harness the video documentation of Egyptians who happened to find themselves in a fluid political context in which video from mobile phones proliferated. In these two projects, the organizations involved have very different understandings of creative capacities, supportive structures and digital video technologies. These differences reveal the limitations of what can be expected if a thoughtful balance between the relationships of these elements is not considered in regards to sustainability of emerging digital video practices. The following chapters will illuminate how both seen and unseen limitations can arise in different possibility spaces and the ways in which

practitioners and organizations attempt to adapt their creative practices to these variables.

The value and importance of online archives that surround political events are still yet to be fully understood or experimented with. The multiple possibilities that envelop the vast online video documentation of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 or the Occupy Wall Street movement have yet to mature and may not be understood for years to come. *18 Days in Egypt* has had to review the project as a whole, reconsidering what the platform is and what the platform should be or could be. It is, like all of these case studies, a constantly changing assemblage. Finding equilibrium, in its unquestionably many shapes, forms the emblematic role of assemblage throughout the analysis of these emerging practices. The assembling of a video practice, in and of itself, is moment of stable creation that works. An enduring creative force that pushes the viewer to think, yet allows for a familiar engagement to also be present. Yet it cannot be forgotten that numerous factors, many beyond the control of the creative individuals involved, also play important roles in the ways in which assembling occurs.

With the case studies examined in this chapter, there is no doubt that these tools and their emerging practices often produce contingent events that are unexpected and open up new vistas for experience. These practitioners and facilitators are themselves trying to identify new digital documentary practices, while in the process attempting to create and experiment with new forms of narratives captured with emerging digital media tools. Assembling these variables is incredibly tricky. Yet engaging with digital video documentation, online platforms and emerging media spaces with a directed intentionality is a valuable and vital pathway towards new experimentations. This chapter reveals

that cultivating sustainable digital video practices is complex and requires a concrete understanding that numerous elements within specific assemblages are critical to the health of a practice. WITNESS and *18 Days in Egypt* use contrasting methods to identify citizens who would create documentary content. Years of experience directed WITNESS to established human rights organizations with strong programs and committed activists to build upon; whereas, *18 Days in Egypt* attempted to procure regular citizens off the street in the hope of convincing them to go online and craft a timeline that evoked their experience. Recruitment of practitioners and identification of human rights organizations and selecting particular kinds of individuals is central to developing and supporting a sustainable practice and cultivating the creative capacities of practitioners engaged in human rights, issues of social justice and protest movements.

## ***CHAPTER 6 – Digital Video Practices in India***

### **6.1 - The Possibilities of Limitations: Embedding Video Making Within the Local**

Historically, creators of documentary media have come from *outside* the communities they document. In the previous chapters, we have seen that the portability of affordable digital video cameras are one of many elements that have aided in the birthing of emerging forms of documentary media developing from *inside* communities. It is clear that the relationship between affordable video cameras (whether smartphones, point and shoot cameras or video tools that straddle both amateur and professional practices) and the individuals engaging with these technologies are merely two cogs in a wheel of multiple elements and connections that have the potential to fuel sustainable and far-reaching digital video practices.

What follows in this chapter is an analysis of Video Volunteers based on the many interviews I conducted with community correspondents reflecting on their own practice, as well as my personal observation of Video Volunteers' trainings. Similar to WITNESS, Video Volunteers deliberately looks to serve as a catalyst for emerging documentary practices and aims to develop a sustainable set of practices and a wide network of media makers in which to grow these video practices throughout the diversity of languages, religions, cultures, terrain and climates that make up the vast country that is India. The organization's work focuses on the development of video advocacy practices from inside communities. These citizen practitioners are given the opportunity to tell their stories and the stories of their communities, but rarely have they been given the chance to talk about how they produce videos and engage with their unique

hybrid of reportage and documentary storytelling within the communities they work in. This chapter offers these individuals a chance to reflect on their video reportage and in the process analyzes and examines Video Volunteers as an emerging assemblage. Utilizing assemblage theory, this chapter picks apart the multiple assemblings that define Video Volunteers in order to gain better insight into the elements that catalyze these practices and those which challenge their sustainability.

The PhD fieldwork I conducted in New York City identified a number of factors *specific* to the emergence of digital video practices, some with links to documentary media, within and around what could loosely be thought of as a ‘New York City possibility space.’ The task of identifying boundaries to a structured working definition, as with my initial attempt at a New York City diagram, which is at once local and simultaneously global, is endless and self-defeating. Furthermore, digital video practitioners and documentary filmmakers who have traditionally come from outside communities are often now empowered to create from within the communities being documented. From the case studies in this dissertation, there are examples of both types of media makers – individuals internal to communities as well as citizens who are external, all experimenting with emerging video tools, digital video practices and forms of documentary media and having various successes and failures. These interactions are never static. Assemblages can empower, shape and constrain at the same time. Elements can intermix, coexist and fuse for moments and periods of time. As Manuel DeLanda (2010, p. 11) writes:

If we parametrized a single concept, then strata and assemblages would cease to be kinds and become *phases*, like the solid and fluid phases of matter. Unlike mutually exclusive binary categories, phases can be

transformed into one another, and even coexist as mixtures, like a gel that is a mixture of the solid and liquid phases of different materials.

Video Volunteers' relationship to mainstream media and traditions of the documentary has required constant re-working where phases of creative conglomerations are experimented with in an attempt to create sustainable practices. The organization confronts the historical conventions of these practices with video reports from areas of India that rarely receive coverage and trains community correspondents from *inside* these communities. Their video practices deterritorialize traditions of the documentary form and video reportage through the areas they cover, their use of trained citizens as correspondents and their methods of publication. The *mélange* also partakes in territorialization as their reports reinforce stylistic tropes of Indian television news networks. In turn, these parametrized phases influence many other factors (such as creative capacities of practitioners, of video tools, of infrastructure, of supportive structures) both within the specific assemblage of Video Volunteers and throughout conjoining external assemblages. As we have seen in previous case studies, elements that are part of assemblages these practitioners emerge within have varying levels of capacities within each assemblage. The strengths of these capacities are also changing as their practices emerge and the practitioners and facilitators spear heading these digital video practices yearn to create sustainable methods of video making.

With the introduction of affordable video technologies, those who were once the subjects of documentary media have the potential to gradually shift power structures such as relationships within a village or community, wider alliances with mainstream media and interactions with individuals in positions of power, through self-produced and publicly disseminated video reports. As

identified in the New York City case studies, often it takes an outside facilitator, organization or supportive structure to instigate a pathway towards formulating creative narratives. The role of a supportive structure as catalyst, actively working with communities to spark interaction between video tools and citizens in order for them to transition to media makers, is not new. Yet it is difficult. Interactions between organizations and individuals can be haphazard, involving dead-ends, experiments and accidents, unintended implications and above all, the right kind of personnel to be sustainable. Integrating cameras within various communities has occurred many times prior (the National Film Board of Canada's, *Challenge for Change* program is an early experiment of this idea).<sup>66</sup> Yet today perhaps unlike before, the physical accessibility and affordability of portable video cameras and devices which incorporate video-capturing capability seems to be multiplying at a much more rapid pace. This proliferation, along with cultural, political and other intangible factors can act as catalyst for new digital video practices to emerge.

This proliferation of video tools, such as mobile phone cameras, provides the potential for underprivileged vantage points to be seen more often. Although these viewpoints have been on the periphery for centuries, arguably the increase of portable video tools has slowly aided the ability for these angles to begin to surface, as has been the pattern for new photographic technologies for over a century. However, this doesn't necessarily mean that there is also some sort of

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<sup>66</sup> See *Challenge for Change: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), edited by Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Baker & Ezra Winton for in-depth essays on *Challenge for Change*. From the birth of this program up to the present day, there are a plethora examples of other documentary experiments in which cameras were given to community members in many global locations.

paradigm shift in new forms of documentary narrative experimentation. As mentioned, most people don't engage with the full set of affordances of their video tools (for example, editing narratives or even uploading raw footage).

The introduction of cameras into underprivileged communities, either through professionals behind the camera seeking to document these communities themselves or by facilitators presenting the possibility for selected individuals within the community to engage with these video tools always presents a plethora of negotiable yet important ethical issues. Frequently, the immersion of introduced cameras has been sporadic and brief, sustainability an afterthought or not even considered. Video Volunteers, the Indian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that is the central focus of this chapter, is actively engaging with citizens from underprivileged communities in the hope of crafting sustainable video practices.

The fieldwork I conducted in India followed a very different route than my New York City based data collection. In India, the focus of this research shifted from examining a number of different assemblages to centering on one, the organization Video Volunteers. The methodology of my India research approached Video Volunteers from the 'inside out', examining the many assemblages that nest in the central assemblage, the organization itself. The purpose of this method of fieldwork was to gain an entry point into understanding *some* of the types of elements that are significant and emerging within India. Similarly to New York City, identifying a diagram or possibility space that is pertinent to India as a whole also proved to be a hopeless and impossible feat. India does not have a diagram that defines its entirety. As we explore Video Volunteers' case studies later in this chapter, we will see that the organization



takes a political strategy involving digital video and looks to embed it within the local, i.e. the socio-political context and the affordances provided by the surrounding telecommunications infrastructure. Individual practitioners, as such, can be hostage to circumstances but still empowered to work against these limitations in specific ways through support by external organizations. Necessarily, Video Volunteers consistently re-assesses the structure of its training programs, the technology it uses and the ways in which its correspondents approach narrative construction.

An examination of Video Volunteers does not encapsulate a generalized all-encompassing sense of the emergence of activist based citizen media making currently being produced in India. Analyzing the organization presents an interpretation of specific possibilities for digital video practices emerging in a number of geographic locations and guided by the support of one particular organization that has been quite successful in what they do. Even though its founders acknowledge the challenges, Video Volunteers is an organization devoted to being sustainable over time. It has proved it can adapt to different types of technologies, models of training and shifts in infrastructure. This shows the dynamics of assemblage and the notion of history and the energy required to sustain a video practice as its content changes over time. Early on in my fieldwork, I realized that Video Volunteers offers telling insights into the difficulties of generating a comprehensive, coherent picture of many possible assemblages that have merged and might emerge from the Indian subcontinent. The organization is also thinking about future possibilities. Continually, their staff is discussing the ways in which they might need to adapt to new technologies

and other shifts in the way they undertake cultivating and supporting a national network of community correspondents throughout India.

Therefore through an examination of Video Volunteers, this chapter analyzes interactions between relational elements such as the nested qualities and sustainability of assemblage, territorialization and deterritorialization within assemblage theory and the emergent nature of the assemblage and its dynamics. There are a number of key issues that are part of the greater possibility space that Video Volunteers has emerged from and helps to generate. Infrastructure means a number of things to the organization and the practitioners that make up the assemblage. Infrastructure can be the relationship to technology, but it can also mean other aspects of physical and logistical concerns. How to get from one place to another and the ways in which these linkages might play a role in, for example, the speed of storytelling. In what ways does infrastructure in this broader sense constrict the organization and at the same time liberate the media they are producing?

Accessibility is another element intimately connected to infrastructure. As the citizens who make up the community correspondents of Video Volunteers come from underprivileged backgrounds, their relationship to technology, to power structures, to economic opportunities are all relevant to the ways in which they engage with storytelling and the narratives that emerge from their work. Numerous ethical issues are inherent to these relationships; especially in the way they approach people in positions of power and how these people in power interpret their videos. The creative capacities of practitioners overlap all of these issues. Social, cultural, religious and political constraints, including the power of police and the army and how community correspondents, who tend to come from

activist backgrounds, decide to balance their roles as journalists and media makers alongside their passion for activism and social justice present critical interactions that must be analyzed. The linkages between these factors also play roles in the issues that emerge between concepts of empowerment and community correspondents' relationship to the camera. How might the use of the digital video camera and the transfer of a story to the Internet present the possibility of empowerment to these citizen media makers? What kinds of layers of empowerment emerge from these relationships? Storytelling ability and the language of the audio-visual medium, the media experience, the understanding of the documentary form and where these citizens reference themselves and their work within the greater structures of documentary traditions are also critical to understanding and analyzing the media practices of Video Volunteers.

## **6.2 - Assembling Digital Video Practices: Video Volunteers & Activism**

For six weeks, I had been conducting fieldwork exploring the ways in which Video Volunteers engages with emerging digital video technologies in the context of documentary media. That is how I found myself, in March of 2013, lost and sitting in a rickshaw on the outskirts of the city of Lucknow, looking for the small campus of the NGO, Sahbhagi Shikshan Kendra, which runs a regional centre for participatory learning. There, the Goa based organization Video Volunteers had organized a twelve-day training for activists from the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP). These citizen activists had been identified as aspiring Video Volunteers' community correspondents by local NGOs in their respective areas and districts of UP and MP. I had come to Lucknow to interview a number of established community correspondents about

the development of their community based video practices. The storytellers of Video Volunteers are scattered throughout India and craft videos about local issues in their districts and villages and slums for the Video Volunteers' India Unheard program, which seeks, among many things, to give voice to Indian citizens and their communities in the hope of publishing one short YouTube video a day.<sup>67</sup> In Lucknow, one of the correspondents I interviewed was the Allahabad based community correspondent, sometimes called local changemaker, Ajeet Bahadur. Bahadur spoke of both connecting with Sajad Rasool, a community correspondent from Srinagar, as well as the global reach of the Video Volunteers' India Unheard community news service. "After making India Unheard videos, what happens is that what is happening here and what is happening in Kashmir, we both know it and can share it," he told me. "This way people can get acquainted and associated with us. What is happening right now is that the media or any other medium of such communication to give information to people is limited on a local level" (Ajeet Bahadur, interview with author, 3 March 2013).

India is a diverse country. It contains multitudes. Presently, the ways in which the community correspondents of Video Volunteers adapt video practices in their localized contexts and situate those practices within the use of emerging video technologies offers critical insight into an assortment of emerging video practices throughout the country as screens and cameras become smaller yet more present. Many other Indian NGOs are also using affordable video technologies, as well as accessible methods of broadcasting to spread issues of social justice, producing educational video tools for communities and people who might have

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<sup>67</sup> India Unheard is Video Volunteers' core citizen reporting program. It is a community news service for India. Its introductory website can be found here: <http://www.videovolunteers.org/about/indiaunheard/>. Accessed 23 October 2014.

difficulty accessing this information.<sup>68</sup> Yet over many years, Video Volunteers has maintained clarity of vision integrating digital video practices into the central methodology of their organization.

The variability of infrastructure in India makes circulating digital video a complex task. Regions exist in which digital connectivity or even electricity is minimal or non-existent. In contrast, urban areas of India might be as easily connected as anywhere in the world. Urban connectivity in India can be attained through home Internet connections, cyber cafés or affordable data connections via telecommunications companies. When I met with the community correspondent, Zulekha Sayyed, in the Vikrohli Parksite Slum outside of Mumbai, she was connecting to the Internet via her mobile phone. India has some of the cheapest mobile phone access rates in the world and Sayyed had an unlimited data plan that at the time cost her approximately 125 rupees per month for 1 GB, which is 2-3 USD a month.<sup>69</sup> Although the connection wouldn't allow her to stream video with ease, she could connect to Facebook and check email rather easily. As I sit in New Zealand and write my dissertation, Sayyed is often 'available' to chat on the gmail email interface.

In my experience researching in India off and on for more than a decade, mobile video technologies have multiplied in areas that are disconnected to the Internet and even electricity. In 2010, while working on a documentary photography project with the nomadic Van Gujjar community of northern India, a peoples who spend much of the year living in forests and national parks of the

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<sup>68</sup> Other NGOs for which I conducted interviews and research include Digital Green (<http://www.digitalgreen.org/>), Breakthrough (<http://breakthrough.tv/>), and Adobe Youth Voices (<http://youthvoices.adobe.com/>).

<sup>69</sup> This is based on a March 2014 exchange rate of approximately 1 USD = 61 INR

Himalayas, often cut off from electricity and certainly without Internet access, mobile phones with video recording and playback capacity were used in Van Gujjar thatch huts called dehras deep in mountain forests. When in an area with electricity or a cyber café, members of this community would upload Bollywood music videos and other forms of moving image content to watch later in their forest homes. The question remains, what sort of video documentation and/or documentary media might emerge when regular Internet access makes it to these forests and more than one person in a joint family can afford a mobile phone with a video camera? In India, multiple strata of digital divides are present throughout the country.<sup>70</sup> As mobile phone technologies and digital video tools further proliferate throughout India, different assemblages will have the opportunity to form and challenge the relationship between citizen and technologies, presenting the potential to disrupt technological and social relationships.

Video Volunteers and many other NGOs in India are experimenting with the present connectivity of digital video tools in order to utilize the mobility of these tools' portability to connect with communities that might lack regular linkages to the Web. Digital Green, a New Delhi based NGO, has been using Pico projectors to screen short films in rural India since 2006.<sup>71</sup> Although the work of Digital Green focuses on videos that address the education of farmers (methods to treat crop diseases, harvesting, water system management, etc.), they work with partner NGOs to craft and screen these videos with the help of local

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<sup>70</sup> Although there is not space to engage deeply with questions regarding the digital divide throughout India, Kenneth Keniston and Deepak Kumar's *IT Experience in India* (New Delhi: Sage, 2004) is an early introduction to the wider conversation.

<sup>71</sup> Digital Green is one organization that was an early case study for India based fieldwork. In New Delhi, I interviewed, Akbar Gulzar, the Deputy Director of Training for Digital Green.

communities. Pico projectors offer their NGO partners a level of adaptability that was not available to the early users of VHS technologies in the 1980s and 1990s, as video-screening equipment from that era required a reliable connection to electricity. As Akbar Gulzar, the Deputy Director of Training for Digital Green, explained when I sat down with him in February 2013:

We use pocket sized Pico projectors. These are very small projectors. They are battery operated. So basically, you don't have to worry about the electricity, availability of it. You can watch it anywhere you want, you can just have a small, where twenty people can sit, you can choose your time and place and the group by yourself. (Akbar Gulzar, interview with author, 14 February 2013)

Despite the fact that the videos created by Digital Green focus on farmer training, the potentiality that the organization plays with opens up a breadth of possibility spaces for emerging video practices throughout rural India. There is an important continuity here with the ways in which radio has been used as a medium of top-down communication in this democratic space. The potential for mobile projection and rural screenings beyond the reach of the mainstream will seemingly expand as the cost of Pico projectors and other pocket sized projectors decreases in coming years. Similar shifts in the portability of screenings happened during the 1980s and 1990s as VCRs multiplied across India. Changes in one technology resonated and interacted with changes in other technologies. Furthermore as the picture and sound quality continues to improve in mobile projection devices, it is conceivable that organizations such as Video Volunteers will want to expand and morph their ever growing and ever shifting assemblages and reintroduce more regular community based screenings.

As an organization, Video Volunteers continually re-assesses their working methods and the structure of their training programs. Technology,

political situations in specific areas of India, relationship to mainstream media and a variety of other factors all play roles in how community correspondents respond to situations on the ground and adapt their reportage to these variables. In two years, or five years, or ten years down the line, technologies such as smartphones with Internet access, Pico projectors in the hands of every community correspondent or a host of wider technologies that could have unforeseen implications (e.g. solar powered devices, etc.) might be a reality. Video Volunteers does think ahead in the hope of being able to foresee and anticipate how their work might evolve. It is clear, however, that within Video Volunteers, there is a multiplicity of possibility spaces.

Since 2006, Video Volunteers has trained community-based activists to produce original video content for the Web, for their communities and for local and regional authorities that often have the power to address issues that these citizen journalists document. As of March 2014, Video Volunteers has cultivated a growing network of 200 carefully recruited community correspondents who are scattered across 27 Indian states, extending as far south as Tamil Nadu, northwest to Rajasthan, far north to the state of Jammu and Kashmir and northeast to Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>72</sup> The evolution of Video Volunteers as an organization and specifically the India Unheard program exemplifies the many ongoing challenges involved in attempting to thoughtfully foster digital video practices throughout India. Although many of these difficulties are pertinent and specific to the Indian context, the organization is focused on embedding practices within localized conditions in order to make them sustainable. The complexities

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<sup>72</sup> See this map: <http://www.videovolunteers.org/about/indiaunheard/map-of-the-current-network/> for a more comprehensive geographic layout of the Video Volunteers' network. Accessed 1 March 2014.



that community correspondents navigate are quite different to the problems that citizens in different assemblages and territories such as New York or Auckland might encounter. For example when Zulekha Sayyed, a community correspondent from the Vikrohli Parksite Slum in Mumbai, explained how she hid in her friend's first floor apartment overlooking the location of now razed homes and had clandestinely recorded forced evictions, she insisted, "if the police saw me, they would have put me in lock up, put me in prison. They would have taken my camera and not returned it" (Zulekha Sayyed, interview with author, 6 February 2013). Although in New York City, Tim Pool or Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye might have also been concerned that their interactions with police could get them in legal trouble, their capacity to request that due process of law be followed would be a much easier task than if Sayyed found herself in similar legal trouble in Mumbai.



**Image 6:** A screenshot of police carrying away a resident from Zulekha Sayyed's video, 'Scenes From Mumbai's Class War: Builders Vs. People'-  
<http://www.videovolunteers.org/scenes-from-mumbais-class-war-builders-vs-people/>

The development of Video Volunteers is an intriguing case study of an organization deliberately trying to encourage the formation of well-thought out assemblages that support human rights video practices, yet are continually challenged by a variety of constraints specific to the territories they work within. Consequently, their assemblages are fragile and Video Volunteers often reassesses their strategy in the hopes of generating sustainable video practices that support and propel the work of their community correspondents.

Video Volunteers started with community video and the voice of the people as its central objective. Non-governmental organizations often use video as a means to publicize their work or raise funds or get out the word about different issues or actions, take the incredibly well circulated KONY 2012 video or the video work of Greenpeace New Zealand.<sup>73</sup> Yet from its inception, the goal of Video Volunteers has been to get video tools into the hands of individuals so that they might be able to share stories that are meaningful to their communities and that also may work to create, impact and fuel change. As Video Volunteers co-director, Jessica Mayberry told me in January 2013, “It wasn’t video for health. It wasn’t video for education, which is how so many projects have been

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<sup>73</sup> KONY 2012 was a short documentary film released on YouTube by the charity organization, Invisible Children. It focused on the issue of child soldiers and specifically asked for the arrest of the Ugandan leader of the Lord’s Resistance Army, Joseph Kony. Unexpectedly, the documentary went viral and currently has about 100 million views on YouTube. The film can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc>. Accessed 26 October 2014. For further reading about KONY 2012 and the impact it made on the organization that produced it, Invisible Children, see - <http://www.npr.org/2014/06/14/321853244/the-kony-2012-effect-recovering-from-a-viral-sensation>. As well, Invisible Children’s KONY 2012 page can be viewed here - <http://invisiblechildren.com/kony/>. To view videos produced by Greenpeace International, see - <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/en/multimedia/videos/>. Greenpeace New Zealand specific videos can be viewed here - <http://www.greenpeace.org/new-zealand/en/>. Accessed 5 July 2014.

done. But it was really about creating local media, just giving people a voice. What would that look like?" (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013). Assemblages have histories and their adaptations respond in recognition to similar past formations, political and financial motivations, as well as technologies and territories that have influenced their shape.

. Initially, the organization began with Community Video Units (CVUs). Started in 2006, these were small regional teams of local people who would produce half hour video news magazines on different issues. Each team would go on a month long road trip, conducting screenings in the twenty-five or so communities where the news magazine had sourced and produced stories. On average, the organization saw a fifty percent turnout of villagers attending screenings and there was strong community involvement. Eventually, twelve NGOs picked up the idea of CVUs and with the support of Video Volunteers, began their own units that worked out of the offices of each independent NGO that Video Volunteers had partnered with. In 2009, Video Volunteers even expanded the CVU program into Brazil, yet that expansion was short lived.<sup>74</sup> The problem with the CVU program was that it wasn't sustainable. The screenings and travel involved was expensive and there was little possibility of revenue generation. As well, it was exhausting for each group, whose task was to constantly create next month's thirty-minute video news magazine while continuously traveling from village to village to conduct screenings.

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<sup>74</sup> It should be noted that the Brazilian video collective, Coletivo Caçamba, emerged out of the CVU training program conducted in São Paulo. Though it seems as if this collective has dissolved, some of their work can be viewed here: <http://coletivocacamba.wordpress.com/vcu-br/>. Accessed 1 March 2014.

And so in 2009, Video Volunteers scrapped that program and since then has run a new model called – India Unheard. With the goal to eventually have a network of community correspondents in each of India’s 650 or so odd districts, Video Volunteers identifies activists who are employed part time or not at all and they train them in video making and storytelling for two weeks and supply each new correspondent with a Flip Cam. The organization seeks out a particular kind of individual, not just anyone. With the help of local and regional NGOs, Video Volunteers chooses people who tend to have a background in activism and are trustworthy. It is not important that they often don’t have camera skills because Video Volunteers will end up training them anyhow. However, the organization wants people who will be motivated to contribute stories and not individuals who might disappear with their Flip Cam after their initial training, never to produce a single video report. Inevitably this sometimes happens or correspondents, after being trained and having produced one or two stories, might begin to taper off in the consistency and regularity of their reporting, though this problem of inefficient video production isn’t necessarily unique to Video Volunteers or the Indian context. Selecting and training community correspondents is one of the many complexities that Video Volunteers must negotiate as they constantly reassess their India Unheard program. In the three months of fieldwork I conducted in India, the organization was continually planning trainings throughout the country, attempting to figure out where their resources might best be utilized as they expanded their network of correspondents.

Once community correspondents have been trained, they tend to shoot one or two stories each month with each story taking a further month or two for the video to get edited, completed and published on the Web. For each story

published, community correspondents are paid on a sliding scale based on the quality of work, the type of video made and years in the organization. Furthermore, if a community correspondent follows up on an India Unheard report through the production of an ‘impact video’ in which they show that their initial video made a difference, they are paid a larger stipend for each ‘impact video’ that gets published.<sup>75</sup>



**Image 7: A screenshot from Sunita Kasera's impact video, ‘IU Impact: Untouchability Captured and Ended on Camera’ - <http://www.videovolunteers.org/iu-impact-untouchability-captured-and-ended-on-camera/>**

An ‘impact video’ is a follow up video report that documents the change that has been made from the production of a previous India Unheard report. If, for example, an initial video presented a situation of poor infrastructure, a road that hadn’t been sealed in years or a lack of a road where one might be needed, and if months later that road has been fixed or built then a community

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<sup>75</sup> In late January 2013, when I conducted my interview with Video Volunteers co-director, Jessica Mayberry, the organization had produced forty impact videos.

correspondent can produce a video report that shows the tangible positive effect of their first video. This type of change is the *impact* of an ‘impact video.’ The Video Volunteers staff aids community correspondents in their creation of these impact videos. In the above screen grab, Sunita Kasera produced an impact video from the Karauli district of Rajasthan in which she followed up on an initial video she had recorded about an ancestral practice in which members of a Dalit caste remove their sandals as they walk through an ‘upper caste’ neighborhood. Kasera reported on a change.org online petition that was launched, along with a community meeting that took place with the district collector and local police in attendance. Through the dialogue sparked by Kasera’s first video, the village decided to abolish this generations old practice. Kasera used footage from her initial report, ‘Untouchability Captured on Camera, Rajasthan,’ which as of July 2014 has more than 46,000 views on YouTube. In Kasera’s impact video, the original footage was given a vignette post-production effect and on screen titling to reinforce that certain clips were archival from the first report.<sup>76</sup> Usage of archival footage from an earlier report is often used in impact videos in order to situate the initial problem and demonstrate the positive change that occurred.

Payment is critical for both the correspondents and the organization. For correspondents, generating income is a necessary means for survival, a stipend to buy food for their families. These earnings become a motivating factor to plan, record and produce video reports. Video Volunteers chooses correspondents who are already activists from low-income backgrounds and who don’t have full time jobs. The organization believes that people who are working full-time won’t be

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<sup>76</sup> Sunita Kasera’s initial video, ‘Untouchability Captured on Camera, Rajasthan,’ can be viewed at this link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdosKk6htrQ>. Accessed 4 July 2014.

able to balance the production of video reports along with full-time work. Therefore, Video Volunteers understands that community correspondents must be paid for their work. They also know that if they cannot pay their correspondents, they won't be able to sustain as an organization. This relationship is symbiotic and therefore sustainable.

To craft India Unheard video reports, each correspondent accesses a computer, downloads their footage, burns that footage to a CD or DVD and sends the disc along with notes/storyboard via India Speed Post to Goa or to a regional Video Volunteers' office. There it is eventually edited, put on both YouTube and the India Unheard website and often screened informally at home in the community and possibly to a government official or person in a position of power. This system is not precisely low-tech, but fuses immediate digital video recording with a method of data transfer and global infrastructure that is economical and relatively quick.<sup>77</sup> Yet the Video Volunteers principal trainer, Manish Kumar explained that this process sometimes poses problems and can become tedious:

Because in rural India, the cyber café is not very easily available. So they have to go thirty to forty kilometers to burn a DVD. And in the cyber cafés, there are big risks because in the big town, one or two, three cyber cafés. So they have to wait the whole day to burn DVDs. So the burning of a DVD and using a computer, I think is the most challenging thing for CCs nowadays. (Manish Kumar, interview with author, 7 February 2013)

It should also be mentioned that viewing footage within the public realm of a cyber café could threaten the safety of community correspondents working in

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<sup>77</sup> Domestic Speed Post tariffs are relatively affordable for the Indian population. A recent search for India Post tariffs shows that using Speed Post to mail two CDs over 2000 kilometers and under 50 grams costs 35 INR and anything between 51-200 grams over 2000 kilometers costs 70 INR. The tariff to send by Speed Post goes down incrementally below 2000 kilometers. See: <http://www.indiapost.gov.in/SpeedPost.aspx> for more specific information. Accessed 1 March 2014.



conflict areas of India. Community correspondents actively work in states such as Jammu and Kashmir, where the Indian government routinely disrupts mobile data and text messaging services as well as imposes strict curfews on the population. Additionally, community correspondents are also working in such northeastern states as Manipur and Assam. All are regions where the Indian army has been given special powers to detain citizens without warrant or use force without the need to follow due process of law.<sup>78</sup> This means that community correspondents living in Indian states where certain districts have been deemed ‘disturbed areas’ must work with the utmost caution when recording in the field or reviewing footage for post-production in public places such as cyber cafés.<sup>79</sup> These types of state specific constraints can limit the potential for video making or can act as a prompt to galvanize the activism and video practice of certain individuals. These regional situations pose political and physical risks that are beyond the dangers present in the New York City experience and certainly absent in New Zealand.

Although multiple constraints are abundant for community correspondents, these limitations are not always negative. In India, the speed of

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<sup>78</sup> For more information on the use of force or unlawful detention in Kashmir see “The Apparatus: Laying bare the State’s terrifying impunity in Kashmir,” by Sanjay Kak in *The Caravan* (March 2013), here:

<http://www.caravanmagazine.in/reportage/apparatus>. Accessed March 5, 2014.

For a brief introduction on the use of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in Manipur, see “A decade of starvation for Irom Sharmila,” by Andrew Buncombe in *The Independent* (4 November 2010), here:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/a-decade-of-starvation-for-irom-sharmila-2124608.html>. Accessed 5 March 2014.

<sup>79</sup> See the “Armed Forces Special Powers Act: The Debate,” edited by Vivek Chadha for a further exploration of the implementation and controversy surrounding the act. This can be viewed here:

<http://www.idsa.in/system/files/Monograph7.pdf>. Accessed 1 March 2014.

Additionally, the wording of the Jammu & Kashmir act of 1990 can be read here: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b52a14.html>. Accessed 1 March 2014. There will be further discussion of Kashmir later in the chapter.



both mobile networks and Internet access is not conducive for online transfers of video footage, thus forcing correspondents to diligently craft a narrative for post-production. This stands in stark contrast to a number of practitioners I interviewed in New York City who were *almost encouraged to deviate from the crafting of a narrative* because they could either live stream digital video from their phones or quickly upload raw footage to the Internet with ease from their laptops.<sup>80</sup> Yet as an organization, with the goal to publish one story on the Internet each day, Video Volunteers' editing capacity is already stretched thin and soon they hope to support more regional video editors of which currently there is only one. However, these technological limitations are also incredibly frustrating. Although only a couple of the correspondents I spoke with owned a computer, the majority had to travel to a cyber café or borrow a friend's computer to transfer files and prepare their reports. As Ajeet Bahadur jokingly reflected:

Right now I need a computer. In the beginning I worked without it. I had friends...and I used other people's computers. I spoilt a lot of computers. Now people are really scared of me. Either they run away with their computer and thus I don't get to meet them; or if I get to use their computer then they sit with me while I work. (Ajeet Bahadur, interview with author, 3 March 2013)

Because of this combination of digital technology and snail mail, most stories take at least a month and a half, often longer, to shoot, send, edit and publish to the Web. Directly, the various infrastructure and economic limitations on the possibility space of the assemblage in which a correspondent creates a video report often restricts the speed of what Manuel DeLanda might describe as *capacities to connect*. In contrast, Tim Pool's practice almost basks in the possibility space that is New York City and thrives upon the cohesion of that

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<sup>80</sup> See Chapter 4 and the case study of the live streaming practice of Tim Pool.

potential. Pool doesn't wonder *how* he is going to get his next smartphone; he ponders *which* smartphone he's going to get next. All of the community correspondents I interviewed came from extremely difficult backgrounds and the fifteen hundred to two thousand rupees they make per India Unheard video might be the majority of their income for the month.

As well, the organization itself sometimes struggles to get equipment for their correspondents. The Flip HD video cameras, for example, are a vital tool and crucial to the NGO's work. They play a major role in the evolving media practices of Video Volunteers and their affordability allows for each correspondent to be given a camera. Yet in April 2011, Cisco, the technology company who owned the Flip HD line of camcorders decided to discontinue the product. As Jessica Mayberry, the Video Volunteers co-director told me:

And then it failed because technology, driven by western ideas of tech, that being the primary market decided that well nobody needs a hundred dollar video camera when you've got it on your phone without realizing that not every, you know, yes in America everybody is going to have a fancy five hundred dollar cell phone, but that's not going to be the case in India. (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 3 March 2013)

In respect to Video Volunteers, it is a crucial point out that lower tech (not low tech, but certainly a very different relationship to the use of technology in India in comparison to the United States) was what was needed to create a sustainable practice. Cisco had recognized that video recording capability was becoming standard in mobile devices and in smartphones associated with editing apps. Thus the company realized the Flip Cam was redundant and decided they wanted to refocus on networking technologies, which was their area of expertise. With the death of the Flip camera, it was possible that the assemblage Video Volunteers had helped to craft might fade away. Yet the organization took a

chance, directly reached out to Cisco and secured hundreds of Flip cameras that had been manufactured but weren't going to go to sale because of the discontinuation of the product. The predicament was fragile and tenuous and needed deliberate reinforcing and careful management in order to proceed and thrive. If the Flip video camera, a crucial component of the assemblage evaporated, the ways in which Video Volunteers integrated digital video camera technology into the India Unheard model would be forced to change. This outreach effort by Video Volunteers allowed for India Unheard not only to sustain but also to grow.

### **6.3 - Technology & Assemblage, Infrastructure & Citizen: Affordable Video Tools & Disruptive Technologies**

As often is the case with global media histories, video technologies in India have a rich and complex history. Through much of the world, the introduction of affordable video tools has disrupted traditional methods of filmmaking and film distribution. These technological interruptions have summoned filmmakers to experiment with and establish new assemblages. To understand the current adaptation methods of the mobile digital video tools that are examined in this chapter, it is important to reflect upon the past in order to situate and understand how emerging video technologies have played roles in the assemblage of new forms of video, film and documentary practices.

Lightweight and mobile video equipment, particularly Video Home System (VHS) technologies and Video Cassette Recorders (VCRs), have presented new possibilities for affordable video making and cheaper methods of

video distribution.<sup>81</sup> Although this earlier technology did not come with the kind of infrastructural support currently associated with digital video, the slow yet steady integration of accessible equipment offered new prospects for visual experimentation. These new potentials produced capacities for connection in which forming assemblages emerged as creative processes. These assembling and well-cultivated relationships galvanized both professional and amateur media makers. As Patricia Zimmermann (1995, p. 149) writes:

This inquiry into the power relations imbricated in the accessibility of inexpensive movie technology is not confined to historical discourse, primary evidence, and commercial films. The struggle between professionalism as a region of technical control, rationality, and expertise, and amateurism as a territory of freedom, spontaneity, and individualism disperses into many sites of media production: communication education, cable television, the question of access for independent filmmakers to the Public Broadcasting Service and the networks, and home video.

Although these primarily domestic video technologies were deliberately marginalized from the spheres of ‘professional’ filmmaking, these video tools could not be boxed in nor delineated to sit within their intended domains. The manifestation of the influence of these video technologies generated further assemblages that begot additional assemblages. Their introduction did offer a linear scope of relationships through the assembling of multiple relationships on various planes. As Manuel DeLanda (2006, p. 45) explains:

[...] these specialized assemblages are capable of operating at *multiple spatial scales simultaneously*: genes are active within cells, govern the functioning of organs, influence the behaviour of entire organisms, and obstacles to their flow define the reproductive isolation of a species; language shapes the most intimate beliefs of persons, the public content of

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<sup>81</sup> In Chapter 2, we saw that the lightweight cameras that emerged around the time of the birth of direct cinema presented new potentials for film practices that took a number of years to evolve.

conversations, the oral traditions of small communities, and the written constitutions of large organizations.

Here, DeLanda notes that specific assemblages have the ability to impact numerous other assemblages working on a variety of different planes. Subsequently, multiple assemblages emerged and impacted other assemblages through the proliferation of these portable tools. Clandestine cinema halls were born and communities of (male) viewership sprouted throughout India as nascent screening spaces slowly emerged and new businesses opened. These and other assemblages built upon one another. As we will see, the introduction of VHS cameras and VCRs gradually began to be adapted in a variety of fields of documentary video production within both ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’ realms. This progressive integration of these affordable tools can be seen across continents, but in this chapter we will focus on their introduction within the Indian context. In India, the initial disruptive effect was focused on distribution and then later in the evolution of new tools of video production. Throughout the country, the language of video slowly expanded and offered new possibilities for storytelling for a variety of people and communities. The potentiality of these tools was extended as VHS technologies evolved into even more mobile and networked digital video tools.

In India until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the general population’s relationship to documentary film tended to be through the Films Division of the Government of India, which was a part of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. As Giulia Battaglia (2014, p. 73) writes, ‘Until the 1980s, the Films Division functioned as an important state organ in film production and up to 1994 it screened its own films compulsorily in cinema halls before the main feature film.’ Because film and video technology was unaffordable for the vast majority of the

population, most of the Indian population was exposed to the documentary genre within the context of a cinema hall. Documentaries produced by the Films Division attempted to reach a wide swath of the Indian population and subsequently might have had difficulty making connections to its intended general audience. Quoting a founding member of the Centre for Development and Instructional Technology (CENDIT) from an article by Anuja Jain in *The Velvet Light Trap*, Battaglia (2014, p. 78) shares, ‘We found that most of the Film Division films were totally irrelevant. [...] They tried to communicate to everybody, and in the process didn’t manage to communicate to anybody.’ India’s strict censorship board and the high cost of public screenings dissuaded independent documentary filmmakers (of which there were few) to commence the process to get public screenings approved. As Battaglia (2014, p. 73) explains, ‘Documentaries made in the pre-video era either needed to be modified in relation to suggestions from the Board of Censors, or were never released, or circulated through illegal private screenings.’ Nevertheless, the high expense of a 16mm projector made underground screenings possible for only those who could afford the cost of such an expensive technology of the time.

In the early 1980s, Video Cassette Recorders (VCRs) began to flood the Indian market and the introduction of this technology, along with more affordable and accessible color television sets, offered a platform for low cost distribution of independent and documentary films. Critically, these film and video works could easily bypass the censor board through clandestine or private screenings. This technology provided a method of screening that was a pre-cursor to the low-tech version that Video Volunteers and Digital Green sometimes employ. Although most Indian families could not independently afford to purchase the combination

of a television and VCR, entrepreneurs in cities and towns throughout India set up televisions and VCRs in makeshift urban and rural public spaces in order to charge a small entrance fee so that the local Indian public would have an affordable place to watch films, albeit now on video cassette. The rise of VHS and VCR technology offered the possibility for new ad-hoc networks of distribution to emerge. Reinforcing the often-embraced rhetoric of new democratic spaces, Battaglia (2014, p. 73) argues that, ‘video technology opened up possibilities for independent individuals to create different media practices, and provided spaces for alternative production and distribution.’ Although VCR technology was still too expensive for the vast majority of the population, these technologies produced both pop-up and established spaces where films could be viewed at an affordable price.<sup>82</sup> Small stores with VHS rentals also began to emerge as new business ventures throughout rural and urban India. These storefronts would stock old and new Bollywood and Hollywood film titles on VHS cassettes. They would often have VCR units for rental as well. Individuals or aspiring entrepreneurs could rent both VHS cassettes and VCRs for specific time periods.

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<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that these types of informal cinema halls are still very much alive and thriving, especially in geographic locations where the ticket price to see a film might be disproportionately expensive for a certain sector of the population. A March 2013 article in *Time Out New Delhi* discussed small pop-up cinema halls in the Delhi suburb of Gurgaon. There, migrant construction workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh who are helping to build malls and multiplex cinemas, yet cannot afford a ticket to see a film in one the many multiplexes that they are building attend film screenings at these small pop-up cinemas. The entrepreneurs who run cinema spaces for migrant workers screen VHS cassettes and VCDs for ten rupees, a fraction of the price for a ticket at a PVR multiplex cinema, which can exceed 300 rupees. See ‘Cheap Seats: Time Out documents the makeshift movie halls around Gurgaon,’ by Uday Bhatia (29 March 2013) found here, <http://www.timeoutdelhi.net/around-town/features/cheap-seats>. Accessed 3 March 2014.

#### 6.4 - From Mainstream to NGOs: VHS & VCR to Digital Video Technologies

In the 1980s and 1990s, the copying and distribution of feature films through the use of VHS technology accelerated in India and many other areas around the world. In Nigeria, for example, relatively cheap VHS camcorders helped to birth the Nigerian national cinema known as Nollywood and offered a means for these low budget feature films to be distributed throughout the country via VHS cassettes and VCRs.<sup>83</sup> Additionally in Romania in the 1980s, the illegal distribution and unsanctioned screenings of Hollywood films, copied and dubbed onto VHS cassettes offered citizens the ability to see films that would otherwise not reach the communist country.<sup>84</sup> Not only was the proliferation of VHS and the VCR happening in India, but it was also occurring in a number of other global settings.

In India, along with VCR and VHS technology, VHS medium cameras began to enter into the public sphere around the same time, the early to mid-1980s. These VHS cameras, along with the creative capacities of some practitioners catalyzed new video practices, specifically the development of the marriage video. The prominence of a marriage videographer became an increasingly widespread presence in middle class and even lower class weddings

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<sup>83</sup> For a more comprehensive exploration of the development of Nollywood and the role of VHS/VCR technology, see Charles Novia, *Nollywood Till November: Memoirs of a Nollywood Insider*. (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2012). Also, Timothy Havens, *Black Television Travels: African American Media around the Globe*. (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 161. And Stevina U. Evuleocha, 'Nollywood and the home video revolution: implications for marketing videofilm in Africa,' *International Journal of Emerging Markets Vol 3, No 4 (2008)*, DOI: 10.1108/17468800810906101.

<sup>84</sup> See Ilinca Calugareanu, "VHS vs. Communism," *The New York Times*, 17 February 2014, available here: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/18/opinion/vhs-vs-communism.html>. Accessed 17 March 2014.



throughout the late 1980s and into the 1990s and 2000s. As Battaglia (2014, p. 75) maintains:

[...] the mobile video image could not only allow access to a depository-memory of past events but also new narratives of the same events. Accordingly marriage-video soon became part of the ritual of Indian marriage, and watching this video with friends became a new practice amongst the middle classes.

Although VHS camera technology became a mainstay of the documentation of Indian weddings during this time period, further documentary specific practices that integrated these technologies were rare throughout the country. Marriage videographers, professionals in their field with camera and editing training, tended to stay within the genre of marriage videos.

In the 1980s, as VCRs began to penetrate the Indian market, VHS camera technology was still unaffordable to a vast majority of the Indian population. Even though videographers might be available to hire for a wedding ceremony, both rural and urban populations still had to contend with an unreliable power grid that might require a backup generator in order to complete a video screening or possibly even a VHS wedding shoot. Limitations on a regular supply of energy meant that blackouts were commonplace and indeed expected. But even more so, the fact that VHS cameras could only be obtained by a certain segment of the population did not allow for a similar infiltration of VHS camera technology that was seen at the same time in the United States. Many of these limitations remain present in India. Blackouts are still commonplace in urban areas of the country and electricity is limited in rural settings. Furthermore, smartphone cameras or cheap digital video cameras are still quite expensive and beyond the reach of the majority of the Indian population.

In contrast to India, VHS cameras were flourishing in the United States throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. In the United States, these VHS cameras were relatively affordable to middle class families. Although videotaping a wedding was not as much of a cultural norm as it was in India, a family in the United States could have easily documented themselves in an amateur fashion with a VHS camcorder they owned. This was due to the fact that VHS video technology was monumentally more affordable to a middle class American family in comparison to that of a middle class Indian family. However, amateur video camera technologies were continually estranged from the possibility of becoming part of professional practices. As Patricia Zimmermann (1995, p. 121) explains, ‘Technology masqueraded as a route to professionalism and creative labor, yet it only marginalized amateur filmmaking as an innocuous, frivolous hobby.’ Professional practices were (and still are) fearful of the potential for creative amateur practices buttressed by affordable video tools to deterritorialize professional practices. As we saw in chapter 4, traditional journalism practices find themselves challenged by the work of individuals like Tim Pool. Globally, Internet file sharing, legal and illegal streaming services and in India, pop-up cinema halls have deterritorialized reliable distribution models that mainstream cinema has relied on for decades.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, a number of non-governmental organizations in India began to experiment with VCR and VHS technologies in order to embrace the affordability and accessibility of these technologies to their advantage. Organizations such as the Centre for Development and Instructional Technology (CENDIT) in New Delhi, as well as Drishti Media in Ahmedabad (Gujarat), began experimenting with VHS cameras in order to produce their own

films that confronted social justice issues. Utilizing VCRs, these films could be screened in local communities and beyond both official cinema halls and the India Censor Board.

Stalin K, the co-director of Video Volunteers, was one of the creators of Drishti, which got its start in 1991. His long-term engagement with video practices demonstrates the commitment needed to comprehend the complexities continually emerging, assembling and reassembling. Drishti focused on four media skills – video, radio, theatre and print. When Drishti launched, there was still a lot of resistance to VHS, which was seen as an inferior form of recording. Yet different attitudes evolved in respect to these emerging video technologies. Drishti believed that de-stigmatizing the VHS video camera as a tool was crucial to integrating it into a participatory video advocacy practice. As Stalin explained in an interview I conducted with him in January 2013:

So we demystified the whole making process. We demystified the technology. A lot of peers told us, you cannot show it in VHS. This is like, you know, bad quality. Because at that time broadcast quality was the “in” thing to do. And we said, No, why? Why would poor people’s issues be left out just because the people working with those people cannot afford broadcast quality, that’s an asinine way of keeping issues out of media content. So we worked on VHS and therefore the costs were very, very low. And we started working with that. So that was the technology front. (Stalin K., interview with author, 24 January 2013)

As Stalin asserts, VHS was seen as a lower class and thus inferior medium. Yet Battaglia argues that the ways in which CENDIT and other NGOs initiated video workshops and trainings throughout the country sparked and thus birthed new forms of film practices. Drishti and CENDIT, working for and with lower class populations, tended to ignore the general feelings of filmmakers and audiences that might have perpetuated and reinforced the belief that an ‘amateur’ textuality was ingrained in some of these more affordable video mediums. The

point for these organizations was to get video tools in the hands of as many people as possible. Battaglia (2014, p. 78) writes, ‘CENDIT transformed documentary filmmaking into “small media” practice, initiating a new tradition of Indian filmmaking.’ Battaglia argues that films such as *Because of Our Rights* (1989), direct by Gargi Sen, Ranjan De and Sujit Ghosh, evolved from the training these filmmakers received from CENDIT.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the fact that a certain number of NGOs experimented with new video technologies and modes of documentary storytelling, VHS cameras were still unaffordable to most. As Stalin explained, “Because at that time even the VHS quality of video was still far beyond the direct access of communities because it was still expensive.” (Stalin K., interview with author, 24 January 2013) VHS technologies were merely trickling into the workflow of both NGOs and professional documentary makers. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, established Indian documentary filmmakers tended to continue to use more traditional tools of filmmaking such as 16mm cameras, only utilizing VHS for local distribution. Engaging with an interview that Thomas Waugh conducted with the documentary filmmaker, Anand Patwardhan in Bombay in early 1988, Battaglia (2014, p. 84) explains the devaluation of VHS technology in terms of quality within the sphere of established Indian documentary makers:

With the arrival of video technology, Patwardhan argues that NGOs started to get video recorders and projectors, or to connect the VCR to television sets, by then available across the country. Thanks to the widespread availability of television and video recorders, documentary filmmakers in India started to have a platform to screen their films beyond state control. Since 16 mm projectors were rare amongst non-state

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<sup>85</sup> For further information on *Because of Our Rights* (1989), see the Magic Lantern site - <http://magiclanternmovies.in/film/because-our-rights>. Accessed 5 July 2014.

organizations the value of the censors' certificate for screening a film in public was not comparable to the potential of video technology, which could reach audiences privately. Despite this, filmmakers did not start making films in video immediately. They rather treated it as a "residual medium," useful for circulation but not yet for production. [...] By using video technology only for distribution, documentary films could on the one hand travel through international festival circuits. On the other, they could circulate locally through NGO networks and internationally through university networks and foreign television channels.

The experimentations in the distribution of films via VHS and VCR technologies parallel similar transitions and even suggest simultaneous questions that link back to the emergence of 'amateur' video technologies in other areas of the world. The history of amateur film, as Zimmermann (1995, p. 145) writes, is 'a history that reflects structural changes in the relationships among discourses on technology, aesthetics, social uses, and political ends.' Conflicts emerged as these technologies began to flourish; presenting the potential for empowerment while at the same time bisecting questions of ethics, distribution, copyright, social structures and much more. In her preface Zimmermann (1995, p. ix) states, 'Amateur film occupied one of the central contradictions of communications in the twentieth century: on the one hand, domination and consumption; on the other, resistance and hope.' Themes that surface from the emergence of affordable video technologies helped to establish the possibility space in which Video Volunteers operates. It is important to understand the evolution of affordable video cameras and video technology within India in the years leading up to the beginnings of Video Volunteers as this historical groundwork provides a prior framework from which the organization emerged. The lineage between the accessibility of these tools for distribution shows that organizations and practitioners are constantly adapting their creative practices to these technologies, while re-working their methods of distribution.

## **6.5 - The Challenges of Video Volunteers: Local & Global Comparisons**

The relationship that Video Volunteers has had to the video cameras they have been able to obtain for their projects offers insight into the ways in which the organization adapted their video programs to the video tools they could afford. Around 2003, when Video Volunteers was young, they worked in partnership with NGOs already in existence, integrating their programming into the structures of already established organizations. At that point, Video Volunteers would convey to NGOs that a camera's cost was around 1000 U.S. dollars. This forced Video Volunteers to envision video projects that were participatory in nature. As a group, individuals would participate in the creation of a film, rather than being given cameras to make a film themselves. Then in 2006, Video Volunteers was able to access Panasonic GS-180 cameras, which cost at the time, approximately 600 U.S. Dollars. With these cameras, Jessica Mayberry explained, "We could have one camera per two or three people. Which allows people to work pretty much independently, as opposed to everybody's got to use one camera" (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013). Yet the price of cameras continued to be a key constraint to the sustainability of the organization. In 2007-2008, Video Volunteers had trouble obtaining these cameras, as they seemed to evaporate from the market. At the same time that Video Volunteers recognized the value of these cameras, the companies that manufactured them didn't seem to believe they were worth keeping on the market. As Mayberry theorized:

That six hundred dollar, three-chip camera disappeared from all the companies because they realized that TV stations in the developing world and presumably other places were using them as professional cameras. They were so good that there was no need to buy the five thousand dollar version. So they pulled the cheap ones. So that was a huge problem for us for a few years. We had projects that we actually couldn't do because we couldn't get cameras that had audio inputs, for community screenings you

need good audio. (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013)

Then in 2010, a precursor to the Flip Cam was launched and allowed Video Volunteers to begin to afford video cameras that provided the tools they needed for approximately 100 U.S. dollars each. This allowed the organization to re-work their existing methodology. As Mayberry recalled, “all of a sudden we could start a model that wasn’t a group of six people working with two or three cameras or a group of eight people working with two or three cameras. It could be one camera per person because camera investment was a hundred dollars” (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013). This allowed more flexibility in catering to localized needs. It reduced the problem of access to technology itself. Although it did not eliminate it, as Video Volunteers continues to struggle with other dilemmas, such as editing bottlenecks that constrain the speed of correspondents’ output. The affordability of Flip Cams presented Video Volunteers with an opportunity to place one video camera in the hands of each citizen selected to be a community correspondent.<sup>86</sup> This was a dramatic change from their previous methods of working in small group settings. Stalin sees this affordability as a global phenomenon that is multiplying throughout the world as video cameras become cheaper and cheaper. Since 2013, similar issues of

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<sup>86</sup> It should be noted that WITNESS also supported the use of Flip Cams for a number of years before Cisco stopped manufacturing them. ‘The Flip and Kodak Zi8 – A Good-bye to Our Favorite Pocket Camcorders,’ on the WITNESS blog has an in-depth discussion of their support for this technology, see - <http://blog.witness.org/2011/04/the-flip-and-kodak-zi8-a-good-bye/>. At one point WITNESS was even offering specially designed Limited Edition WITNESS Flip Cams available for fundraising through their website. Though discontinued some time back, the description of these cameras can still be read at the bottom of this webpage, see - [http://org.salsalabs.com/o/600/t/9918/content.jsp?content\\_KEY=6280](http://org.salsalabs.com/o/600/t/9918/content.jsp?content_KEY=6280). Both pages accessed 18 March 2014.

accessibility and affordability have played out in multiple areas of the world. Reflecting upon the evolution of affordable video cameras since 2006, Stalin places robust faith in the proliferation of affordable digital video tools:

So 2005-2006, those years were very interesting because costs did come down. In 2010, costs really nosedived. So an Arab Spring could not have happened in the sense, in the sense that we know it today, of that scale, of the people, you know, new people joining after seeing people on the street, could not have happened. In spite of YouTube and Facebook being there, could not have happened if the device that records that image and puts it on was absent or inaccessible. So it's a good culmination of the device being in the hand and accessible in every form as a video camera, however crappy the quality may be, who cares, and the platform to share it. (Stalin K., interview with author, 24 January 2013)

Although this affordability has put many cameras in the hands of populations, video *documentation* has multiplied not *documentary narratives*. No matter how much the affordability of digital video cameras allowed Video Volunteers to re-envision their work, or for that matter the ways in which greater global populations document the world around them, including during times of revolution and unrest, a plethora of accessibility issues remain within the India context and present possible impediments for digital video practices like those of Video Volunteers. Although community correspondents can navigate issues such as their lack of computer ownership by traveling to a cyber café or borrowing a friend's computer, identifying a power source where they can recharge batteries for their Flip Cam can still be difficult. As Video Volunteers' principal trainer, Manish Kumar, expounded, "Electricity is a big problem in the rural areas, because all the equipment works on electricity and the chargeable batteries. And most of the rural or tribal areas have no electricity for weeks, so they have a challenge to recharge the batteries" (Manish Kumar, interview with author, 7 February 2013).



Additionally, many of the community correspondents lack either an email address or if they have one, rarely check their email account. This becomes problematic during the development of a story. After a Video Volunteers training, community correspondents return home and are expected to be in contact with their mentor (usually a Video Volunteers staff member in the Goa office or a well-established, more senior community correspondent). The intention is that this dialogue will continue for months and years after these twelve-day trainings so that correspondents are offered regular support in their development of narratives and stories. In India, with less than twenty percent of the population having regular access to the Internet, maintaining these mentorship roles becomes draining and time-consuming, yet essential in order to support and motivate community correspondents through not only their video making, but also their personal struggles, which often arise and impede their documentary practice. Video Volunteers recognizes that human-to-human connections are a key part to the building of human capital and essential to the assemblage. Subsequently, the organization relies on impromptu or irregular, but necessary correspondence with community correspondents. As Jessica Mayberry explained:

Communication is a challenge. How do you talk to a hundred people in a hundred different places? And you don't have, you can't put them on an email group. They don't have email access. Management is very difficult. We have this mentor, you know, we manage through mentors, where each, most staff people are given a small group of community correspondents that they are supposed to have weekly calls and it's very, very, very tough, tough work. You know they are, if you could hear some of the conversations in Hindi that they are having every day, it's like, they are putting out major fires related to people's safety, related to how they are going to help villages get water, related to what are they going to say to the district collector, related to sorting out personal issues. (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013)

Video Volunteers has roughly outlined criteria for the recruitment of community correspondents. The challenges that Video Volunteers as an organization and the community correspondents as individual citizen journalists encounter in India can be profoundly different than the problems that facilitators and nascent media makers in the United States or New Zealand may confront. Foremost, these individuals come from lower economic backgrounds. Correspondents are often from families that are classified by the government as Below Poverty Line (BPL). Elaborating on recruitment of community correspondents, Mayberry explained that they should, “be associated with some kind of interesting social work, you know, have some history of volunteerism. They should not be full time, you know, that for us is a reason people don’t continue. I mean they shouldn’t be full time in an organization” (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013).

For many of the community correspondents I spoke with, producing stories for Video Volunteers was their main or only source of income. Sitting down with Ajeet Bahadur in Lucknow, I wondered if he had a camera but was not getting paid for making videos, would he still have the impetus to craft stories for Video Volunteers. Bahadur explained that multiple motivations exist as to why he works with the organization:

Then I would have been associated with Video Volunteers in a different way. I would have done something else for money. Money is needed. Right now when I am making the video, I get paid too. One, that is very important. And our voice is heard. Both are getting accomplished. Otherwise, what would have happened is that my attention would have been diverted. First, I wouldn’t have made the video. I would have first arranged for other things. Then the rest of the time left, I would have made the video; otherwise I wouldn’t have made the video. Minimum requirement of wheat, pulses, rice is needed. Going on with these, living with these essentials is necessary to survive. (Ajeet Bahadur, interview with author, 3 March 2013)

Community correspondents are engaged with their practice for political purposes and in response to important local problems, but other factors also influence why they produce video reports for the organization. In New York City, regular citizens supported Tim Pool and at times, this support even included food to sustain him as he continued to live stream. Yet Pool's situation was drastically different than that of Ajeet Bahadur, who lives with his family in the northern Indian city of Allahabad. As a community correspondent, Bahadur needs to feed and support his family. If he is not paid by Video Volunteers for his videos, providing for his family becomes exceedingly difficult and life becomes an act of survival. In that situation, what time is there for video creation? Different pressures exist in these assemblages due to the territory of the possibility space. The stakes are much higher in India and Video Volunteers often finds itself in situations where it needs to address external issues that are affecting their community correspondents. The practitioners I interviewed in New York City weren't dealing with situations in which they struggled day-to-day in order to feed their families.

The lack of representation of low-economic classes in India through mainstream media as well as on the Internet, along with a yearning to empower these communities by training citizens in the production of journalistic narratives via the use of affordable digital video tools are additional factors that drive the work of Video Volunteers. The Internet presents another tricky platform of which Video Volunteers attempts to form assemblages within possibility spaces that have yet to embrace an overwhelming amount of local language content. The first day I arrived at Video Volunteers, Jessica Mayberry was in the middle of a long conversation with Google, who had contacted the NGO in the hopes of using the

skills of community correspondents in order to produce ‘How-to’ videos in local and regional languages of India. As Mayberry explained:

So Google said, yeah, there is not content on YouTube in local languages. It is not easy for people to find what they need. There are just movies. So that, even that process of getting that, building that archive that’s on the Internet, is important. You know, is sort of a space to be occupied. (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013)

The majority of Video Volunteers’ videos are seen by a small number of people – sometimes generating thirty, fifty, one hundred views. The expectations of the organization’s relationship to the network are quite different from those of the practitioners examined in New York City. No matter the view count, Video Volunteers believes uploading videos to YouTube is a political act. The Internet is primarily an English medium platform. When one presents Google with the name of a small village in New York State or in the Waikato region of New Zealand, a vast number of websites will appear (personal blogs, maps, local newspapers, travel guides, YouTube videos and much more). Yet when a small village in a state of India is searched on Google, with the name of the place phonetically spelled out in English, few if any results are returned. This is problematic for many reasons, specifically because a lack of content precludes research of a place or a community or a language or a culture. Eventually, Video Volunteers decided that they did not want to collaborate in Google’s yearning to create ‘How-to’ videos. However, producing and publishing Video Volunteers’ local content is instrumental to assembling not only nascent forms of documentary media but also new forms of digital knowledge about communities and cultures.

Stalin K. believes that publishing YouTube videos is essential for history. In India, the politics of Internet participation are very different than they might be

in the United States. The potential for communities, languages and cultures to recede into the digital background are plentiful. In New Zealand, Greenpeace subscribes to these ideals (albeit in respect to environmental issues). Greenpeace NZ believes that their meaningful witnessing is a localized political act with global repercussions. Stalin sees uploading these videos as a way of offering historical documents, personal narratives and documentation of citizens and communities that would otherwise be powerless to tell their story. Adamant, he explained:

Now talking about marginalized communities and communities on the fringes, whose voices to me are the more crucial than the voices in the center, because they are already there in the center. It is the mere occupation of that digital space that is a political act – irrespective of the quality and the content of it. You know, it’s like old school putting a flag. This space is mine. And we all understand the immense power of planting your flag in a certain territory and marking it ours and saying, “Do Not Enter, this is my space.” Internet, if you see the evolution of Internet and the terminologies around Internet, there are a lot of people who use the word real estate to Internet space, to cloud space. It’s called real estate, right. What is the claim of that real estate on the underprivileged people? They cannot state that claim because they are not remotely, physically present to state that claim. Because they are on the other side of the digital divide. (Stalin K., interview with author, 24 January 2013)

Stalin and Video Volunteers understand the terms and issues used to debate access to technology. The relationship between communities and the Internet that Stalin discusses is drastically different in India than in the United States or New Zealand. Video Volunteers is in a situation where they are dealing with an absence of diverse Indian voices on the World Wide Web; whereas New York City’s representation on the Web offers an almost overabundance of voices that eventually might need to be filtered in order to identify who and what might provide genuine narratives. Generally, the relationships that community

correspondents have with the Internet are radically divergent than connections that an average American or New Zealander might have.

Stalin presented me with an analogy. He told me that he often likes to dream one hundred or two hundred years down the line. What would an archaeologist stumble upon or how would this archaeologist make sense of our society? If this archaeologist searched the Internet for our histories, what would he or she find? Without a digital presence of disadvantaged communities on the Web, how do they exist in an exceedingly digital world? Where are they? Where is their voice? Where is their point of view? Expanding, Stalin said:

So for example, what happens is, if you want to say, “displacement, banned, India.” I need our videos to show up, for a researcher, for a writer, for somebody who is traveling to India, for anyone. And say okay, you’ve heard the government side of it, you have heard the World Bank side of it, you have heard the funder’s side of it, you have heard the development side of it, here is the community side of it as well. It’s all going to feed into knowledge creation, which is all nice, you know. Let a thousand opinions form your knowledge, not one. So that’s what I mean by occupying that space. (Stalin K., interview with author, 24 January 2013)

Stalin’s faith in the openness and democratic nature of the network is important. Although algorithms have the ability to control the pathway of our online searches, inhabiting an online space with video reports from communities in India that seldom have an ability to self-publish narratives on the Internet provides the potential for empowerment and distribution of knowledge through the surfacing of local issues. Even though many of Video Volunteers’ stories are narrowcast to local government officials in the hopes of producing change to the situation that the video exposes, broadcasting these videos on YouTube signifies that these communities, individuals and problems exist. Even if only ten or twenty people view a video, merely the act of publishing online matters. Of

course, the Internet is difficult to predict and some of the most viewed videos have surfaced and been seen because of social media. As Mayberry mused:

Sometimes our videos will get picked up by Rediff and they'll get, those are the ones that have gotten a hundred thousand views. Like because just so many people watch. And it's, Rediff is mostly porn. So the screen grabs of our videos on Rediff are hilarious. There is like literally three naked women and then, one of our stories about like untouchability or something. And all the staff is like we shouldn't do this and I'm like no, it's important storytelling. (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013)

Difficulties of being able to make a message heard within a global online marketplace of ideas and content persist. In spite of the fact that Mayberry is minimally concerned that Video Volunteers' uploads can appear beside content that in no way relates to the issues their correspondents' examine, Video Volunteers is conscious that their work could be easily recontextualized or misunderstood via placement beside pornography or through uninformed reinterpretation of the situation. This concern is valid. As Mayberry explained, even the Video Volunteers' staff was apprehensive and unclear as to the relationship between their own videos and others that appeared on the same Web page. It is a double-edged sword. In one sense, this is the nature of the Internet and in another sense these dilemmas present never-ending ethical questions to both the creators and facilitators of citizen video content. The organization's concerns over a proper and appropriate frame for meaning echo those of WITNESS (see chapter 4).

Publishing citizen produced video content to the web provides a significant validity of existence that perhaps media makers in places such as New York City or Auckland might take for granted. Jigar Mehta, the co-creator of *18 Days in Egypt*, expressed a concern that if the photographs and videos from the

initial uprising in Tahrir Square were not collected, collated and framed within a documentary narrative, then the framing of the documents from that time period might disappear or the images themselves might eventually evaporate from people's cell phones and hard drives. History could be forgotten. Parallel to Mehta's idea is the political act that Stalin discussed, the idea of occupying YouTube, which translates into the equally important role of being present on the Internet as a media maker, as an artist, as a creator, as a person, as a community, as a culture. There is a pride in having one's work published, shared, seen and heard. Zulekha Sayyed, the community correspondent from the Vikrohli Parksite Slum expressed this sentiment very clearly in our interview. For her, publishing on YouTube, being a part of Video Volunteers, identifying as a community correspondent and a citizen journalist provided an immense source of satisfaction.

As she told me:

After I joined Video Volunteers, one thing is, I am really feeling very good when I am searching in Google my name, my whole history is coming, so I am really getting very happy. I am to all my friends, you see, my name is coming, your name is not coming! (Zulekha Sayyed, interview with author, 6 February 2013)

There are a number of dimensions of empowerment that emerge in the work of Video Volunteers. There is the camera as a means of empowerment. Community correspondents see it as a weapon, as a pen, as a tool, as a protector, as a way to tell their story. Using the camera is also *personally* empowering for people like Sayyed. They are empowered by their work in the field, which is further reinforced by the exposure their work receives on the Internet and at times in the mainstream media as well. Furthermore, community correspondents are also politically empowered when change actually happens in response to the publication and narrow casting of their stories. The camera as a weapon, as a



tool, as a protector in a sense, authorizes them to pursue angles to stories that they might be hesitant about without a camera. The camera provides a level of visibility that offers a layer of protection against a potential backlash for their politicized reporting. Discussing a video report in which she investigated the laundry system of a local hospital, the Goa based correspondent Sulochna Pednekar explained that she didn't wait for official permission to pursue the story.



**Image 8: A still from Sulochna Pednekar's video, 'Going to the Hospital? Carry Your Own Linen' - <http://www.videovolunteers.org/going-to-the-hospital-carry-your-own-linen/>**

She believed that the camera emancipated her from feeling as if she needed to wait for authorization from hospital authorities. In fact, Pednekar convinced a hospital employee who worked in the laundry department to record the piles of unclean bed sheets and hospital gowns that had been piling up for months, forcing relatives to bring bed sheets and clothes from their own homes for their loved ones. Although the employee that Pednekar persuaded to use her camera and record was fearful she would suffer consequences if caught, the size of the Flip

cam and Pednekar's reassuring instruction prevailed and footage of mounds of soiled linens was captured for her video report. As Pednekar told me:

No, I will not wait but actually I will do the recording. I did not mind going inside, nobody could stop me. It was actually like a sting operation I felt, because this stuff there, I crossed my limits of the... Means we are supposed to seek permission before entering those premises. But it was like I got a free entry that day. So I did not wait for another chance to come. I said let me finish my job of shooting it, tomorrow what happens let's see. (Sulochna Pednekar, interview with author, 25 January 2013)

This type of empowerment is approached on a very different plane than the ways in which mobile video cameras might empower a video practitioner in New York City or New Zealand. For Video Volunteers, producing video reports is a way to speak back to power and present visible evidence. Power structures in India are often monumentally different than they are in the United States or New Zealand. The ability for a member of a minority community in India, whether that includes caste position, religious affiliation or economic status, to confront figures of authority or state institutions can be problematic and intimidating. Working for Video Volunteers helps to bridge that seemingly insurmountable gap. It opens a new space for possibilities of meaningful action. Discussing the respect that community correspondent, Sunita Casera, has gained over her years of experience, principal trainer, Manish Kumar, explained:

She's from Rajasthan, Karoli. But now she has grown as a journalist. She is now the president in her district, for women, being a journalist. She has two press cards from that area, government press cards. Now she has a good hold in the administration. When something happens the district collector calls her to come and cover this story. So she knows how the media power can work. So she learned those things. So she's not making some visually great videos, but she's working very hard, she produced more, the most impact videos. (Manish Kumar, interview with author, 7 February 2013)

The complexities present in a democracy like India are intricate and dynamic. Certainly, these sorts of complexities and contradictions can be found in democracies like the United States and New Zealand, yet in India the stifling constraints of established power structures can be detrimental to instigating change or empowerment. Examples of how these relationships play out can be seen in the empowerment that being a community correspondent might license to those who have been working for the organization for quite some time. As Shankarlal, a community correspondent from Chilla village in the Lalitpur district of Uttar Pradesh explained:

Before joining Video Volunteers, everyone supported my work. But from the time I have gotten the Video Volunteers ID card, it has garnered some influence. People know me, otherwise people in offices used to ask various questions. Like, who are you? Where have you come from? Stand on the side. Now our ID card is a type of weapon that Video Volunteers has given us. So when we show them the ID card, they come under pressure, "Oh, he is a community correspondent." Like this, they listen to what we are saying. Earlier, when we went to the offices, they never used to listen to us. From the time we have joined Video Volunteers, we are getting support from the government offices. They have developed some liking for us by recognizing that we are doing some good work. And they think that if they associate with us, their problem will be solved. (Shankarlal, interview with author, 8 March 2013)

Shankarlal's point is important in regards to sustainability and growth. A kind of official identification or localized recognition of the status of the correspondents is critical to their work. In India, this sort of recognition can deterritorialize stern power structures and thus give confidence to individuals who might (without Video Volunteers' identification) be delineated to lower class or caste structures and not be given the time of day by government officials. In addition to personal testimony, documentary proof is a way of presenting and narrowcasting evidence to government officials and people of high power within

institutional settings. Yet it is critical to note that community correspondents' connection and use of their camera doesn't negate these cultural barriers. Merely, this relationship presents opportunities for progressive steps towards surmounting these ingrained power structures. Women correspondents of Video Volunteers, perhaps more than others are constantly confronting issues of inequality. Discussing a story she wanted to cover on the red corridor of her home state of Chhattisgarh, Bhan Sahu explained:

I wanted to go there and meet a Naxalite and ask them why they are a Naxalite and how they struggle against the government. I would like to go there and film that. When I had gone back initially after training, there was an incident at a place called Madanwada in Rajandgaon. The journalists from the mainstream media were there covering it and I knew one journalist there. He told me that if you were a man I would have definitely taken you along, but because you're a woman and we have to stay the night in the village, I can't take you. (Bhan Sahu, interview with author, 11 February 2013)

India is a country with a population that exceeds one billion people. It is a nation where literacy varies drastically from state to state and oral traditions of storytelling have produced centuries of history and narratives, many generations before the Internet was introduced to the Indian public, a technology that only began to make inroads around August 1995 (Rao and Manzar 2011, p. 1). A World Bank study shows regular Internet usage in India hovers around 15.1%, though certainly, this number has increased since this survey was conducted (World Bank 2014). However by late 2013, it was believed that by the middle of 2014 there will be approximately 243 million regular Internet users in India ('With 243 million users' 2013), which will be more Internet users by number than in the United States. Although the Video Volunteers' India Unheard model has been in existence since 2009, the organization knows that as mobile video tools and smartphone cameras begin to become more affordable to the

organization and the communities they work with, the India Unheard model will need to shift and change in order to adapt to the proliferation of these mobile cameras. As Jessica Mayberry emphasized:

But we have to operate as if it is a situation where every Indian villager has a cell phone that plays, that shoots and uploads and downloads great video. And at that point you won't worry about the mainstream media. You know the questions we'll be asking is like, "How do I help this producer make sure that everyone in his village is getting his videos on his cell phone?" You know, how do they crowd source? How is a community producer a hub of crowd-sourced video in his area? How is he going to curate this stuff, when he has some automatic, people have granted him access and coming into our server is the footage from five or six of his friends as well? I don't know whether this is two years or ten years away? My guess is that it's more on the scale of ten years because my experience of media companies in India is that they just don't give a damn about this stuff. (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013)

Mayberry's concerns that as new technologies become more accessible; their own video practices will need to evolve with them is a crucial element of assemblage. If Video Volunteers wants their practices to be sustainable, they must adapt to shifts in and around the assembling of the work of community correspondents. If Video Volunteers cannot consistently reformulate its methodologies as technologies shift and change, its work could potentially become obsolete. However, there are also elements of technological determinism in Mayberry's ideas, similar to those of Tim Pool. This belief that the network has the ability to disrupt and shake up established economic, political and social power structures and empower those whose voices have yet to be heard throughout modern India is not necessarily realized. Although the relationship between technology and the creative practices of community correspondents has allowed for crucial counter-narratives to emerge, it is not a direct translation of the presence of video technology that breeds new narratives. Without Video

Volunteers supporting community correspondents, these stories would not make it to the Internet nor would opportunities to narrowcast them to the appropriate authorities manifest. Probably the stories would never be produced because community correspondents wouldn't even be able to afford the technology. Unlike a number of the case studies examined in previous chapters, Video Volunteers crucially recognizes that there is a need for a long-term commitment; that they must adapt to new technologies and platforms and be sensitive to local issues and conscious of specific challenges that individual correspondents confront.

Although there can be much speculation as to what could have or couldn't have happened in the absence of Video Volunteers, the organization offers financial, emotional, technical and creative support to their community correspondents. This emergent storytelling has also provided the ability for new forms of documentary practice and rudimentary narratives to develop and thrive; producing confidence in both the correspondents themselves and hopefully, in time, will spread to other segments of the population. When I sat down with Zulekha Sayyed (the community correspondent mentioned at the beginning of the chapter) who hid in a friend's home in order to record forced evictions in her slum, I asked her whether the mainstream media might have been present that day. "No, no, no they are not coming," she passionately exclaimed, acknowledging that conventional media rarely covers local issues. "Last video I made, forced eviction, so there is major problems. So I shoot it but I call, there is a TV 9 news channel, TV 9, I called them, they clearly told, we are not allowed to go against the builder's, sorry we can't" (Zulekha Sayyed, interview with author, 6 February 2013). Even though Sayyed suggests that she called a local news

channel to direct them to a controversial action by the municipality, she implies that her request was turned down due to power structures and business interests within her community. Perhaps it is the unseen impact, not the number of hits on YouTube or the speed at which footage can be uploaded, but the work on the ground, person to person, breath to breath, that makes a practice sustainable, or more importantly meaningful? Or maybe the significance of individual, organizational and community agency within these creative assemblages becomes the act of recording, bearing witness and then being proactive about targeting the evidence towards particular audiences in order to share an existence, chronicle a reality and produce a documentary effect?

#### **6.6 - Differences in Terrain: Community Correspondents, Creative Capacities & Supportive Structures**

In April 2013 when I interviewed Sajad Rasool, he was a twenty-five year old community correspondent from a small village forty kilometers from the city of Srinagar in the Budgam District of Jammu and Kashmir, a state within India that confronts Rasool with one extreme to these emergent and at times, volatile assemblings of citizen video reportage. Despite his young age, Rasool, like the majority of the correspondents I interviewed, was a relatively established video reporter with more than twenty Video Volunteers' stories crafted and published. Rasool is an activist, a reporter and a student. When I met Rasool, he was in his last year finishing up a Masters degree in Mass Communication and Journalism at Kashmir University. Rasool envisions both activism and journalism to be his life's work. Rasool explained:

I make my stories, which are often very much a real concern to me, because at the same time I'm an activist. So it's not about just covering the story and getting it published online or anywhere else. It's about

bringing the change. It's about you know, real activism. It's journalism plus activism. I call it real activism. (Sajad Rasool, interview with author, 2 April 2013)

Most of the community correspondents I interviewed had entered Video Volunteers from places of activism and social justice. During the course of my interviews, these correspondents used numerous labels to describe the relationship between their work as both journalists and activists. Community correspondents see no conflict in trying to balance their activism with their journalism. As an organization, Video Volunteers also has no qualms in acknowledging that they are an activist organization working with and for underprivileged communities throughout India. For community correspondents, the introduction of video cameras provides an additional layer of tools that support their activism. Community correspondents also identify as reporters and Video Volunteers provides them with an identification card that associates them with the organization and that they can presumably use as a sort of ad-hoc press card.<sup>87</sup> However, all the community correspondents I sat down with also approach their documentary storytelling in very different ways and under a variety of circumstantial terrains. What types of differences emerge in the ways that these citizens approach their video practices and see their relationship to activism, the camera, journalism and documentary? Are these ideas similar or divergent? Additionally, how do these burgeoning correspondents situate themselves within global definitions of citizen journalism or the documentary?

Rasool owns a laptop computer and a smartphone with Internet capabilities. He is also a fluent English speaker. He told me that prior to

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<sup>87</sup> Later in the chapter, we will see that a few correspondents have also received official government press credentials from their respective Indian states.



becoming a community correspondent, he had seen many documentaries on Kashmir, Palestine and other conflict zones. I stayed with him and his family for two nights in Raitan village where he grew up and his family currently lives. Driving from Srinagar to Raitan, Indian Army posts, camps, and soldiers are very present along the route. Reinforced with barbed wire, lookout towers and sandbags, there is no question that Kashmir is a contested land. He is one of the few correspondents I met who owns a computer. He told me that he got his first email account when he was seventeen years old. This makes his work easier as he has the ability to transfer video footage within the comfort of his home and work on Video Volunteers' stories in private. In Jammu and Kashmir, this is almost a necessity as much of the state is highly militarized and working on a project in a public cyber café might not provide Rasool the same comfort and privacy needed to prepare a paper edit to send to the Video Volunteers' main office in Goa for further editing. Although Rasool's home in Raitan does not have an Internet connection, he told me that he could use his smartphone as a wi-fi hotspot connection and browse on his laptop when needed.

The militarization of Jammu and Kashmir presents specific challenges for Rasool and the general Kashmiri public in regards to communicating through telecommunications networks. At the time of writing, SMS services had been banned in Kashmir for the last four years for anyone who cannot afford a post-paid connection, which is the majority of the local population. Rasool has three sim cards – one with a post-paid connection and two with pre-paid services. These sim cards are of three different companies in case one of them halts phone service, he can use the other two as back up. Rasool told me that on the Independence Day of India, August 15 and on Republic Day, January 26, Internet

service is blocked, as is mobile phone service. Additionally, civil rights are contested in Jammu and Kashmir through the Indian Government's implementation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. These laws curtail due process in Kashmir as well as in a number of northeastern states of India. Kashmiris are very aware of the reach of this act. As Rasool fervently told me, "they can kill you any time, they can shoot you, they can detain you any time without anything, they can frisk you, they can search in your house, they can do anything to you. So there are laws which are protecting police as well as armed forces, so you can't question so much" (Sajad Rasool, interview with author, 2 April 2013).

Rasool's videos tend to focus on human rights issues throughout Kashmir and average under three minutes in length. He will often appear on camera at some point towards the beginning of the story in order to explain and preface the issue that is going to be covered. In the below screen shot, Rasool has just explained that the place from which he is reporting, an area called Arizal and Harthpanzu, is nearby an Indian Army firing range that regularly causes damage to structures in the community and accidents have claimed the lives of a number of people and children from the surrounding villages.



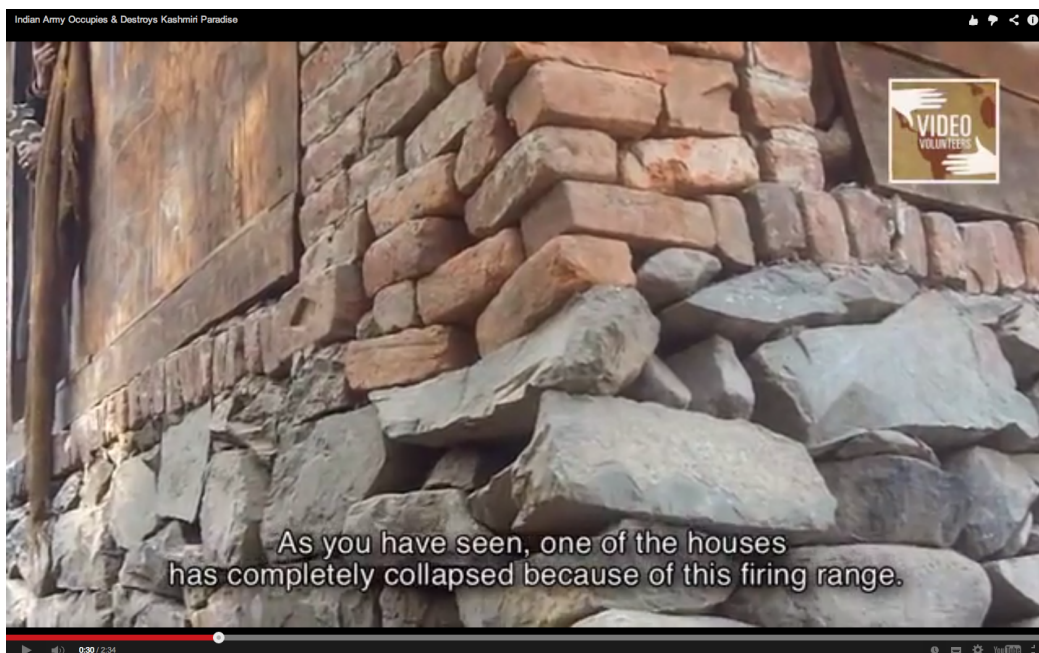
**Image 9: A still from Sajad Rasool's video report, 'Indian Army Occupies & Destroys Kashmiri Paradise: ToasMaidan Firing Range' - [http://www.videovolunteers.org/indian-army-occupies-destroys-kashmiri-paradise/](http://www videovolunteers.org/indian-army-occupies-destroys-kashmiri-paradise/)**

Rasool's reporting almost always integrates interviews with local citizens. In this report, Rasool interviews a local resident who explains that many of the houses are collapsing or suffering cracks in walls due to shelling that occurs during the day and at night.



**Image 10: Interview with local man from Darrang village in Rasool's report, 'Indian Army Occupies & Destroys Kashmiri Paradise: ToasMaidan Firing Range.'**

Throughout this video, Rasool conducts both interviews and uses his Flip Cam to document evidence of cracks in the walls of local houses and collapsed buildings.



**Image 11: Evidence of a collapsed building from 'Indian Army Occupies & Destroys Kashmiri Paradise: ToasMaidan Firing Range' by Sajad Rasool**

Midway through this report, Rasool interviews a local man who states that he lost his leg when he went to the forest to retrieve his family's horses. Rasool begins this short interview with a shot of the man's prosthesis. The man, also not identified, tells his story, explaining to Rasool (who is behind the camera), that the Indian army leaves unexploded grenades throughout the forest and he happened to step on one.



**Image 12: A still from Rasool's report, 'Indian Army Occupies & Destroys Kashmir Paradise: ToasMaidan Firing Range'**

Unlike other community correspondents who often end their reports with a telephone number of a government official to whom they plead to the audience to call and request that a solution be implemented, Rasool's videos (including this one) often don't conclude with contact information. Rasool's videos are short documentary reports of injustices that Kashmiris have faced for decades.<sup>88</sup> The titles of his videos offer a glimpse into the sorts of storytelling he engages with –

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<sup>88</sup> More of Rasool's reporting can be viewed here - <http://www.videovolunteers.org/author/sajad/?submit>. Accessed 5 July 2014.

‘Kashmir: From Paradise to Hell,’ ‘Rampant Child Labour in Jammu and Kashmir,’ ‘The Homecoming of a Militant,’ and ‘Kashmir’s Roads Are Falling Down’ are just a few of Rasool’s reports available on the Video Volunteers’ website. There is no potential quick solution to propose. No phone number to offer. For Rasool, his video practice documenting the daily lives of his Kashmiri neighbors reinforces the reality of the rural Kashmiri experience, offering visible evidence of this relationship and situating Kashmiris within the context of the Army posts and soldiers that surround them.

There is much truth to Rasool’s utter distaste with the implementation of the Armed Forces Act in Kashmir. This recognition of the potential power of a camera when in the presence of police and authority figures remains a constant in all three global locations of my research. Discussing this in Goa, Stalin reinforced these thoughts:

I think the perceived power of the camera, in terms of its ability; of its perceived ability to tell the truth and therefore to mediate, govern or change our immediate behavior is sort of universal. It’s like a mirror. Every human being, irrespective of which culture they belong to and which age they belong to, I mean not just in the physical age but which ages they belonged to, will have a certain universal behaviour in front of a mirror personally. [...] The degree of comfort, of familiarity differs from culture to culture. And therefore cultures that have been exposed more to the camera in the face, behave more familiar, they have a more familiar relationship with the camera. (Stalin K., interview with author, 24 January 2013)

However, it is not just those in front of the camera who may approach a situation differently when confronted with a video camera recording. Being a community correspondent seems to have empowered all of the correspondents I spoke with. Identifying as a community correspondent, seeing oneself as a local changemaker has emancipated these individuals from being mere citizens or



activists. The tools to document have authorized them to search for stories. The possibility space for these community correspondents changes with this evolving empowerment and also highlights the tenuous relationship these assemblages have to creative capacities. Community correspondents seem imbued with *a confidence to record and then produce stories with documentary agendas*, traits that are absent in many of the case studies of this dissertation where video makers are working independently. As most of these correspondents live in the communities they document, their relationship to the stories they seek to tell are quite different than that of a local news reporter or journalist, who records, frames a story and leaves, perhaps never to be seen again. For someone like Sajad Rasool, he is a member of the community he strives to document. His commitment to both his storytelling and his community is unlike that of a journalist or documentary filmmaker.

The natural closeness that Rasool would have in his relationship to his own community suggests a very different level of accessibility than say, a traditional reporter or documentarian might garner. In many of Rasool's stories, he interviews neighbors or friends of neighbors or people from neighboring villages. The relationship that Rasool has with the subjects of his reports is a key difference from the case studies I examined in the global sphere of New York City. The wider politics of these correspondents and their connections to the people in the frame offers a different approach to media making. Coincidentally, the familiarity that Rasool's subjects have with the *videographer but not the video camera* also brings in questions of ethics. Rarely might Rasool fully disclose his association with the subjects that appear in his pieces. This, however, can be traced across other forms of documentary filmmaking. Only the most transparent

documentary maker, of which there are few, will openly share the extent of the personal connections behind the subjects that appear in their films. Rasool does not know everyone that appears in his video reports, far from it, but his distance or lack of distance between the camera and the community, presents Rasool with delicate ethical dilemmas as he produces reports. At once, he is part of the culture he reports on and at the same time he knows he must keep a professional distance. Although for many of his neighbors it might be difficult to access the Internet, they can easily follow up on the tangible success or impact of his reports and that means he is accountable.

When I asked Rasool to tell me about one or two stories he had worked on that were most important to him, he recounted a report he had made about a woman named Shakeela, whose husband, Mohammed Shafi Lone, had disappeared in 2002.<sup>89</sup> Shakeela was one of Rasool's neighbors and he went to interview her, "That was just like a horrible story for me. That I am living in the same community, I am living in the same society, I am living in the same district. She's my neighbor also. And I didn't know that her husband has been missing since 2002" (Sajad Rasool, interview with author, 2 April 2013).

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<sup>89</sup> Rasool's report, 'Missing Persons of Kashmir,' can be viewed at this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G5IALbjXZI>. More of Rasool's thoughts on this story can be explored here: <http://www.videovolunteers.org/community-correspondent-diaries-sajad-rasool/>. Both websites accessed 8 March 2014.





**Image 13: A screen shot from Sajad Rasool's 2011 Report, 'Missing Persons of Kashmir' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9G5IALbjXZI>**



**Image 14: A still from 'Missing Persons of Kashmir' by Sajad Rasool**

Producing this report inspired Rasool to contact the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, a Kashmir based NGO that investigates the thousands of disappeared people in Kashmir, as well as supports families of those who have

disappeared. From this initial report for Video Volunteers, Rasool expressed his desire to craft a longer and more in-depth yet short-length *documentary* later in the year:

So I have decided now, Inshallah, this year in fact, I will be making a full-fledged documentary of ten minutes. I have talked to them and they have told me that you can come and we will give you some particular sensitive cases in different areas of Jammu and Kashmir. (Sajad Rasool, interview with author, 2 April 2013)

Rasool is passionate about the struggles of his Kashmiri neighbors. His drive inspires him to strive to create content that more closely resembles the documentary form. Rasool understands the potential of a concrete documentary agenda. This relationship to his community is a driving factor behind his motivation to produce documentary content for Video Volunteers. This is coupled with his desire to eventually transition to being a full-fledged reporter for a national newspaper in India such as *The Indian Express* or *The Hindu*. In early 2013, Rasool was chosen by Video Volunteers to partake in a training session conducted by the photojournalism agency, Magnum, held in Goa.<sup>90</sup> External trainings such as these, as well as those of Video Volunteers, provide a further foundation for Rasool in his pursuit of his professional goals. Similar to Tim Pool, Rasool strives to create a career path for himself. He is self-aware that transitioning his skill set from Video Volunteers to a more mainstream media outlet will provide him with more resources, though not necessarily more freedom to report. He also hopes that further correspondents will be trained in Kashmir (presently Rasool is the only one). “It’s damn challenging every time to do a

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<sup>90</sup> Some of Rasool’s photographs from his Magnum project about Dal Lake can be seen here: <http://communityphotographers.blogspot.co.nz/p/sajad-rasool.html>. Accessed 8 March 2014.

story for Video Volunteers,” he told me. “There is nobody working here. If I would be given a good team here, ten reporters for ten districts, that will be a big, we can do anything big for the people” (Sajad Rasool, interview with author, 2 April 2013). In a recent email exchange I had with Rasool, he explained to me that he was in New Delhi for a month long internship with the investigative magazine, *Tehelka*, and then, depending on his options, he would probably return to Kashmir.<sup>91</sup>

Sajad Rasool sees his video work as a balance to the mainstream media’s interpretation of the situation that has unfolded in Jammu and Kashmir, a state of India in which the relationship between citizen and power structures has been skewered through years of conflict and injustice. Rasool is constantly adapting and shifting to the working conditions within the state. The disruption of telecommunication networks and often imposed curfews can diminish his ability to report and move throughout the state. Even a change in lifestyle, obtaining a job in New Delhi or getting married or having a child, could shift Rasool’s ability to sustain these assemblages. Rasool had explained to me that he has difficulty recording at night. The light is poor and his Flip Cam cannot pick up details. The limitations of the technology he uses are an additional constraint. Rasool has the intellectual and educational means to critique media. He believes that his work is vital, offering a counter-narrative to the overly sensationalized mainstream media of India, which tends to focus on the violence in Kashmir, rather than the uphill battles of its citizens. As he reflected:

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<sup>91</sup> A recent article titled, ‘Documenting A Story Like This Was Like Reopening A Wound,’ by Sajad Rasool, appeared on the *Tehelka* website in March 2014. See, <http://www.tehelka.com/documenting-a-story-like-this-was-like-reopening-a-wound/>. Accessed 18 March 2014.

For me, camera is the, is my weapon. I treat it as a weapon, to tackle any situation and to highlight any issue. But it is said that pen is mightier than sword, but I believe that camera is much more mightier than pen itself. Pen is mightier than sword, it's a proverb, pen is mightier than sword, for a writer, if there is an army man, weapon is important for him because it is a weapon for him. So without you can't even imagine a policeman, you can't imagine an army man or soldier without a weapon, without weapon, the army, what is it? [...] So I believe, for camera, as camera is concerned, if pen is mightier than sword, camera is much more mightier than pen [sic]. Because camera gives you the visuals, camera gives the real situation. (Sajad Rasool, interview with author, 2 April 2013)

Rasool lives in Jammu & Kashmir and the highly contested frontier between Kashmir and Pakistan is one of the most dangerous international borders in the world. Rasool insisted that the Kashmiri people have a long history of resistance against the Indian government and an equally extensive yearning for freedom from the Indian state in the hope that one day they will see the creation of an independent nation. The vast majority of Kashmiris I met during my time there do not identify as Indian. They see themselves as Kashmiri and their relationship to India is troubled and hostile. The same goes for the Indian army and their place within the state of Kashmir. If practitioners in New York City feel empowered by live streaming Occupy Wall Street or producing cell phone videos during stop-and-frisks conducted by the NYPD; in Kashmir, the empowerment that Rasool must feel documenting the life and struggles of Kashmiris is undoubtedly clear. Do his videos make a difference? Perhaps at times, the changes that come about from his work might be negligible. Yet for Rasool, that camera must feel like both a weapon and a protector. In an area of the world where local citizens are surrounded by army bases that are supposedly protecting them, Kashmiris tend to believe the presence of the army does just the opposite. In Kashmir, where grandparents, fathers, uncles and brothers have disappeared,

never to be seen again, there is no doubt that an activist like Rasool, with a camera in his bag, provides a critical vantage point. He is one of very few people in Kashmir who *believes his camera is a weapon and uses his camera as a weapon*. The possibility exists that what Rasool documents may at some point empower not only himself, but also many of his people. Quite possibly, the archives of Rasool's work, his raw footage, might be turned into a more traditional documentary film, perhaps produced by Rasool himself, possibly Video Volunteers or maybe even a third party interested in using his footage?

Sajad Rasool is one of the many community correspondents of Video Volunteers who are actively working to assemble nascent documentary video practices. These community correspondents come from underprivileged backgrounds and yet different correspondents arrive at the organization with different levels of experience using video cameras and understanding various concepts of media making. Amol Madhukar Lalzare, from the Sathenagar Slums in Mumbai worked as an auto rickshaw driver before joining Video Volunteers. His mother was part of a Women's Empowerment collective and recommended Lalzare to Video Volunteers in 2006. He has created over 25 stories for Video Volunteers and was part of the early Community Video Units as well. He only began using a video camera after he joined Video Volunteers, but had always been fascinated with documentary filmmaking. Lalzare's relationship to documentary films was quite different to that of Rasool's. Lalzare told me:

There was a TV at our place and I used to watch National Geographic and Discovery channel. I used to be crazy about watching these. I would wonder how they would go in front of lions. This was all so different. Then I would watch how these were made, so I used to really like watching the making of these. So I got an impression, an inspiration to work with cameras that I would make films like that one day. But I

haven't been able to make films like that yet – wildlife films. (Amol Madhukar Lalzare, interview with author, 7 February 2013)

Lalzare had laughed about his dream to track down lions and produce nature films, yet the motivations that drive these community correspondents are plentiful, giving a voice to those who might not be able to share their side of the story. When I met Lalzare, he was in the process of transitioning into becoming a mentor and trainer to those citizen activists who were just entering Video Volunteers and becoming community correspondents. For Lalzare, this was reinforcement that his video practice was respected. Yet he also realized that this promotion meant that he would have to boost the level of his practice and challenge his creativity in the hope of producing stronger video content. Explaining his aspirations for his practice Lalzare remarked:

Now that I am going to be a mentor and trainer, I have more responsibility that I have people working below me and now I have to show them that I am a trainer, mentor and a good filmmaker also. Now that I have more responsibility, I will work more responsibly looking forward, I will make the best possible films which... It shouldn't be they are at their level, my five community correspondents who I have now been put in charge of... They are learning right now. I have been doing this around 6-7 years. If I make videos like them, then there won't be any difference between them and me. Now I have to make videos, better videos than them so that I can lead by example and say this is how you should make videos, so that they can also learn from them. (Amol Madhukar Lalzare, interview with author, 7 February 2013)

Lalzare's statement exposes his desire to craft videos that are more dynamic and structurally creative. As a mentor, he will be a role model for new correspondents and he wants his video reports to mirror his growing responsibilities. Although community correspondents go through a twelve-day training with Video Volunteers and are in touch with their mentors, their limited exposure to the documentary art form has, in a sense, restrained the

experimentation of their storytelling. Most India Unheard video reports stick to a framework that is reminiscent of a news reporter's on-air reports for a local television station. Community correspondents might not have a handheld microphone, yet their relationship to the camera suggests that they are reporting for a news program. Even the twelve-day training that Video Volunteers conducts with community correspondents instills a framing method to their video reports called 'Piece to Camera' (Video Volunteers 2013).



**Image 15: Community correspondent, Amol Lalzare, introduces his story, '8000 Mumbaikars Share 2 Toilets,' using the piece-to-camera method - <http://www.videovolunteers.org/8000-mumbaikars-share-2-toilets/>**

'Piece to Camera' suggests that correspondents should address the issue that they are covering directly to the camera through an opening statement and a closing statement. This stylistic structure emphasizes similarities to the ways in which traditional television news reports are framed. Yet Video Volunteers is also in the process of trying to figure out how to transition out of this narrative structure and into a better produced documentary sensibility. As Mayberry expressed, "We just got to get the quality up. I don't really care how many people

are watching it but I do want to have a certain amount of stuff that we are really proud of. We don't have enough of that which we think is really important" (Jessica Mayberry, interview with author, 23 January 2013).

A myriad of assemblages have emerged and are emerging from the organizational structure that is Video Volunteers. Each practitioner engages with a variety of different skill sets, these video practices evolve from the experimentations of the practitioners themselves. Although community correspondents tend to come from lower economic classes, they are all from various backgrounds, states and situations. These individuals arrive at Video Volunteers with contrasting relationships to storytelling. There is Laxmi Nautiyal from Tehri in the state of Uttarakhand, whose video practice emerged from her previous work as a young journalist for the children's magazine, *Bal Patrika*, and now believes her "camera is my livelihood and it is everything. It is my career" (Laxmi Nautiyal, interview with author, 21 February 2013). And Devidas Gaonkar from Goa who had been actively involved in anti-mining and environmental movements and started filming with his friend Sebi in and around those activist movements, transitioning into work with Video Volunteers and doesn't see himself as a journalist or filmmaker, but both, "I feel that everything comes in my path. I feel like a journalist and also like a filmmaker" (Devidas Gaonkar, interview with author, 28 January 2013). There is also Bhan Sahu who previously worked as a social worker in the state of Chhattisgarh and now sees herself as a "community journalist" (Bhan Sahu, interview with author, 11 February 2013). These correspondents are just a sample of the many that I interviewed over the duration of this dissertation.



It is clear from my interviews with community correspondents that they identify with their video practices in a variety of different ways. They are simultaneously activists and reporters. They are filmmakers and journalists. Their cameras are weapons and protectors. They are community correspondents and local changemakers. The intermingling of this terminology and the ways in which they identify with their practices might contribute to how these correspondents tell stories and perhaps reinforces a further need that the organization acknowledges at some point they might need to shift the way they train community correspondents, focusing instead on training these correspondents to produce stronger documentary narratives that don't follow the reportage, 'Piece to Camera' model. Nevertheless, all of these community correspondents are part of the larger community of Video Volunteers and this association produces a commonality and certainly a community of support as well. Because community correspondents work within their immediate communities, there is an obligation to follow up on the stories they produce. This drive is compounded by requests from neighbors and friends, inquiries as to what sort of results or changes have come about from a video report made months before.

Digital video tools and the myriad of media makers that engage with these technologies are producing numerous video documents, video documentation and often when reinforced by supportive networks, documentary narratives as well. Although it is quite difficult to ascertain exactly how this relationship between emerging video technologies and nascent forms of video production within the context of human rights and local social justice movements will effect wider documentary culture, the abundant video reports uploaded online by Video

Volunteers will surely begin to produce a broader narrative and more critical conversations. These contributions, perhaps not yet stylistic re-workings of the documentary, offer a glimpse of small sparks of creative practices that have begun to expand, grow and evolve as emerging forms of contemporary documentary media of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The potential, the technology, the drive and the creativity of community correspondents are emergent and developing throughout the work of Video Volunteers.

### **6.7 - Conclusion: One Organization / Multiple Assemblages**

This chapter has examined the assemblage of Video Volunteers and a number of historic assemblings that led up to the emergence of Video Volunteers, as well as exploring assemblages that revolve in and around the organization's work. The Video Volunteers assemblage is an aggregate of socio-economic, cultural and technological variants that merge to support a working technological ecology of citizen based digital video practices rooted in human rights and social justice issues throughout India. The long standing and adaptable supportive structure of Video Volunteers, the imaginative use of digital video technologies and the increasing creative capacities of community correspondents bodes well for the sustainable evolution of the Video Volunteers model and a continuing healthy and prolific creative output. The video practices of Video Volunteers align with some traditions of the documentary, yet they also cross borders and relate to customary forms of journalism. From my comprehensive interviews with the directors and correspondents of Video Volunteers, it is clear that they are actively seeking to transition from a stylistic bent geared toward journalistic reporting to more traditional documentary centered content. To generate further

creative experimentation, introspection on the ways in which community correspondents' are trained will need to occur and correspondents will have to be exposed to alternative methods of recording, reporting and production of content.

From case studies in New York, India and New Zealand, the use of digital video cameras within protest spaces, human rights contexts and social justice movements are capturing critical video documents and offering further possibilities for documentary storytelling. Video Volunteers is an organization actively trying to form assemblages of documentary video production throughout multiple regions, languages and terrains of India. Video Volunteers itself is an assemblage comprised of multiple assemblings all contingent and framed within their own localized factors, the organization is still uncertain as to which ones are sustainable. Much of this sustainability relies on the personal qualities of the individual community correspondents who make up the body of Video Volunteers' India Unheard program. The relationships that the organization and the community correspondents have to the places where they work are flexible and relative to each situation and circumstance. The organization recognizes that human capital is at the center of each assemblage. The types of individuals, their reasons for wanting to be correspondents, the stipend they receive for each video, their origins and relationship in respect to the complexities of India class and caste systems are all relative to the emergence of these multi-faceted assemblages throughout the country. Video Volunteers has provided a framework and support system to encourage the production of video reports, yet it is up to the community correspondents themselves to deliver footage to Goa. This task, however, requires monumental support and encouragement by the organization.

Affordable video technologies have allowed the organization to evolve and then re-work the structures of their trainings and reportage in order to provide the best means for their community correspondents to produce video reports and then narrowcast these reports to the pertinent authorities, while also broadcasting them to as wide an audience as possible. The work of Video Volunteers has had multiple layers of influence on both a local and global scale, yet the organization is uncompromising in its belief that uploading regional and local video content produced throughout India provides a vital counter-narrative to the mainstream representation of people and communities in India that might have little means to tell their own stories. Other NGOs in India are also experimenting with video technologies, both for producing their own media, as well as figuring out the best methods to distribute this media to rural and isolated communities who may not have the wealth to procure educational trainings that address local business practices, such as farming, or speak to social issues such as domestic violence or sexual health.

Understanding the complexities innate to the sustainability of digital video practices is critical to their longevity. Video Volunteers comprehends that assemblages form and sustain through a nurturing adaptability that takes multiple variables into account. Creative video practices seeped in human rights and issues of social justice that *solely* privilege technology over the numerous other elements necessary for a practice to thrive will most likely confront difficulties to their practices as they evolve. Critically, digital video practices that hint at the potential to transition into a creative practice that more closely resembles documentary are often self-reflexive and purposeful in the creative challenges they must overcome to produce video that provides a documentary effect.

All of the community correspondents that partook in this research have varying degrees of experience with digital video tools and practices. The practitioners examined in this chapter are producing dynamic, important and localized video content. Not everyone who is trained by Video Volunteers necessarily makes the same sort of impact as the community correspondents examined here. The interviews in this chapter focused on individuals who have been with the organization for a long time, so inevitably these practices come from positive experiences in the organization. Although many of these video practices are based upon traditional video news reportage, these creative practices are constantly shifting, both in their style of reportage, as well as in their method of production. Video Volunteers as an organization is conscious that they will need to adapt their methodology to evolving media technologies. Furthermore, the organization is also clear that they intend to begin to transition to video reports that are more clearly situated within traditions of the documentary film. This will mainly signal stylistic shifts to their content and perhaps the correspondent will not take as much of an on-camera role.

Many of the components that contribute to how assemblages form are intangible, including that of creative capacities and the factors that shape and hinder the potential of these expressive capacities. In regards to the case studies I encountered in India, these include but are not restricted to class structures, infrastructure limitations, language, supportive structures, adaptability of creative practices and workflow methodology. Cultural constraints, distinct power structures, lack of awareness of the possibility space and scarce exposure to multiple methods of digital storytelling, also play roles in the formation of assemblages that these practitioners creatively energize. The digital video

practices of Sajad Rasool in Kashmir or Ajeet Bahadur in Allahabad or Zulekha Sayyed in Mumbai have all evolved in similar yet incredibly divergent ways due to the relationships between unique elements specific to their practices as they assemble, disassemble and reassemble as community correspondents and emerging media makers. Although the stylistic characteristics of Video Volunteers leans more towards methods of journalism, the videos of the India Unheard program have emerging and growing connections to traditions of the documentary form. The work of Video Volunteers displays incredible promise that simmers just below the surface of emerging and dynamic Indian documentary practices rooted in human rights, social justice and protest movements.

## ***CHAPTER 7 – Case Studies in New Zealand***

### **7.1 - Examining Digital Video Practices Throughout New Zealand: Assembling Documentary Networks**

The previous three chapters have examined particular digital video practices in a number of specific possibility spaces. Each case study has been analyzed through the lens of assemblage theory in order to critically evaluate the emergence of these practices and better understand the capacities of elements to connect within these spaces of creative possibility. From the case studies examined in New York City and India, a key framework has emerged that highlights valuable insights that go far beyond the limited readings and misunderstandings entrenched in technology-based interpretations. As Evgeny Morozov (2011, p. 290) writes, ‘Technological determinism [...] obscures the roles and responsibilities of human decision makers, either absolving them of well-deserved blame or minimizing the role of their significant interventions.’

Apparent throughout this dissertation is the dynamism innate in all of the assemblages and creative practices that have been explored. Each location and specific practice presents a new space of possibility and thus the challenges vary from assemblage to assemblage, from digital video practice to digital video practice. This means that technological challenges are very different in India in comparison to New York City. Furthermore, throughout India these challenges might also vary considerably in different villages and cities. It would be hard for Tim Pool, with all of his digital tools and live streaming knowledge, to land in Mumbai and expect to proceed live streaming an Indian street protest with ease. The territory is different and thus, so is the assemblage. Throughout Mumbai, access to an online network is much more difficult, understanding the energy

behind the protest would be increasingly complex for Pool due to language issues and the fact that he would be an outsider. Similarly the support structures he relied on during Occupy Wall Street would be absent and subsequently, Pool would have to readjust his practice. It might even collapse. Conversely, if Sajad Rasool arrived in New York City at the height of the Occupy Wall Street movement, he too would need to adjust his practice as the territory would be unfamiliar, the support structures he relies on in India would be missing and his relationship to the protest movement itself would be different than his connection to human rights issues in Kashmir. The mere ownership of digital technology does not provide the route to developing digital video practices centered on human rights, social justice issues and protest movements, nor does attributing credit to technological advances offer a conclusive method of analysis.

The privileging of technology fails to understand the relevance of capacities to connect and their relationship to digital video practices. This dissertation has attempted to counter that absence, focusing on non-professional media makers that are producing, recording, editing, uploading and disseminating video content. The New Zealand based case studies explored in this chapter are analyzed through the lens of assemblage theory and situated in regards to the development of the capacities to connect that emerge between both human and non-human elements interacting throughout these assemblages. Activist movements need people, but so do creative movements and artistic practices rely on the motivation of practitioners to produce and experiment with expressive forms of representation. Subsequently and in regards to the case studies found in this chapter, my analysis identifies and addresses a familiar set of elements that were uncovered in the case studies from previous chapters. Throughout this



research project, a core inquiry has focused on why there has not been a wider proliferation of documentary specific video practices. This lack of documentary content has necessitated a wider investigative lens. How are New Zealand based practices approaching digital video technologies and integrating their use and limitations into creative discourse? What sorts of power structures and political issues are at play within the New Zealand context and are supportive structures (both formal and informal) aiding the cultivation of digital video practices circulating around such issues as environmental justice and the development of communities of documentary practice? Furthermore, are New Zealand based practitioners, facilitators and activists moving beyond a complacent reliance on digital technologies and instead, adapting their practices to specific situations while strengthening supportive structures critical to long-term and sustainable communities of digital video practices?

This chapter begins with an examination of the digital video practices of Greenpeace New Zealand and situates the organization's practices within the boundaries of the technology they utilize along with the anticipated documentary effect they often aim to spread. Greenpeace is a global organization looking to embed video making within this local context. The organization draws upon a clear history of activism and looks to add the possibilities of the dissemination of video to enhance the political effect of their New Zealand actions. Greenpeace New Zealand's videos along with their online presence seek to facilitate recruitment of their political agenda both in New Zealand and abroad. The organization embraces a sense of 'branded' activism, supported by a formal management structure, a sophisticated approach to marketing and a committed faith in the merits of their work. As a global organization, the agenda and

practice of bearing witness has always been a centering pivotal value. The elements found in the assemblages that form around the current digital video practices of Greenpeace New Zealand are reminiscent of the resilient organizational structures examined in the practices of Video Volunteers in India and WITNESS in New York. However, as New Zealand provides a possibility space that is geographically removed from other parts of the world, the video practices of Greenpeace New Zealand centered on environmental justice are further tasked by the challenges of connectivity present throughout the possibility space of a relatively remote island nation.

Later in the chapter, the digital video documentation of Auckland street protests by Linda M. is situated within a New Zealand context and juxtaposed in relation to the work of Tim Pool and that of Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye. Due to the lack of fast-networked infrastructure in Auckland, Linda M. does not have the ability to live stream like Pool and subsequently she is forced to engage in minimal editing after she documents a protest. Her faithful dependency on the power of the video camera to document ‘the truth’ relies on the straightforward acceptance of an ingrained ability for the camera to represent reality, yet as we have seen, the interpretation of video is much more convoluted than Linda M. or Pool or Gonzalez and Swaye make it out to be.

The chapter then examines the evolution of the Wellington, New Zealand based youth filmmaking workshop, Inspiring Stories. For a number of years, Inspiring Stories, a registered charitable trust, has conducted filmmaking workshops for youth on both the North and South Island. The organization has attempted to cultivate young New Zealand filmmaking communities, yet Inspiring Stories’ assumptions regarding the inherent power of digital video technologies

has limited the reach of their work. The rhetoric of the organization has replaced its ability to read the complex challenges and diverse possibility spaces scattered throughout the country. A reliance on technology as a solution, rather than critically reflecting on the potential ways to adapt and adjust their workshops to different communities and terrains has restricted the creative output of the young people they link with and has threatened the long-term sustainability of the creative programming rooted in documentary that they promote. This section positions the approach of Inspiring Stories to case studies from previous chapters such as *18 Days in Egypt* and Video Volunteers.

The final section of this chapter explores the recent work of Loading Docs, an Auckland based initiative that attempts to cultivate new short online documentaries directed by New Zealand filmmakers with backgrounds in documentary storytelling. Loading Docs is a case study that offers insight into how the embryonic documentary short film form might be encouraged and supported in New Zealand. Loading Docs is dynamic in that they have created a web portal to screen and promote the films they fund, yet they also utilize established video and social media platforms such as Vimeo, Instagram and Facebook, while requiring filmmakers to harness crowd sourcing as a way to fund their projects. This approach, via numerous fronts and valuing multiple online platforms and technologies, along with a strong formal supportive structure that includes the backing of long established film organizations in New Zealand presents a developing counter-balance to the work of Inspiring Stories. Although Loading Docs is far removed from digital video practices aligned with human rights issues, social justice or protest movements, the organization's approach

closely links to case studies that embrace a comprehensive understanding of assemblages, as seen in the work of WITNESS and Video Volunteers.

Specific components and their relationships to other elements forming around the creation of digital video practices rooted in human rights, social justice and protest movements present complicated assemblages prone to changes, shifts and adjustments. Formal supportive structures can be crucial to the development of video practices; yet independent practitioners and their digital video practices can also thrive with the contribution of informal networks of supporters. The capacities of these creative video practices to connect rely on the intertwined linkages between variables that form between the networked and technological infrastructure infiltrating and encircling the forming assemblage. Furthermore, the tendencies of the creative capacities of the practitioners and practices to anticipate challenges within these assemblages are critical. For the digital video practices to remain sustainable through changes to their assembling, they must be open to corrective adjustments and reassembling. Digital video practices that depend on technologies or practitioners who are isolated from creative communities are vulnerable to rigid convictions that technology is the solution or their practice offers ‘the truth.’ Without constructive criticism from wider creative networks, independence acquired through the reliance on digital tools, access to the Internet or via an isolated practice might be blinded by the rhetoric associated with the digital technology itself. This chapter compares assembling elements and their assemblages within a New Zealand context, while simultaneously situating these diverse digital video practices in relation to case studies from the previous three chapters.

## **7.2 - Greenpeace New Zealand: Activism, Infrastructure & Bearing Witness**

The non-profit organization, Greenpeace New Zealand (NZ), produces and publishes digital video online along with other forms of supportive digital media in order to circulate their activism and publicize their actions through web-based broadcasting platforms and intricate navigation of mainstream media channels. Greenpeace NZ's work is similar to that of WITNESS (see chapter 5). On one level there is a corresponding effort to think global and act local and importantly, a necessity to cultivate sustainable practices within regional political movements rooted in issues of social justice (or in the case of Greenpeace NZ – environmental justice). The proliferation of mobile video tools has compelled Greenpeace NZ to re-work the ways in which they approach visual storytelling. Greenpeace NZ, as the local branch of a much larger global organization, works in a very distinct New Zealand workspace that at once provides the organization with numerous possibilities yet at the same time restricts the organization in their methods of digital video production due to certain infrastructure limitations in New Zealand. As possibilities for online dissemination of videos emerge, new challenges surface and often complicate decision-making. As Nick Young, Director of Digital for Greenpeace NZ, explained:

Every day on the Internet, there is some new tool or some new mash-up of tools that allows some interesting new use of video or images or some combination of video and tweets, you know, the possibilities are endless. In the old days the hard part was finding a way to do something, now the hard part is finding, the hard part is choosing which way to do something. There is just, there are so many ways you can do things and so many tools and so many channels and so many combinations that literally, what we often spend time doing is trying all different ways and then choosing the best way to do something. So it's a challenge, but the opportunities are massive in the future for using video for capturing what we're doing, to capture what is being done wrong and to bear witness and more and more

now it's not so much a case of capturing a short bit of footage and relying on it going on television. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

Young's introspection elucidates the complexities that arise as the possibility spaces for video practices mushroom. As new opportunities become visible, Greenpeace NZ must figure out methods to juggle and experiment with these ever-shifting potentials. Yet it can be relatively easy to fall back into the same old rhetoric that surrounds digital technologies. As Young states above, "the possibilities are endless." Yet momentarily, we will see that Young contradicts himself. In fact, the use of digital video is very specific to each circumstance and political action. Greenpeace NZ is methodical in the way it utilizes digital video technologies. The organization is conscious of the creative limits of both the activists who employ the use of digital video as well as mindful of the technological restrictions that might arise during particular actions.

This sort of multi-tasking is not easy and illuminates the importance of a support network such as Greenpeace NZ. One of the core values of Greenpeace has been to bear witness, but also to create and disseminate meaningful witnessing on a global scale. Documenting environmental degradation is just one cog in a wheel that utilizes lens-based media on a number of platforms in order to produce visual evidence that supports political battles the organization wages. In order to supplement and distribute visual media, Greenpeace NZ integrates social media campaigns, political actions, a strong web presence, direct lobbying and a number of other methods to push their political agenda.

As we have seen in earlier chapters, digital video practices reinforced by strong support networks often have a greater potential to remain sustainable. Yet this is not always the case. *18 Days In Egypt* is a case study that struggled as it

evolved, whereas Video Volunteers blossomed and (to date) has sustained as its methodology adapted and constantly re-formed. Yet unlike Video Volunteers, which centers its activism on the direct use of digital video for change, Greenpeace NZ uses video to supplement and promote actions and activism. For Greenpeace NZ, digital video is not merely about documenting and uploading footage to the Internet. Instead, the organization is cognizant that cultivating successful digital video practices that create political value requires a multi-layered approach, so that the work that goes into recording and editing footage is best utilized by circulating the media over multiple platforms and numerous emerging technologies. As Nick Young described:

Now more and more we are starting to use video in more creative ways as well, for storytelling and using animation in whatever ways that we can come up with to make it fresh and interesting and use it as a way to tell a story, not just to show what we are doing. And really recognize the value of video as a medium for it's, it's just a really compelling, you can use video in a really compelling way because it's immersive and you can, it's visual and sound and everything all in one and you can encapsulate a lot in a short time. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

Different forms of digital video practices aligned within an online framework that presumes short attention spans of audiences watching video on the Web situates the work of Greenpeace NZ within an unfolding assemblage. The historical challenges in respect to the use of visual imagery that were once present for Greenpeace NZ have not gone away, but have merely shifted. The organization now has the ability to experiment with animation, integrate different styles of storytelling and utilize social media platforms. They can publish videos online to gauge a response and the financial investment is minimal in comparison to an era when Greenpeace NZ needed to purchase television advertisement time in order to broadcast a message or delicately navigate the complexities of the

early days of multi-format Internet video. Describing the pre-YouTube production methods that Greenpeace NZ once had to navigate, Nick Young reminisced:

So it was physically recording onto a tape and then you'd have to get it off the tape, which was a huge job within itself. And then using the video was also a much more difficult and clunky task cause back in the old days you'd have to encode for Windows Media Player and for Real Player and for QuickTime. You'd have to, if you wanted to put a video on the Web, you'd have to put three different versions of it and you'd have to host the video yourself. So there was no content delivery network in the old days, you know. So people would have to often be watching a video that was not much bigger than a postage stamp and it would take them ten minutes to download it and they would be able to watch it and it would be low quality and so forth. You know, in the old days the video was mostly done for TV. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

Online platforms such as YouTube provide Greenpeace NZ with the ability to focus their resources more on the creative side of digital video without the need to invest energy in generating a Greenpeace specific platform to publish videos on the web. Uploading to YouTube with support from directed social media campaigns is a contemporary workflow that Greenpeace NZ and other global organizations such as Video Volunteers and WITNESS are constantly engaged with. Although bearing witness, Greenpeace NZ's core tactic, is still the dominant technique in their arsenal of mediated approaches to environmental advocacy, their strategies often vary in comparison to the approaches of other Greenpeace organizations around the world. As a country, New Zealand is much less high profile than, for example, the United Kingdom. Greenpeace's localized approaches to digital video often coincide with how it might supplement or contribute alternative viewpoints within the context of mainstream coverage. The day before I interviewed Nick Young, Greenpeace UK had live streamed a fifteen-hour broadcast of six female Greenpeace climbers scaling London's tallest



building, a skyscraper called ‘The Shard,’ in a protest against oil drilling in the Arctic.<sup>92</sup> ‘The Shard’ stands in the middle of the buildings that house Shell’s three London offices. Greenpeace UK’s intention was to engage in an action that would pique the interest of office workers and London street traffic and at the same time globally broadcast their stance against Arctic oil drilling in order to enhance political engagement with the issue and hopefully increase recruitment for their cause.

Inspired, Young described the way Greenpeace UK had set up their online stream and social media linkages. For this action, all six of the climbers were wearing helmet cameras and Greenpeace UK had a studio in which they used livestream.com to live stream the broadcast of the climb in a similar fashion to how a television sports broadcast might be set up. With multiple camera angles and ongoing commentary by a climbing expert, the director of Greenpeace UK and others involved in the preparation of the climb, along with constant analysis for the fifteen-hour duration that it took the fastest climbers to reach the pinnacle of the building, the live stream was highly coordinated by both Greenpeace International and Greenpeace UK.<sup>93</sup> Video was part of a multi-platform strategy. A massive social media effort ensued in order to direct traffic to the site. The hashtag ‘#iceclimb’ was spread across online networks, appearing prominently on the homepage dedicated to the climb itself. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and a variety of other online platforms were utilized via links and hashtags and then shared across online networks. Prominent mainstream news channels and

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<sup>92</sup> The Channel 4 news report on this action, ‘Greenpeace protestors arrested after scaling Shard,’ can be viewed here: <http://www.channel4.com/news/greenpeace-protest-shard-london-arctic-climb-video>. Accessed 7 April 2014.

<sup>93</sup> The dedicated site for the climb can still be viewed here: <http://iceclimb.savethearctic.org/>. Accessed 7 April 2014.

websites, such as Channel 4 in the United Kingdom and BBC World News, also picked up the high profile London climb. Greenpeace did its best to harness both its global and local networks in order to publicize the scaling of ‘The Shard.’ However, depending on the visibility of an action, varying amounts of supporting media might be employed. Every assemblage is different. Specific circumstances require distinct approaches.

These multiple methods of video distribution vary considerably from the mechanisms of past distribution. However, it is not as if online distribution necessarily makes the dispersal of digital video any easier or more influential. In fact, these new possibility spaces for distribution can be incredibly complex and it remains difficult for practitioners to meaningfully gain the attention of target audiences. Social media can drive traffic to a specific video and today’s monetary investments (the cost of technology and distribution) are minimal. Yet experimentations with distribution methods are difficult to perfect within the arena of online video. The videos that Greenpeace NZ integrates into their wider campaigns, in contrast to those of Greenpeace UK, tend to be much more focused on local New Zealand based issues. Nevertheless, Greenpeace NZ still strives to navigate the maddening patchwork of online distribution structures and directing traffic to their videos is a constant dilemma. Reminiscing on the shifts in these methods, Nick Young stressed:

So you know the time frames are much compressed but then what goes with that is the challenge of the sheer vastness of the amount of media that everyone is able to choose from. I mean, they’re choosing what to look at that day. You know, in the old days you watched the news at six o’clock and that was the only footage you saw in your entire day, sometimes in your entire week, maybe watch a bit of TV as well, but you know, it was simple, we captured some footage, extremely compelling, all we had to do is make sure we get it to the TV stations. They’re going to put it on the news, sometimes they’re not going to be able to put it all on the news.

They'll sometimes go on, chop out a bit and it's not always going to be the bit that we wanted them to use, you know whatever, but those were the challenges and the opportunities in the old days and now the challenges and the opportunities are quite different. And one of those is cutting through the cat videos on YouTube, you know, and trying to get people to see what it is that we want them to see, rather than billions of other things that they got in front of them to watch. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

Young's reflections are a reminder of the complexities of video distribution on the Internet. His thoughts are also suggestive of the frustration that can emerge with the banality of content on YouTube and having to fight for the attention of users. If we recall, Video Volunteers also encountered similar problems when it came to distribution. Directing traffic to specific videos or websites is difficult, presenting a constant challenge for organizations whose work centers on online video. In chapter five we saw that WITNESS also found that trying to force or direct the surfacing of video footage could be obstructed by the magnitude of media on the Internet. The Internet is repeatedly reinforced as a platform that aids in the dissemination of visual media, but media can as easily disappear within its grey zones.

Greenpeace NZ has a considerably larger domestic profile in comparison to local Greenpeace organizations in many other countries. The organization has a storied history protesting nuclear testing in the South Pacific and the sinking of the Greenpeace vessel, the *Rainbow Warrior* in 1985, was international news.<sup>94</sup> Generally however, Greenpeace NZ's campaigns are local in nature and often don't receive as much of a global profile as Greenpeace's actions in other areas of

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<sup>94</sup> The *Rainbow Warrior* was a Greenpeace ship that was intentionally bombed by French intelligence and subsequently sunk while in harbor in Auckland. One person was killed. For an introduction into the history of the ship, see: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow\\_Warrior\\_%281955%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rainbow_Warrior_%281955%29). Accessed 18 November 2014.

the world. New Zealand provides a freedom of expression that might not be available in other countries and thus offers an expandable terrain where creative practices are given license to experiment with video and media.<sup>95</sup> Despite this artistic freedom, other forms of limitations are present.

To contrast the work of Greenpeace NZ to that of Greenpeace UK and their scaling of ‘The Shard’ in July 2013, it is important to compare the ways in which Greenpeace NZ approached a corresponding political action at the Port of Taranaki in February 2012. The digital video and social media methods the organization utilized at that time offers insight into how Greenpeace NZ navigates their implementation of video practices within a New Zealand specific possibility space.

In February 2012, six Greenpeace New Zealand activists scaled the 174-foot drilling tower of the Liberia registered ship, the *Noble Discoverer*, which was docked at the Port of Taranaki with the intention of eventually navigating to the Arctic Ocean in order to commence exploratory oil drilling (Wilson 2012). One of the protestors was the high profile New Zealand actress, Lucy Lawless, who starred in the 1995-2001 internationally syndicated television series, *Xena: Warrior Princess* (Greenpeace UK 2012). The inclusion of Lucy Lawless as a protestor in this specific action gave it a global profile that it would not have had if there hadn’t been a celebrity as part of the protest team. Her presence magnetized many sectors of mainstream media that might not have expressed

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<sup>95</sup> In India, for example, laws have been put in place to keep tabs on how foreign funding of NGOs are used in order to potentially regulate the work of organizations that are seen as problematic to the government. In 2014, Greenpeace India found itself in a dilemma when reports were leaked that suggested their work had negative consequences on the Indian economy. See, <http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/06/12/greenpeace-and-other-advocates-fear-clampdown-after-leaked-report/>. Accessed 16 June 2014.

interest in an environmental advocacy action. In this instance, Greenpeace NZ rightly predicted that Lawless' inclusion in the protest would open up the action to other assemblages.

In the case of this action, the protestors stayed atop the derrick for four days until they were arrested. This prevented the ship from leaving port and thus delayed drilling. Greenpeace NZ outfitted the protestors with small Go-Pro cameras that attached to their climbing helmets. They also had smartphones with video capabilities but since they were on a drilling ship in the Port of Taranaki, they had no access to wireless networks and had to rely on the 3G wireless infrastructure of New Zealand cellular networks, which were not fast enough to permit constant live streaming. Instead, the protestors recorded short video clips that they sent to Greenpeace NZ headquarters, where a light edit might occur and then a short video would be uploaded to YouTube and placed on an accompanying social media live stream. In a sense, this corresponds to the network limitations of Video Volunteers. Both organizations confronted restrictions regarding their Internet connections in the field. However, Video Volunteers addressed these restraints through the creation of documentary narratives that integrated the collaborative creative vision of both community correspondents and the editorial insight of the organization itself. Whereas for Greenpeace NZ, they were much more inclined to send out raw footage and then frame and construct their narratives around lightly edited footage. For this action, their organizational strategy was to let the footage speak for itself; in essence, the truth would be 'self-evident.' Thus videos from the Taranaki protest would appear on YouTube and these videos would then be linked through Twitter, Facebook, global Greenpeace websites, blogs and social media accounts.

Basically, Greenpeace chapters around the world harnessed a vast mélange of multiple methods of online dissemination essential to garnering an audience. The organization's use of an assortment of media highlights the nature of the overlap between digital video practices, media created by organizations in the realm of social justice issues, the larger network of social media and mainstream press' continuous overarching presence and influence in regards to emerging digital video practices.

Although this New Zealand possibility space did not allow for continuous live streaming, Greenpeace NZ kept a Twitter account and other social media feeds going for the duration of the protest. Additionally, a number of video clips made their way to mainstream media, both through the social media linkages that Greenpeace, as a global organization maneuvered and also due to the celebrity presence of the actress, Lucy Lawless. For mainstream media, the story transformed into that of Xena the Warrior Princess protesting arctic oil drilling and this, in and of itself, became news. Unlike Video Volunteers, which relies on video to produce change, Greenpeace NZ and their global affiliates have a broader, well-established global strategy that is not solely reliant on video for their advocacy work.

Other considerations laid a framework for how Greenpeace NZ navigated video in regards to their protest on the *Noble Discoverer* drillship. Nick Young explained some of the hardware restrictions that emerged at the Port of Taranaki:

There was an issue with battery power because they had to climb the rig with everything they needed to stay there for three days. They did take some batteries and they had a solar panel and they were charging their equipment with a solar panel. But they also had to do a lot of phone calls. So the phones were running out of juice and it was really difficult to keep anything going continuously. So you know, we played around with it beforehand and we just decided that we wouldn't try and do a continuous

live feed because you know, that would have required us to have, you know, X amount more batteries and more weight and that sort of thing and we figured that doing a pseudo-live feed where we were using clips of video interspersed with still images and text updates would be just as good and in some ways better. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

The technical constraints did not inhibit video production, but merely forced the organization to adapt and re-think how they might approach their use of digital cameras. If we recall, similar limitations were also present in case studies examined in India and New York City. In India, many of the community correspondents in rural areas were confronted with problems accessing power connections and at times struggled to find a constant source of electricity to charge the batteries of their Flip Cams. In New York City, Tim Pool's Samsung Galaxy had an additional external battery that Pool carried around in a backpack. Notoriously, smartphone batteries have limited storage of electric charge and in Pool's case, the only way he could maintain his uninterrupted marathon live streams was to carry an extra large battery attached by a cord to his smartphone. At the Port of Taranaki action, the protestors were constrained, as they did not have the ability to access any sort of power outlet and had to rely on solar cells to recharge their phone and camera batteries. They did not have the informal network that supported Tim Pool's power needs during OWS. Even if Greenpeace NZ had decided to attempt live streaming, they would have encountered multiple roadblocks that would have further restricted their ability to publish live video feeds on the Internet.

Furthermore, all six of the Greenpeace protestors were engaged in an illegal occupation of private property. Therefore, online publishing of what can be construed as possible criminal activity becomes tricky as it has the potential to

backfire on protestors. Similar legal quandaries emerged throughout Tim Pool's live streaming practices. At times, Occupy Wall Street protestors resented the fact that Pool would record people's faces and even the slashing of police car tires. Pool was verbally and physically attacked on a number of occasions. In the case of Greenpeace NZ, the Port of Taranaki protestors trusted that the organization would analyze their video material before publishing it, so as to prevent the circulation of anything that might be legally detrimental. Discussing the arrests of the protestors afterwards, Young explained:

So you know you've got to be, they went to court after that and they were all charged with offenses and a variety of things. You have to be pretty careful with what you're putting on video and so, I mean that was one of the other considerations and we felt that it was probably a good idea to look at what came through and choose the bits that we wanted to put on camera and which bits we didn't. And some of it is just not that good. You know, when the camera is on your head and it's waving around you can get some pretty low quality stuff if you are doing a live feed. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

Here, Young is acutely aware of the quality of the video output. As the organization uses video to supplement a larger advocacy strategy, perhaps there is an acknowledgement that video standards must be aligned with the overall Greenpeace brand or conceivably Young believes in order to appeal to supporters the quality of video must be up to a certain standard? In the case of the Taranaki protest, the more engaging the footage provided a better chance for Lucy Lawless and her associated protestors to make the nightly news or a celebrity entertainment show in the United States.

With the Greenpeace NZ Port of Taranaki action, assemblages that emerge from the capturing of digital video footage and crafting these images into narrative structures are manifold. These relationships are both predictable yet unpredictable at the same time. Some parts territorialize, while other relationships



are more transient. Potentially, these videos might have their place in legal settings, providing evidence in a courtroom as to the impact of environmental devastation. Furthermore, Greenpeace NZ believes that bearing witness through visual imagery and then spreading that media as widely as possible also has the direct potential to harm the image of a company or even a government. Compared to Video Volunteers, which has a distinct grasp of local and national Indian laws, Greenpeace has an awareness of global legal regulatory regimes. The organization also has a sophisticated sense of what might be required to gain some global traction when it comes to an online audience swimming in an ocean of media. Discussing the importance of video in the context of public relations, Young made clear:

Often, as part of that communication there is an implied or a real perceived risk that the company's brand will be damaged by the fact that they now will be associated with something that's being shown to be something so obviously wrong and so obviously contrary to what people want or what people see is right or good or ethical. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

Through both video practices and multi-layered approaches to advocacy, Greenpeace NZ has the ability to produce and disseminate documentary narratives with potentially less repercussions than might be the case in other areas of the world. Young's assertion however, that viewers will interpret their videos in the way that Greenpeace NZ has intended is not necessarily as simple a notion as Young presumes. As discussed in earlier chapters, emerging forms of documentary media have often challenged truth claims and new forms of documentary film and video have championed their burgeoning methods of production as a greater representation of what is 'the truth.' Yet documentary media is always prone to individual interpretation. Both makers and viewers

approach storytelling from their own perspectives and naturally these vantage points color their relationship to the subjects and situations of documentary projects.

For Greenpeace NZ, the act of bearing witness is a responsibility. Greenpeace believes that meaningful witnessing and producing a documentary effect (in this case, putting documentation to political use) is necessary to give deliberate existence to an environmental problem, the decimation of an animal species, or the many other forms of environmental devastation that are prevalent throughout the globe. As Nick Young explained:

One of our core principles or one of our core tactics is bearing witness. There is a real power in bearing witness and there is, the whole Quaker tradition of bearing witness as an act of defiance is one of our sort of founding principals of Greenpeace and how we effect change in the world is that we bear witness to something and not just bear witness to it, obviously we also try and stop it. Sometimes you can't, but just being there to bear witness to something and capturing that and being able to show it to the whole world is an immensely powerful thing. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

The concept of bearing witness through video and visual imagery in order to record an event parallels similar beliefs of Video Volunteers. The community correspondents of Video Volunteers produce video reports in order to narrowcast them to the appropriate authorities in the hopes of sparking tangible changes within their communities. Yet their videos are also published online with the conviction that World Wide Web representation of communities with little Internet presence is in and of itself an act of defiance, a political act. Thus if Video Volunteers doesn't record and publish stories, who will? Greenpeace holds a similar belief. Bearing witness is a political act. If it is not recorded, these environmental infractions might never be documented and uncovered. As Young explains above, bearing witness is "an act of defiance." Many community

correspondents of Video Volunteers echoed this belief through similar metaphors – that to them, the camera was a sword or a weapon. And so although these organizations are hoping to create and bring palpable changes to their respective and numerous political and environmental issues, both organizations also believe that there is discernible visual resistance in the mere act of witnessing and disseminating digital video within the public sphere.

The possibility space of New Zealand is singular and shifting, yet at the same time does not exist. The digital video practices of Greenpeace NZ embrace each protest and specific cause with different methods and often through multiple creative approaches. Gas drilling in the Arctic, large-scale corporate commercial fishing or seabed mining off the west coast of New Zealand might all require certain techniques and delicate methods of media making. Possibility spaces throughout New Zealand are forming, modifying and dissolving. Greenpeace NZ produced digital video practices are very place and political agenda specific. The ways in which Greenpeace might approach video making or activism in other areas of the world can be very different. As well, the consequences of Greenpeace actions and documenting these protests can be extreme. For example, in September 2013, members of Greenpeace attempted to scale a Russian government controlled Gazprom oil platform in the Arctic Ocean, documenting their endeavor through video, social media and linkages to mainstream news (Vidal 2013). A number of activists aboard the Greenpeace vessel that launched the action were arrested and charged with piracy, although after international pressure, the piracy charges were dropped (Myers 2013). Eventually, all the charges against the protestors were dropped, though the majority of them were detained for more than two months (Associated Press 2013). In contrast, the

Greenpeace activists who occupied the *Noble Discoverer* in the Port of Taranaki were given much lighter treatment from New Zealand authorities than the activists in Russia. The Greenpeace NZ action received minimal news coverage in comparison to the protest in Russia, which became high profile world news for almost two months. However as we have seen, organizations like Greenpeace, Video Volunteers, WITNESS and even individual practitioners such as Tim Pool, Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye are well aware of how their videos might be interpreted within a court of law. Legal regulatory frameworks are beginning to seep into wider assemblages of digital video practices that surround human rights, social justice and protests movements. When I interviewed Nick Young, the Greenpeace Gazprom action had not yet occurred. Yet Young reflected on how Greenpeace NZ's work often contrasts to the approaches of Greenpeace in other areas of the world. Young told me:

And there is a culture here or there, an acceptance of protest and direct action that doesn't exist in other places, you know. Or it's not the same. Greenpeace also operates in Africa and in China and you know being Greenpeace in China is a totally different kettle of fish than it is in New Zealand. So they have a lot more constraints than we do, but also a lot more opportunity and a lot more, I guess in some ways, a lot more purpose. That's where the real environmental battles or the problems, the big problems are in places like China and India and Brazil and lots of places in Asia. (Nick Young, interview with author, 12 July 2013)

The footage that Greenpeace recorded in Russia during their Gazprom action was assembled in a number of ways, from clips used on mainstream news channels to the editing that Greenpeace used on their own website and other platforms on the Web, as well as integrating footage into larger documentary projects, such as in the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) series, *Journey to*

*Planet Earth*, narrated by the American actor, Matt Damon.<sup>96</sup> As we saw with the work of Tim Pool in New York City and Video Volunteers in India, many of these individuals and organizations felt it was necessary to document protests and political actions as a method of bearing witness and as a way to document. Although these various organizations and individuals often had numerous ideas as to the purpose and eventual use of their videography, their digital video practices evolved, developed and emerged over time as dynamic and living visual media.

The relationship of Greenpeace NZ's digital video practices with other forms of documentary content and social media are interconnected and evolving. Disseminating their work on both local and global scales confronts similar but also very different challenges than say the work of Greenpeace in the United Kingdom or Russia. Bearing witness is at the core of Greenpeace's mission, yet it is also ingrained throughout historic traditions of the documentary form. The creative approaches to digital tools, online platforms and methods of narrative used by Greenpeace NZ present evolving challenges that can be difficult to predict and complex to embrace. As we have seen, these sorts of challenges are not new to current forms of digital video. The nature of digital video tools and platforms for the distribution of these videos within New Zealand present immense possibilities, yet these potentialities require careful, deliberate and sustained experimentation in order for organizations like Greenpeace NZ to understand the best ways to engage with digital video. The assembling of the digital video practices of Greenpeace NZ has evolved over many years and

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<sup>96</sup> See this website for more information on the series: <http://www.pbs.org/journeytoplanetearth/>. The clip that includes Greenpeace footage can be found here, 'Extreme Realities: The Arctic Sunrise,' at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdZNYVpTc5c&feature>. Accessed 15 April 2014.

through multiple iterations of video technologies. Shifts in hardware, software, methods of distribution and audience consumption of visual content consistently highlights the importance of support structures and adaptability of creative approaches in order to continue to maintain sustainable video practices. Similar dynamics are seen across this dissertation as video practices assemble, disassemble and reassemble in and around possibility spaces centered on human rights, social justice, protest movements and even within creative and political actions throughout communities. Organizational knowledge is a key advantage for Greenpeace, WITNESS and to a lesser extent, Video Volunteers. Certainly, the global support network of Greenpeace strengthens and nourishes the wide-ranging creative video capacities of the organization.

### **7.3 - From Tim Pool to Linda M: Traversing Independent Protest Documentation**

The independent video work of Linda M. offers a meaningful contrast to the institutionalized video production of Greenpeace NZ and reinforces how limitations on the possibility space of New Zealand have the potential to set barriers that inform the ways in which digital video practices evolve. Linda M. (she preferred that her last name not be mentioned) is an activist in the protest organization, Socialist Aotearoa. Her video practice emerged out of the Occupy Auckland movement (an offshoot of the Occupy Wall Street movement) of late 2011.

Linda M. runs a YouTube channel called, ActioNZMedia, which as of the middle of 2014 seemed to be rarely used or defunct.<sup>97</sup> However when I interviewed Linda in July 2013, she was uploading multiple clips of protests in and around Auckland a number of times a month. Linda, born in the United States but living in New Zealand for over a decade, seemed to be one of the most prolific videographers during the Occupy Auckland protests and within other protest movements that Socialist Aotearoa was connected to since the dissolution of the Occupy encampment in Aotea Square in downtown Auckland. Occupy Auckland was a flickering part of the New Zealand context fuelled by a sense of political urgency that was prompted by global catalysts. As we will see, when the Occupy movement subsided, associated video practices weakened. As such, not only did the Occupy movement galvanize Linda's linkages with Auckland based protest movements, but her video practice emerged from both Auckland based events and a discernible consciousness of the mobile phone video recording happening in the United States, specifically in California where Linda lived before emigrating to New Zealand. She recalled how the video documentation of the shooting of Oscar Grant at the Fruitvale BART station in Oakland had a profound impact on her relationship with the mobile video tools that she owned.<sup>98</sup>

Explaining, Linda told me:

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<sup>97</sup> During the height of the Occupy Auckland protest movement and up until the end of 2013, Linda's YouTube channel had hundreds of videos that she had uploaded from multiple protest movements and political actions in and around Auckland, all associated with Socialist Aotearoa. Her YouTube channel, which is still public, yet contains little content, can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/user/ActioNZMedia>. Accessed 17 April 2014.

<sup>98</sup> Oscar Grant was shot by BART police officer, Johannes Mehserle, on New Year's Day of 2009. His murder was recorded by a number of witnesses at the station with their mobile phone cameras. The wikipedia page about the Oscar Grant shooting is a good introduction to the issue. See:

I know California. And it woke me up. I just woke, you know, I just woke up with a start. And I looked at this phone and it could have been me. And if I had shot that and put that on YouTube, I might have made a difference. I might have changed something. I might have changed somebody else on the other side of the world. They might see something that I've done and then they might wake up and after that, I knew that I was a documentarist. And I stopped editing them heavily, I just started editing in the camera. (Linda M., interview with author, 11 July 2013)

Although Linda defines herself as a “documentarist,” her recordings were more aligned with unedited video documentation than the construction of a documentary narrative. Hence, her visual documentation is more reminiscent of the work of Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye than that of the community correspondents of Video Volunteers. Linda began documenting protests in Auckland with her Samsung Galaxy camera, the same one that Tim Pool was using on the other side of the world at the Occupy Wall Street protests in Manhattan. The speed of New Zealand wireless 3G phone networks was not conducive for seamless live streaming, so Linda would record and then head home later in the day and upload the footage to her YouTube channel. Linda and a number of other videographers documenting Auckland based protest movements attempted live streaming but the footage was consistently unusable, unwatchable, splotchy and choppy. Linda and her few colleagues abandoned their attempts to live stream and instead relied on recording and then uploading afterwards.

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BART\\_Police\\_shooting\\_of\\_Oscar\\_Grant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BART_Police_shooting_of_Oscar_Grant). Accessed April 17, 2014. Furthermore, the story of the last day of his life was turned into a fiction film in late 2013, *Fruitvale Station*, directed by Ryan Coogler. *The New York Times* review of the film can be read at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/30/movies/a-bay-area-killing-inspires-fruitvale-station.html?pagewanted=all>. Accessed 17 April 2014. Additionally, see the fourth chapter of this dissertation for further discussion of the documentation of Oscar Grant's killing.



In due time, Linda developed a rapport with the police officers that would be assigned to the protests and she would move within the action in order to document the protests from a reliable vantage point. She described her technique, “Part of my strategy is, my tactic is I’m always in the action, always actually in the action. And so I’ll be at the front. Sometimes I’ll actually be behind the police and they know this about me and they speak to me about this, but we kind of have an understanding” (Linda M., interview with author, 11 July 2013).

After uploading her recorded protest footage to YouTube, Linda would often reach out to her contacts at Auckland based news agencies. Although Linda was recording in a more isolated fashion than Pool, her videos were also used for the online public relations campaigns of these protest movements. Linda and her colleagues at Socialist Aotearoa believed that if people searched for recent Auckland based protests on YouTube and could view footage of over-aggressive police officers, the footage might have the potential to sway an audience or at least allow viewers the ability to understand the vantage point of the protestors. Yet contrasting that, if Linda’s footage demonstrated that protestors had been violent, conversely it might work against them. Yet since Linda was not live streaming, she could make conscious after-the-fact decisions from the comfort of her home as to which footage she wanted to upload and what footage would be kept private. Although she mentions that her editing was restricted to in-camera corrections, her technique of reviewing footage at home and then uploading might have offered her a minimal sense of distance from her footage, thus allowing more time to think about editing decisions and clip selection. Because of her inability to live stream, Linda’s workflow was quite different from Tim Pool’s process.

Unlike Occupy Wall Street, which made worldwide headlines for a number of months in late 2011, the relatively small global profile of the New Zealand based Occupy movement and the protests that spawned from that movement received meager international press. As Tim Pool became the global face of the new, smartphone armed citizen protestor and citizen journalist, the work of Linda M. only became known to those who looked for the work she produced or those who by chance stumbled upon it. Even then, her identity was never made public as she rarely appeared on camera, preferring to stay behind the scenes. As she recalled:

So it's not about individual heroics, so it can't be about me. And I'm sure Tim Pool wouldn't want this but it may have been for a while about Tim Pool. Some of these people were legendary figures. Well that's actually not how we should work it, alright. We're not trying to create, celebrity culture is actually destroying society, it's not helping society [...] That's why you use this and I don't use a fancy, you know, two thousand dollar camera and stuff like that, although that would have been nice and it would have gotten me out of some squeaks. (Linda M., interview with author, 11 July 2013)

Linda M. is an activist first and a videographer second. Her video practice was never about becoming a character in her videos or the face of a movement, it came from her belief that if she didn't record these protests no one would. Linda's footage, she came to realize, had the potential to be influential within a number of circumstances (from the criminal justice system to public relations campaigns to inspiration for the protestors themselves). Linda also began to cultivate a community of practitioners in and around these protest movements, so that multiple cameras could be present to document these political actions. As she explained:

I'm actually working with people trying to encourage them to use their footage and now their footage is taking over from mine, you see. So now

where I was one and if anything happens to me or I drop my camera, that's the entire record of the event destroyed, gone. Now there are five, there might be five and soon there will be ten. (Linda M., interview with author, 11 July 2013)

Inconsistencies arise in Linda's faith in the perceived power of the video camera. At once, she states that she is encouraging individuals to utilize their footage, but then qualifies this statement as being the mere importance of the presence of the camera to record, not necessarily the process of cultivating an argument with footage. The Auckland possibility space in which Linda's practice developed presented certain restrictions on approaches to documenting protest movements and Occupy Auckland's relatively low profile hampered the global dissemination of her videos. Although Linda navigated these dilemmas as best she could, she still expressed frustration with the mobile video software she used, desiring integrated mobile phone video software that would allow her to tag and mark key moments while recording in real time. She explained, "But if I'm doing a 10-15 minute thing, I've got to actually edit the whole bloody thing. [...] Then there could be software, which will go through, and recognize the markers and tags and will be able to quickly get the guff out. Cause right now, we're so busy, we're so hard pressed, we just can't edit anything at all," (Linda M., interview with author, 11 July 2013). Although much sought after developments in both hardware and software tools might provide practitioners with editing short cuts, online documentary video practices must juggle the mammoth task of digital production and disseminating work via social media and interested networks in order to remain sustainable.

Linda's videos from the Occupy Auckland movement and the work that she did in the years after the dissolution of the Occupy movement presents one

case study of a citizen who harnessed their mobile phone video camera to document protest movements that they were personally linked through activist networks. It should be noted that Linda had a background in filmmaking before she began, owning a small start-up film company many years prior. Although she embraced a growing consciousness of her relationship with her mobile video tools, there was still a boundary between video documentation and the crafting of a documentary narrative that limited and stalled her practice. As we have seen throughout this dissertation, there doesn't appear to be any direct connection between the proliferation of accessible digital video hardware, editing software and online platforms for dissemination and the creation of new documentary narratives. Certainly, a few case studies have illuminated situations in which citizens and organizations *are making and experimenting with forms of documentary as they have been known*, however the establishment of documentary narratives seems to be stunted by the ability of citizens to easily document and upload footage, as well as via a variety of other factors.

At the time of writing this dissertation, Linda's video practice seems to be on hiatus and rarely updated. All the videos that were once archived on her YouTube page have long been removed. Linda's video practice mirrors many others throughout the globe. At one moment in time, her work showed much promise, yet now has dissipated, having become unsustainable in the long term. How might her once and momentarily flourishing video practice have been defined? When I interviewed her at the height of her video practice, Linda had her own view of her work. At that time, she reflected:

I might shoot a hundred hours of something and it won't be worth anything and it's just a record and maybe nobody will ever watch it, maybe a hundred people, two hundred people. But then that one moment when I'm there and it's going off, that is what you live for. And if that's

not journalism, I don't know what is. You know, just because I didn't get a degree in journalism and I don't work for a major corporation, am I not doing journalism? Is this, you know, no it's journalism and people are going to have to accept that. (Linda M., interview with author, 11 July 2013)

Many questions remain. In what ways might have Linda's practice evolved or assembled if she had been linked to an organization with stronger traditions of bearing witness, such as Greenpeace NZ? Would her work have become a more collaborative effort, evolving from video documentation into more traditional modes of documentary production and narrative storytelling? In preceding chapters, we have seen organizational structures that nurture these video practices also help to maintain and sustain these practices. Yet are current shifting assemblages of digital online video practices too unstable and complex for independent media makers to cultivate their own sustainable video practices? From the current limited use of Linda M.'s YouTube page, it is clear that these assemblages are volatile and that it is incredibly difficult to predict the ways in which they may or may not evolve in the long term. Her reliance on the technology neglected the larger assemblage and subsequently impacted the sustainability of her practice.

#### **7.4 - Cultivating Filmmaking Amongst Youth: Explorations Bringing Film into New Zealand Communities**

As we have seen in previous chapters, the cultivation of citizen centered documentary video practices can be quite difficult to sustain. Organizations such as Greenpeace NZ and Video Volunteers are continuously analyzing the ways in which they approach creative video production and methods of distribution. In regards to independent media makers, individuals like Linda M. are more

common than people like Tim Pool, whose live streaming practice transitioned into a career in documentary media production. His work is the exception. Although most organizations comprehend the complexities involved in the relationships between elements that are critical to the nourishing of citizen video, some organizations still subscribe to the unproven optimism of technological determinism. As Michael Newman (2014, p. ix) explains, sheer insistence that technology provides a solution tends to:

[...] describe a quasi-religious faith in electronic technology as an impetus to societal improvement, a great benefit to humanity pointing the way to a future free from the problems of the past and present. In its many iterations, this utopian rhetoric repeatedly returns to the idea of revolution.

Despite evidence that video technology alone does not have the ability to produce new forms of documentary storytelling, some individuals and organizations dismiss the importance of the complexities required to support and maintain nascent forms of citizen based video practices. This section examines the work of Inspiring Stories and analyzes how it struggles to spark and maintain sustainable youth video practices throughout New Zealand.

Inspiring Stories is an organization attempting to trigger interest in filmmaking, specifically documentary filmmaking, amongst youth throughout cities and towns of New Zealand. It is important to note that the organization has a very different set of goals than those found in the practices discussed earlier in this dissertation. Inspiring Stories is not motivated by human rights, protest movements or issues of social justice. But in a small sense, they are comparable with the broader ‘training’ agenda and intention to cultivate a community of media makers that can also be found in the work of WITNESS and Video Volunteers.

Inspiring Stories, which is a New Zealand registered charitable trust, was started in 2010 by the Wellington based filmmaker, Guy Ryan. In 2009, Ryan directed *Carving the Future*, a documentary film that profiled four young New Zealanders who were inspired to take action in their communities and address climate change. Ryan's film went on to win a number of awards at small environmental film festivals, yet what took Ryan by surprise were the conversations that ensued after screenings of the film. On a whim, he applied for the Vodafone World of Difference scholarship, which offered seed funding for New Zealanders, "to head a youth focused project of your choice for a year" (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012). From this funding, Inspiring Stories was birthed with, as Ryan explained to me, "a vision to harness the power of storytelling for a better world and one of the ways I knew how to do that was through filmmaking" (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012).

In 2011, the first year that Inspiring Stories implemented their initial curriculum, the organization had two distinct layers of programming. Firstly, the organization conducted two-day youth filmmaking workshops throughout most regions of New Zealand. These workshops focused on getting students to identify a local changemaker in their own communities and encouraged them to go out and make a short film on that individual, in essence, to craft "an inspiring story." The organization's focus on youth was reinforced by an inherent belief that providing minimal guidance to an adolescent population might spark a generation of young filmmakers. This conviction involved a faith in the revolutionary potential of video filmmaking itself (and the widespread diffusion of associated technologies), rather than beginning with a concentration on a particular form of political activism. Yet Inspiring Stories lacked a sustainable vision and because

of a deficient long-term model, the organization failed to develop programming that could encourage the cultivation of enduring goals. In their initial year, the workshops accepted participants who varied in age from thirteen to twenty-six. These participants came from high schools, local universities and polytechnic institutions. The second part of that initial year's programming involved a national film competition for youth. This competition spawned off from the youth workshops (which in the first year connected with approximately 150 participants). Yet in that first year, the competition received only thirteen entries out of 150 workshop participants, which came to be somewhat of a letdown for the Inspiring Stories' team. As Ryan told me:

The quality was mediocre. You know, it was often first time filmmakers and we had an award ceremony and it was a great learning curve and a couple of the films that came in were really cool, but you've got to respect that. Whilst I had a tertiary education around high-end filmmaking, I think my expectations; these were going to be Hollywood standard entries! And they weren't, so that was a bit, a bit soul shattering for me initially. So I soon came to grips with it, okay you got to start somewhere. (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012)

Ryan's comments express his frustration in regards to the quality of the films that came out of that first year of workshops. Yet the fact that there were only thirteen entries shows that even with an initial catalyst, a much longer investment in time and training is required in order to nurture sustainable video practices that are rooted in citizen produced documentary media. A two-day workshop might infuse an excitement within the participants, but it does not offer a long-term foundation in filmmaking. Furthermore, the Inspiring Stories model is quite different than those from other chapters. In the previous chapter, we saw that even though Video Volunteers conducts twelve-day workshops, they still must consistently follow up and support their community correspondents.



Furthermore, the goal of Video Volunteers is also tied to activism and their wider selection process identifies individuals who are already invested in the social problems that occur in their communities. As such, linking video production skills to activists who are already inspired to make change provides an alternative tool that aligns storytelling and activism. Individuals engaged with Video Volunteers seem to have a much stronger investment to both the cause and the craft than the young people who have signed up for an Inspiring Stories workshop. Since its inception, Inspiring Stories has only conducted minimal follow up and offers almost non-existent ongoing support to the beneficiaries of its workshops. Young New Zealanders would have to contact Inspiring Stories themselves in order to implement a dialogue throughout their creative process as the charitable trust does little pro-active outreach after each workshop concludes.

Upon reflection as to their approaches to their first year of workshops, Inspiring Stories began their second year with a slightly different workshop model. In the initial year, Ryan himself was the only facilitator and in year two, the organization brought in Lu Davidson, who had studied with Ryan at the University of Otago in their Postgraduate Diploma in Natural History Filmmaking and Communication program. Ryan told me that he believed a gender balance present in the make up of the facilitation faculty was a vital dynamic that had not been present in the first year. The organization also decided to narrow their focus and in the follow-up year worked solely with secondary school students. Similarly as in the first year, creative industry speakers from each community continued to come in and talk to students. Finally, a major readjustment included scaling down two-day workshops into one-day workshops. In the first year of the

program, the organization trained 150 young people and in the second year, 300 youngsters were trained through Inspiring Stories workshops.

In the second year, the organization strived to make the film competition more high profile than it had initially been in the hope of attracting more entries, as well as stronger quality entries. They also introduced a number of local screenings in which the organization could present films produced for the Inspiring Stories national film competition, as well as other films from more established documentary makers (such as Ryan's film, *Carving the Future*), screening them for a koha (monetary donation) in communities throughout the North and South Island. Describing the multi-layered expansion of Inspiring Stories, Ryan notes:

And that model of workshops, that built capability, competition, which provides incentive for people to test out their skills, enter a film and then a distribution model around grassroots community engagement and screenings. It's really self reinforcing, has had fantastic results and in terms of engagement, we've reached three times as many people as we reached last year on about the same resource. (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012)

However, Ryan's sense that the Inspiring Stories model becomes "self reinforcing" is somewhat refuted by the lack of interest in the film competition and minimal expansion of the workshops. Although Inspiring Stories increased the number of workshop locations, the length of each workshop was reduced, curtailing the amount of time devoted to each community. Faith in the technology seemed to usurp the essential need to cultivate filmmaking skills and each workshop was streamlined from two days to one in order to prioritize more locations over the depth of the trainings.

At the beginning of the third year of workshops, I attended an Inspiring Stories screening in the town of Raglan in May 2013 and I sensed that although a

number of films that had been created by Inspiring Stories alumni were screened, the majority of the films that stood out were not that of alumni but were, in fact, the work of professional filmmakers (including Ryan's *Carving the Future*). Davidson, the Digital Storytelling Workshop Project Coordinator/Facilitator, along with Komako Silver, a Digital Storytelling Facilitator and Inspiring Stories alumni, were the hosts for the evening's screening that I attended. The following day I interviewed them about their experience as facilitators and the two of them had slightly conflicting viewpoints on the Inspiring Stories model. In an interview I conducted with Davidson the morning after the screening, she told me:

Well just in a nutshell, if it wasn't for the behind-the-scenes stories at the screenings, most people, if it wasn't for people knowing about how the film was made, that it was on a cell phone and it still won the competition, a lot of the time, it's the audience that has the assumption, that to be a short film it has to be on a slick camera, slick editing, perfect quality, because that's, in New Zealand the only types of films we really watch are pretty sweet quality and maybe on a tight budget, because it's New Zealand and not blockbuster, but to break down that expectation and go, "Hey Guys, look at these, not so polished and not so slick but still amazing stories that make you feel something." (Lu Davidson, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

Davidson's comment acknowledges the difficulties that can emerge in terms of the kinds of audience responses that might be anticipated. In New Zealand, an expectation might exist for high quality camera work and cinematography, whereas within the Video Volunteers setting, the publication of a community correspondent's story is celebrated in and of itself. Although Video Volunteers is conscious of the aesthetics of their output, they are most concerned with the narrative framework they present and the further dissemination of their videos. Silver had a more direct critique of the Inspiring Stories' teaching approach. In an interview I conducted that same morning she told me:

I think the interesting thing with those screenings is that they are quite, um, like cutesy. They are a little bit like we tell a story and they're very sort of, we make it very personalized and intimate. Like as if we were just hanging out at one of our houses and we're just jamming, we're just talking to a good group of friends. I think some people vibe off of it and they think, "Oh, this is awesome," and they connect with the story and us and what we're about. But I think a lot of other people, maybe more like the older generation thinks it's a little bit too cutesy. (Komako Silver, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

In my conversation with Silver, she wasn't exactly opposed to the way that Inspiring Stories approached their film screenings, she was simply a lot more self-reflective rather than unconditionally positive that these screenings and even the workshops themselves had the types of transcendental qualities that Ryan and Davidson, as natural advocates and leaders of the organization seemed to believe. Further reflecting on the screenings, Davidson had a different take on the assumptions about the aesthetic quality of material:

Breaking down that expectation, I hope will encourage them to go back and if they ever hear someone who wants to make a film and they are complaining that they only have a cell phone or something and go, "No way man, I saw this amazing film and it was all on a cell phone." And getting the audiences to demand change so that the filmmakers maybe feel a little bit more liberated and encouraged to just give it a go and that it doesn't matter necessarily about quality first, it's, yeah... That's kind of a biased audience when it judges you by the way you look. And that, we don't encourage that in New Zealand as much as we can. So it's kind of sweet, that is a new wave kicking off. Um, or you can wear your grandma's jumper and not feel like you're underdressed. But yeah, that's probably the only other thing I could think of that I've started to realize now is yeah, people come to a film screening, they get some slick stuff and then to mix it in with some not so slick, yet sweet background stuff. (Lu Davidson, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

Davidson's point elucidates the organization's attempt to change the sense of possibilities, perhaps lower the threshold and expectations of audiences, in the hope that video practices would flourish on their own. Certainly the screenings I

attended exhibited a wide range of films with various qualities, though often the rhetoric of Inspiring Stories was infused with this naïve sense that technology such as cell phone cameras allowed young people to make both connections and inspiring films with an ease like never before. In contrast, Silver, who again wasn't absolutely critical of the organization, just highly self-reflective of the way it approached screenings and workshops concluded her thoughts on the screening process during our interview by saying:

So we can come across a little bit like we are trying to convince you guys of something, when we've asked you along to a film screening. But I don't really think that's our intention. I think it's just the way that Inspiring Stories is, um yeah. The way that we've sort of decided to run things and whether they want to change or not, I don't know. (Komako Silver, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

Silver's thoughts acknowledge that the organization's approach wasn't serving as a strong enough catalyst. They were still searching for an organizational strategy that would be effective and sustainable in a localized context. The Inspiring Stories' film screening and then subsequent workshop I attended was at the start of its third year of programming. The organization had again made a number of changes for 2013. They had decided to conduct simultaneous film workshops in both the North and South Island and this meant that they had hired multiple facilitators to conduct youth workshops for the months of May and June 2013. As in 2012, the workshops were still one-day affairs and the screenings occurred wherever the organization could find a suitable publicly accessible space to gather an audience (town halls, community centers, etc). Most prominently, the organization had expanded beyond filmmaking and was in the process of organizing a conference on youth social entrepreneurship called *Festival for the Future*, which would be held at the

Museum of New Zealand, Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington. This growth in programming seemed to signal a shift from the charitable trust's exclusive focus on training young people intent on making documentaries about local changemakers to a parallel festival that celebrated Kiwi innovation (workshops, guest speakers and entertainment). This transference of programming seemed to mesh a little more easily with government and corporate emphasis (and funding for) linkages between innovative thinking and digital technologies.

Yet returning to the core filmmaking values of Inspiring Stories, a number of contradictions arose as to what specific definition of documentary or type of film structure the organization espoused to the young people who attended their workshops. These conflicts surfaced during the course of my interviews and observation. My interview with Lu Davidson reveals the inconsistencies that are omnipresent as the relationships between digital video technologies, fuse, clash and challenge traditions of the documentary form. As Davidson explained:

We ask at every workshop, has anyone ever made a film where there, where it's just on your camera and then uploaded to YouTube and it's usually about a quarter on average. Some places no one has done it, but then you re-explain what making the film means and they're like, "Oh yeah, I've done that." It's just capturing something and sharing it, so not as many, but by the end of it, they're not as afraid, usually they say it's because, oh it just seems too daunting, too big, I can't do that and we show that you can do it with a cell phone and free editing software, if you can access a school computer or something or showing them that all computers have like a free editing thing. (Lu Davidson, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

Here we see inconsistencies arise as to the ways in which Inspiring Stories situates their approaches to cultivating youth documentary filmmaking networks. At one end of the spectrum, they seem to reinforce to their students that a film is "just capturing something and sharing it," and on the other hand they are insistent

that they want better quality output from the students who attend their workshops. Inspiring Stories' intention is to help students transcend the barrier of merely capturing and uploading footage and instead beginning to teach them skills so that they can take video in order to craft narratives that elicit meaning for themselves and for others. Inspiring Stories encounters difficulties with their short one-day workshop structure, as it does not provide participants with the necessary training time to begin to understand the many elements and variables critical to crafting short documentary films. Observing an Inspiring Stories one-day workshop, one thing I noticed is that they don't actually make a film.<sup>99</sup> The steps might be presented, but the hands on experience of recording and editing even a thirty second short film does not happen and thus the physicality of the process remains distant. This fact, that an edited video is not produced over the duration of a full day's workshop, cements the difficulty in producing documentary content even with the expansion of citizen video tools. Essentially, making documentary films takes time, energy and commitment. And as we have encountered throughout this dissertation, assembling digital video practices relies on numerous elements.

There is no doubt that Inspiring Stories attempts to cultivate creativity that more closely resembles the documentary form, yet when students ask what a film is, the facilitators themselves seem to continually struggle to clarify what delineates a narrative of moving imagery from that of a video document.

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<sup>99</sup> I should mention that The Outlook for Someday (another New Zealand film workshop program for youth) does produce a short 30-second film over the course of a one-day training. I sat in on their Hamilton workshop and the fact that a short video was produced in this workshop but not in an Inspiring Stories workshop was the starkest contrast between the two trainings. Personally, I found the excitement seen in the young people who attended The Outlook for Someday training much more energetic than in the Inspiring Stories training. I attribute that to their production of a completed video, which formed the conclusion and also the highlight of the day, a small screening for the students.

Defining one's own idea of documentary is not necessarily a critical requirement (many of the case studies in this dissertation fluctuate between multiple ideas of documentary and others don't fit within established definitions of what documentary is). Yet Davidson's explanation as to why a short film is not crafted during the workshop (even a minimal thirty second piece similar in length and style to those crafted in The Outlook for Someday's workshops) is a reminder that even with the support of an organizational structure, the leap from being a citizen who owns a video camera to becoming a citizen who uses that video camera to make a documentary film remains a fragile and frustrating exercise. Crafting a documentary draws upon a degree of skill necessary for storytelling and requires the ability to use specific sets of technologies toward meaningful ends. As Davidson told me, "Yeah for sure, um, a lot of the question is, 'Are we going to make a movie today?' And it's like, oh, you're going to make pieces of one and then by the end of the day they realize why it's near impossible to make a movie in a day" (Lu Davidson, interview with author, 19 May 2013). Thus for Inspiring Stories, mobile video tools hint at accessibility and ease, yet on the other hand the organization admits that creating a film is a difficult task.

Inspiring Stories at once envisions documentary media to be easily crafted, fuelled by accessible technologies and linkages to infrastructure that theoretically could be an impetus for many citizens to create documentary narratives, yet subtly the organization acknowledges the difficulties. The charitable trust sees itself as an incubator for possibilities present in the connections between video tools and youth. As Guy Ryan explained:

I don't think we're trying to set up a network per se, you know, I don't think we have the resource or capacity as an organization to service the network well. You know if, I think our role is being a catalyst, sparking connections and providing a platform where these connections happen



locally. So young filmmakers connect with each other, they connect with local industry mentors, they connect with, you know, other creative professionals and people doing stuff in the community. And then from there it's organic. They can develop it or reconnect as they like. (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012)

Over three years of workshops, screenings and festivals, Inspiring Stories has continually re-worked and re-framed the way they approach their youth outreach. In 2014 they again readjusted their training model, offering youth organizations, community centers and media studies teachers the ability to hire a day-long Inspiring Stories workshop from early May until late June 2014. The organization charged approximately 1000 New Zealand Dollars (NZD) for each workshop.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, the 2014 Inspiring Stories Film Competition has submission fees that range from 20-50 NZD. As such, the charitable trust seems to be shifting the ways in which it is trying to generate income. No longer do they offer free entry into their film festival and relatively cheap workshop fees. Subsequently, their approach to youth and film re-forms as the organization seeks to try and get a better grip on the sustainability and reach of their filmmaking workshops. Furthermore, it seems as if Inspiring Stories is still trying to figure out their identity as an organization. When I asked Guy Ryan whether or not he thought that digital media, storytelling and youth had reached its potential in New Zealand, he responded with a defiant, "No." Why, I asked? Ryan replied:

Well technology is changing all the time, the processes that we use to play with this technology and the purpose in which we use it for. So actually using storytelling and technology as a tool to bring people together around ideas, around what's possible, around celebrating kiwi innovation, around a new, you know, new tools for community engagement and voices of

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<sup>100</sup> See the '2014 Inspiring Stories Info Pack / Filmmaking Workshops for High School & Youth Orgs' here: [www.inspiringstories.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014Workshopsinfopack\\_updatedMarch2014.pdf](http://www.inspiringstories.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/2014Workshopsinfopack_updatedMarch2014.pdf) Accessed 6 April 2014.

people and projects in community, that's new stuff, that new stuff that in New Zealand hasn't happened before, you know. Um, one hand, well the entire world has come from a mainstream media context, which has been owned by a handful of people who own the biggest media corporations in the world and that's becoming more distributed. Everyday people have never been as empowered as they are now to create and seek their own new media without just getting broadcast this stuff on commercial television, which is, I won't go into it. You know, so the landscape, the media landscape is changing. (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012)

Ryan's comments reflect the aspirations engendered in the rhetoric that surrounds new technologies, yet his thoughts also assume that producing brief gatherings (such as workshops and conferences) have the ability to stimulate empowerment. Certainly, the multi-pronged work of Inspiring Stories has the potential to initiate creative ideas and interest in storytelling, digital video technologies and local New Zealand based innovation, yet lacking is the recognition that to nurture these practices and ideas and potential, requires a concerted and long term effort that far exceeds a high profile festival or brief day-long workshop. Assemblages take time to cultivate and rely on long-term support structures in order to remain sustainable. As we have seen in previous chapters, citizen empowerment and digital media are embroiled in a tricky relationship that often disguises the subliminal connections swirling around the edges. The incubation of sustainable practices requires an enduring and malleable commitment. As Michael Newman (2014, p. x) writes:

Revolution talk also functions to shift interest from the objectives of powerful institutions and individuals, who benefit from the commercial fortunes of media and electronics, to the people whose interests are supposedly to be served by technological improvement, and whose participation in technological innovation as enthusiastic consumers is often necessary to satisfy the objectives of corporations and states. Revolution talk bathes media and technology in a glow of optimistic

promise and thrill, but it is typically devoid of authentic critical perspective and historical understanding.

The consistent rhetoric that video technology itself is the answer for young people to craft documentary narratives disregards the importance of creating a robust training workshop for youth that has the longevity to last for many years. Though there are still many films available on the Inspiring Stories' Vimeo page, as of October 2014, the annual competition is now linked to the *Festival for the Future* and the organization has transitioned more toward youth innovation, social entrepreneurship and enterprise, rather than filmmaking. The organization's resources are spread across multiple initiatives and subsequently elements that support the Inspiring Stories workshop series are spread thin. When I spoke with Guy Ryan, he seemed to think that the boundaries in New Zealand that might at one time have stymied the work of youth filmmakers had fallen. He remarked:

Technology and equipment has never been more accessible. So many schools, especially media studies classes in New Zealand are kitted out with cameras. They're kitted out with editing software capability. You know, people can make a film on their mobile phone. So in terms of access to technology, the ability for young people to share perspectives and their stories about things that matter to them has never been easier. And our ability to share that stuff through platforms like YouTube and Vimeo or you know, technology and grassroots community screenings has never been easier. (Guy Ryan, interview with author, 4 December 2012)

Again throughout my interviews, the organization seemed to privilege access to video technology over the facilitation of teaching skills and long-term backing. Their efforts were minimal when it came to identifying ways to harness human capital and to commit to long-term relationships that might foster particular kinds of activism and innovative, sustainable methods of video making. Relatively inexpensive video projectors, DSLR cameras and computer technology had allowed for their programming to be more mobile and accessible to different

communities throughout New Zealand. However, the economic realities for many segments of the New Zealand population aren't conducive for equal accessibility to the technology Ryan espouses. Komako Silver, who had been an Inspiring Stories' participant and led workshops throughout the 2012 road trip, had a contrasting view on the availability of the technology. Her reflections on the process took into account a variety of New Zealand situations. She wondered, if in fact, many New Zealanders could access this technology. She explained:

I think one of the things is if we are trying to encourage young people to like, tell stories, if that is the most important thing and we're trying to combine that with technology that is around today, that is not going to be accessible to a lot of minority communities. Like they might have a phone, they might have a camera but they won't have a laptop or an editing suite software. Like how do we find ways to, yeah, to really support those people who have captured this awesome film on their phone or like, use the camera, but how do we get their story out? That's what I'm interested in trying to figure out. Like I'd sort of be interested in trying to help people like that. (Komako Silver, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

It is not the technology itself that is the catalyst for the surfacing of digital video practices emerging in places like New Zealand, but the experiments and concerted efforts of, in this case, a community organization attempting to support youth documentary filmmaking. Yet in the long run, what sustains video practices that might be introduced at a workshop? Maybe it is the further engagement with the textuality of the medium itself, citizen media makers absorbing the possibilities of these video tools but then crucially embracing the medium of documentary video production as a form of expression through a concerted effort to continue to create and push their own unique limits of artistry. Perhaps it is also the more intangible elements such as a commitment to a filmmaking agenda, the desire to learn new skills, a sense of creative or political

urgency within the local, regional and national context. Yet Inspiring Stories teaches a singular method of video production that might be embraced by many, but certainly not by everyone. The organization does not adjust their workshops to different segments of the population. Subsequently, their assemblage is not adaptable in the ways that would allow for it to absorb shifts in culture, technology, infrastructure, terrains and support systems. Silver believes that Inspiring Stories could do much more to adapt their workshop trainings to the different ways of seeing the world that certain New Zealand communities and cultures might connect with. As she very passionately told me:

And I mean, it's hard because Inspiring Stories is sort of, it's whole kaupapa is like not to sort of go, "Okay, we're going into a school, all of the students are going to be Maori students." We don't tailor the workshop just because they are Maori students. Inspiring Stories looks at it more like, we're going into a rural community or we are going into like the city school or whatever and there is no sort of like trying to tailor it to different cultures. [...] So we teach, our format of teaching storytelling is through classical narrative and for me, I just feel like if we want to get some really interesting, powerful, diverse stories, we need to teach them different ways of telling a story through a different perspective, through different theories, through different cultures, not just classical narrative stories and then teaching the same format to every single, sort of group of people that we come across. We need to like, within the workshop teach them fourth cinema, teach them about third cinema and teach them about second cinema, first cinema and show them all the different ways of telling a story and I think that's a massive thing that could be changed.<sup>101</sup> Otherwise, that's the thing, with like a lot of the films we get, they are all real similar and they have this vibe that I think is because we don't show them a massive spectrum about how to tell a story. We just sort of show

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<sup>101</sup> Cultural identity outside the framework of traditional Hollywood and mainstream cinema are central to concepts of third and fourth cinema movements. A comprehensive exploration of third cinema can be found in *Questions of Third Cinema*, edited by Jim Pines & Paul Willemsen, and throughout *Rethinking Third Cinema*, edited by Anthony R. Guneratne & Wimal Dissanayake. For a wider discussion of fourth cinema, Stuart Murray's *Images of Dignity: Barry Barclay and Fourth Cinema*, is a good beginning.

them this like, Inspiring Stories thing, you know. (Komako Silver, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

Silver's reflection is a reminder that Inspiring Stories does not focus on a politicized kind of filmmaking and that there doesn't seem to be much effort within the organization to connect to longer, established forms of New Zealand activism that have integrated lens based media into their campaigns or documentation.<sup>102</sup> Critically embedded within local New Zealand communities are complex cultural factors that the organization seems to ignore as they take their one-day workshops to urban and rural communities throughout the country. Silver's point mirrors dilemmas that organizations like Video Volunteers in India are also confronting. When you train people to produce documentary media in one manner, with one sort of sensibility, how do you then get these nascent media makers to also embrace the potential to think outside the box and develop digital video practices that might challenge traditions of the documentary form? Furthermore, in the case of Inspiring Stories, perhaps these relatively traditional methods of narrative storytelling are not the best routes for some communities to begin to embrace digital video tools and commence their introduction into the

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<sup>102</sup> It should be noted that important traditions of New Zealand political protest and activism integrating lens-based media exist. The 1981 Springbok Tour of New Zealand is political activism that reached a global scale, see: <http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/patu-1983> and [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981\\_South\\_Africa\\_rugby\\_union\\_tour\\_of\\_New\\_Zealand](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1981_South_Africa_rugby_union_tour_of_New_Zealand). Additionally, the 1977-1978 occupation of Bastion Point in Auckland was documented in *Bastion Point – The Untold Story* (1999) here: <http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/bastion-point---the-untold-story-1999>. All sites accessed 18 November 2014. For a further introduction of different forms of political activism in New Zealand, see Aroha Harris' book, *Hikoi: Forty Years of Maori Protest*, Trevor Lawson Richards', *Dancing on our Bones: New Zealand, South Africa, Rugby and Racism*, Evan S. Poata-Smith's article, 'He pokeke uenuku i ai: the evolution of contemporary Maori protest,' and Malcolm Maclean's 'Football as Social Critique: Protest Movements, Rugby and History in Aotearoa.'

documentary form. Silver agrees that in New Zealand, the relationship between youth and video tools has yet to mature, has yet to be fully realized. She mused:

I think the problem is that, well for one, no I don't think youth have really, are engaging in trying to tell stories through using all different types of, you know, like a phone or a handcam or a DSLR camera. I don't think they are really engaging with technology to tell stories. I think definitely, youth are engaging with technology to like film shit, like skateboarding, like YouTube, uploading it to YouTube and like stuff. But there is not really strong storytelling going on. (Komako Silver, interview with author, 19 May 2013)

Silver's point elucidates the reality that this seems to be the case everywhere and this is not widely understood. Her insight can be taken to New York City and India as well. Individuals who are recording and uploading are a minority. And those who are recording with new technologies tend to just upload clips and not craft stories. The individuals who commence experimentations with documentary narratives tend to be reinforced by supportive structures in conjunction with digital technologies aligned with creative capacities. Furthermore, there is also a need for more intangible elements as well, such as a strong sense of political commitment or prior experience with activism.

Inspiring Stories is an example of an evolving assemblage that also faces issues of sustainability. As a case study, it shows that the changing focus in terms of motivation and the consequent reshaping of elements within the assemblage, such as the design of the *Festival for the Future* and the reconfiguration of the one-day workshop into an on-demand and purchasable product, reinforces the vulnerability of the assemblages that have emerged in and around Inspiring Stories. Critically however, the work of Inspiring Stories strengthens the notion that supportive structures with clearly defined goals that harness both the creative capacities of individuals and digital video technologies must be able to adapt, yet

not stray from their mission. Video Volunteers is clear that they employ video to fuel change. WITNESS is unhindered in their goal to provide support for local video organizations throughout the world. This does not mean that these organizations do not change their strategies; they are constantly re-working their approaches and re-assembling. Yet their purpose has clarity. In contrast, Inspiring Stories is still in the process of identifying the primary function of their organization. Developing parallel platforms with limited resources, rather than concentrating on improving a specific program has exposed the Inspiring Stories youth filmmaking workshops to a possible unsustainable future. The following section will examine similar challenges that professional filmmakers are facing in their quest to develop sustainable online documentary filmmaking practices.

### **7.5 - Loading Docs: Experiments in Sustainable Online Documentary Film**

Although experimentations with emerging digital video technologies are taking place across the domain where amateur practices strive for maturity and sustainability, there are also transition spaces that appraise ways to engage with digital video practices within the formal realms of professional documentary filmmaking as well. In a very different vein, the online initiative Loading Docs seeks to guide up-and-coming New Zealand documentary filmmakers in order to help them diversify their skill sets within an evolving local and global documentary marketplace. Loading Docs began as an idea of the Auckland based filmmaker and producer, Julia Parnell, and eventually evolved into a collaboration that ensued between Parnell and producer and academic researcher, Anna Jackson. Funded and supported by New Zealand On Air, the New Zealand Film Commission and *The New Zealand Herald*, Loading Docs put out a New Zealand



wide call for three-minute documentary film proposals. The initiative received sixty-seven proposals, of which ten were chosen to be part of the first year's batch of films, which would eventually be available for anyone to view online for free.

The Loading Docs initiative presented filmmakers with a unique funding structure. Each filmmaker or filmmaking team chosen to partake in the first year was required to raise 2000 New Zealand dollars through a crowd sourcing initiative that they would produce with help from the Loading Docs team. After each project raised 2000 dollars, Loading Docs would match that funding with 2500 dollars to go towards production costs. Loading Docs believed that filmmakers might feel a stronger obligation towards their films if they were required to raise a certain amount of funding themselves. Behind this matching funding structure was a desire to teach crowd funding skills to these filmmakers. Crowd sourcing, often thought of as a citizen centered form of fundraising, is commonly being used by both professional and amateur filmmakers alike, as well as a tool for artists, designers and creators to procure seed funding for ideas and embryonic projects. Yet raising money through crowd funding is also a skill set in and of itself, requiring diligent production for pitch videos and meticulous writing in order to present a project as intriguing, valuable and one that could flourish with the necessary funding. Crowd funding acts as a kind of filtering process for projects in order to identify individuals who can support themselves and take the initiative to produce a fundraising platform. Furthermore, crowd funding plays a important role in the forming assemblage as well. Should a filmmaker fail to procure funds, a project's feasibility can become stunted even before it can go into production. In the context of Loading Docs, crowd funding is a crucial element to the assembling of these specific practices.

For the ten New Zealand filmmakers chosen to be part of the Loading Docs initiative, further limitations were placed on the production of their documentaries. Each film was required to be no more than three minutes long. This restriction was informed by different online documentary film initiatives that Parnell and Jackson had examined prior to writing their initial proposal. Short films seemed to suit an online audience well. They had seen that other filmmakers and online documentary projects had achieved some success with a three-minute time limit and this informed their decision to go with this length. As we have seen in a number of other case studies throughout this dissertation, short form online video content of around three minutes resonates with audiences seeking to view documentary content online. In broader terms, this could almost be termed as a ‘YouTube’ effect; audiences and practitioners alike seem to gravitate towards the publication of short documentaries produced for the Web.

The New Zealand Film Commission and New Zealand On Air saw this initiative as a potential way for New Zealand produced documentaries to reach a global audience. This initiative, presenting films accessible online and for free, established a unique possibility space to get New Zealand short documentaries out to the world through a relatively affordable monetary, time and creative investment. As the first year of Loading Docs was primarily funded by two agencies, the New Zealand Film Commission and New Zealand On Air, an advisory team from these funding agencies along with Parnell and Jackson chose the ten films that would make up the first year of Loading Docs.

The films are diverse. Content-wise, no two are alike. In the hope that these films would eventually reach a global audience and might be embraced by such short documentary taste-makers as *The New York Times* Op-Docs series, *The*

*Guardian* or Vimeo Staff Picks, the selections exemplified an assortment of distinctly New Zealand content. There is the film, *The Jump* (2014, directed by Alex Sutherland), about A.J. Hackett, the New Zealander who brought commercial bungee jumping to the masses.<sup>103</sup> The film, *Living Like Kings* (2014, directed by Zoe McIntosh), examines the lives of homeless New Zealanders who live in abandoned houses in and around the neighborhoods devastated by the Christchurch earthquake.<sup>104</sup> *Stop/Go* (2014, directed by Greg Jennings) explores the employment of Kiwi road workers, who day in and day out work New Zealand roads, placing and holding the temporary traffic signs that allow road works to be safely carried out.<sup>105</sup> These are just a few of the many films supported by Loading Docs' first year of funding.<sup>106</sup> The diversity of films can also be elements of larger assemblages. Loading Docs hopes that some of these projects might connect to wider online documentary film communities and platforms around the world. Loading Docs chooses documentary projects specifically in terms of their approach and content. Seeking out distinctly New Zealand stories, the program intends to bring these stories to a global audience and subsequently, selects films that have the potential to transcend a New Zealand audience base. Certainly, it can be hard to predict which films might be able to make this transition, yet these aspects are components to the growing assembling

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<sup>103</sup> See: <http://thejump.loadingdocs.net/>. Accessed 16 April 2014.

<sup>104</sup> See: <http://livinglikekings.loadingdocs.net/>. Accessed 11 October 2014.

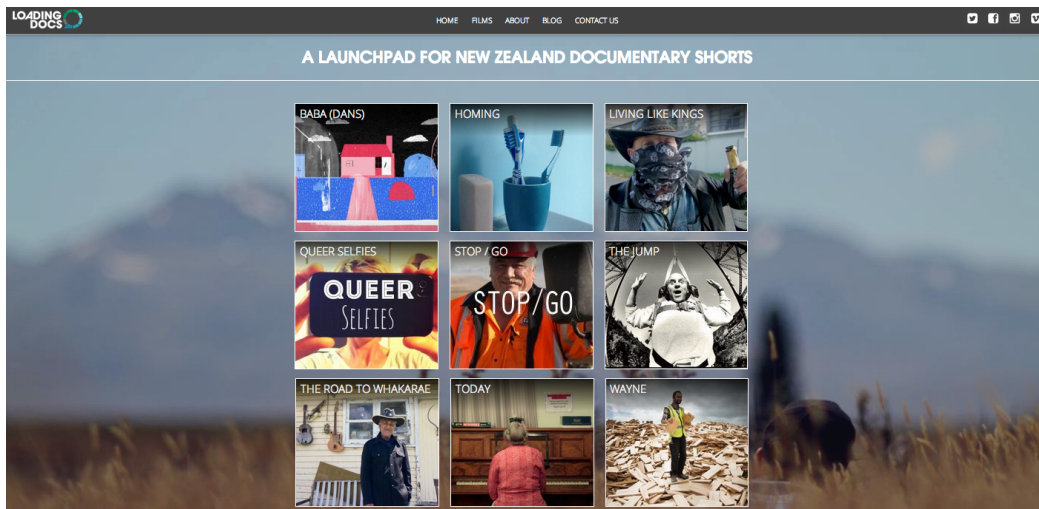
<sup>105</sup> See: <http://stopgo.loadingdocs.net/>. Accessed 16 April 2014.

<sup>106</sup> The other six films are *Baba (Dans)* at <http://dans.loadingdocs.net/>, *Homing* at <http://homing.loadingdocs.net/>, *Queer Selfies* at <http://queerselfies.loadingdocs.net/>, *The Road to Whakarae* at <http://theroadtowhakarae.loadingdocs.net/>, *Today* at <http://today.loadingdocs.net/>, and *Wayne* at <http://wayne.loadingdocs.net/>. All accessed 11 October 2014. The tenth film, *Catkiller* by Aidee Walker and Alexander Gandar was taken offline after individuals in the North Island town of Raglan threatened legal action against Loading Docs in response to the portrayal of their street in the film.

that is Loading Docs and the wider assemblages the program and its films might link into. As we have seen, anticipating which sorts of assemblages specific video practices or creative material might fit within is hard to predict, yet Loading Docs attempts to do just that.

Besides monetary funding and help in the launching of crowd funding, the Loading Docs initiative provides each film with a dedicated website. Additionally there is technical support, guidance towards the use of software, post-production facilities and access to some hardware. All are elements of the assemblage. Under the banner of the New Zealand Film Commission and New Zealand On Air, by association these filmmakers also become part of a larger fraternity of New Zealand documentary makers and the hope is that this expertise will contribute monumentally to the development of each film and associated filmmakers through mentoring and the linkages and networking that ensue after the films have been published online.

The timetable for the initiative was swift. Films were chosen in late December 2013. Crowd funding began in February 2014 and was completed by early March 2014. Some of the films even began production prior to the completion of funding, as early as December 2013.



**Figure 16: A still of the Loading Docs homepage (October 2014) – <http://www.loadingdocs.net>**

The films premiered online in late May 2014, a very fast turnover time for the pitching, acceptance, production and completion of a three-minute documentary film. Although ten films premiered on the Loading Docs website, one film, *Catkiller* (2014, directed by Aidee Walker) was eventually removed due to conflicts in regards to the representation of certain locations in the film. A number of films produced by Loading Docs received much of the acclaim they hoped to garner, including two being selected as a Vimeo Staff Picks.<sup>107</sup> As of October 2014, *The Jump* has been viewed more than 138,000 times on Vimeo. As a case study, Loading Docs shows that these sorts of film possibilities are feasible within certain New Zealand documentary workspaces.

Although Loading Docs is not specifically about the support for citizen activist media practitioners, it sets a precedent for the possibility space of these practitioners by exemplifying a possible future path of support. Loading Docs believes their initiative is a hands-on experiment in nurturing both new and old

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<sup>107</sup> See *The Jump*, here - <https://vimeo.com/96025187> and *Living Like Kings*, here - <https://vimeo.com/96458672>. Accessed 5 July 2014.

skill sets for documentary filmmakers. Unlike the majority of the case studies covered in this thesis, most of the filmmakers involved come from professional or semi-professional filmmaking backgrounds. As co-executive producer, Anna Jackson, explained:

So as a program, it's designed to up-skill filmmakers and producers like us, I think it's really valuable and much needed because there is nothing really like that, I mean you can't compare going to a workshop or a conference to doing something like this and it's very rare for filmmakers to get the amount of support that they would get from us. Often when you work with an executive producer they might kind of give you a little feedback here and there but this has been a really involved process. In terms of the format for documentary, well I think our objective is to encourage audiences to think differently about documentary and kind of open their eyes to possibilities of it as a form. And that there might be eventually some kind of trickle up effect, if that's a thing. (Anna Jackson, interview with author, 12 April 2014)

The films on Loading Docs follow traditional approaches to documentary storytelling, yet their short lengths and online distribution experiment with new methods of dissemination. It is hard to ascertain whether or not Loading Docs will become a sustainable force in the documentary culture of New Zealand. The concept is unique for New Zealand and online documentary culture is very hard to predict. Which film might be the most successful becomes almost a guessing game. A combination of social media strategies, publicity and luck might propel a film to the forefront in which it achieves a sort of global dissemination. As Jackson wondered:

In terms of the sustainability of the model, for our public funding, it's not a given. We really have to deliver results for them to invest in us again. In the same way that New Zealand On Air with projects they fund for television usually look at ratings and kind of use that as a measure of value, you know, both agencies I think, will really be looking to see how many people we reach with this. So we have to deliver on that if we want to see the project funded again. (Anna Jackson, interview with author, 12 April 2014)

The hope for Loading Docs is that their films reach online audiences and are picked up by influential online documentary platforms. Loading Docs does not dissuade the filmmakers from submitting their films into festivals; they only require that they have the ability to use the films within a Loading Docs context for two years. Jackson mentioned that Loading Docs production cycles do not necessarily overlap with their funding cycles and the program is not able to be certain as to how many further years of funding they will receive.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, it may take some time for publicity around the films to spread and thus the dissemination and potential success of the films as well. And then the question arises, what are the benchmarks that constitute success within emerging forms of online documentary filmmaking? This is the tenuous nature of digital video practices and online documentary media, at once so much is in the control of the media makers, yet at the same time, there are many unknowns and variables that fall outside the realm of the filmmakers and carefully crafted online distribution platforms. Assemblages are hard to predict, yet they can be encouraged and strengthened.

Although Loading Docs does not necessarily address specific issues of social justice or protest, the program is an attempt to engage with sustainable modes of digital video practices and online documentary culture, at the same time fusing traditional methods of documentary production with more recent Internet-based fundraising and distribution techniques. Loading Docs imposes a number of limitations on the work of the filmmakers, including length of the film itself

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<sup>108</sup> As of November 2014, Loading Docs has secured funding for ten more short films to premiere in 2015.

and fundraising requirements. These restrictions, however, are not necessarily limiting. As Jackson mused:

I feel like what we've come up with is a good model. Maybe not commercially, but in terms of working through this kind of period that we're going through now, where models are really changing in terms of the way that film works. I think it's great to have this innovation, research and development, where new things can be tried out and both in terms of the way that films are made, the form itself, like three minutes gives a lot of scope for filmmakers to experiment and work differently. You're pushed to be more innovative because of the constraints. There are really few opportunities for the kind of professional development in terms of thinking about outreach and distribution and funding. So this is a really integrated model, I think, for exploring what is really kind of unknown territory. (Anna Jackson, interview with author, 12 April 2014)

The assemblings of documentary production that are occurring online and with the work of Loading Docs are partial experiments in documentary media making. The films of Loading Docs are not necessarily examples of 'meaningful witnessing' in the ways in which this is defined and applied in this thesis. However, Loading Docs is an assemblage and the work it does ties into other forms of assemblage. Some of these assemblages are clear, such as in the case of certain films (*The Jump*) which have connected to global audiences through the curation practices of websites such as Vimeo or when specific films are picked up by traditional media outlets such as *The New Zealand Herald's* website. In turn, this exposure might connect one assemblage to another. Perhaps, for example, social service organizations that work with the homeless population of Christchurch might be directed towards the film, *Living Like Kings*, and then further assemblings may continue in the form of finding shelter for the subjects documented in the film. The intention of Loading Docs has been to champion (through funding initiatives, creative support and industry network linkages) New Zealand short documentaries. This conscious assembling might also produce



unintended consequences, alternative assemblings and linkages to broader assemblages that initially might not be on the organization's radar. The Loading Docs style of production is an extension of existing funding regimes and an experimentation in shorter format documentary filmmaking. These constraints encourage filmmakers to adapt their individual creativity to the restrictions imposed on their craft. A New Zealand initiative, Loading Docs is a strong working model that integrates multiple forms of documentary textuality with documentary production in the hopes of producing New Zealand documentary shorts that are pushing the boundaries of the craft and deterritorializing the limitations that surround traditions of the documentary form.

#### **7.6 - Conclusion: Specific Possibilities Within New Zealand**

Digital video practices in New Zealand suggest that a patchwork of disparate and fractured assemblages are present throughout the country as community programs, local branches of global organizations, individuals and established media makers experiment with emerging digital video technologies, online platforms, methods of video recording and production of multiple forms of non-fiction narrative. New Zealand assemblages are complex in that at times they attempt to directly engage with political issues while sometimes they merely seek to commence a more mature understanding of the interaction between the tools of digital video and the individuals who wish to engage with the hardware and software that allow for the creative capacities of these tools to be expanded upon. New Zealand case studies reinforce the importance of the relationships between support systems, technologies and the practitioners who engage with these

creative capacities, but also intangible elements such as social and political factors and how these inform individual capacities to connect.

Although digital video technologies are quite prolific throughout New Zealand, the emergence of new forms of digital video practices within the context of human rights, social justice and protest movements is fairly limited. Digital video practices are increasing throughout New Zealand, but at a much gentler pace than in places like New York City or even India. In specific pockets of activism, New Zealand provides spaces of possibility for the emergence of new forms of digital video. Activist practice is present throughout New Zealand, yet the geographic remoteness of the country produces a consistent challenge for the dissemination of digital video that addresses political and social issues. The Internet does not provide a solution; it merely offers a platform in which new challenges are consistently emerging. There is no comparable critical mass in terms of production or distribution of the kind of video material that is the focus of this thesis.

Despite the fact that the integration of digital video practices unites the case studies found in this chapter, the reality is that they are all very divergent in their methods, topics, approaches and use of digital tools. That is they are all different assemblages. In the case of Greenpeace NZ, the organization understands the need for committed individuals, but also has a sophisticated sense of the marketing and supportive approaches required in the production of a high profile online, multi-platform outreach strategy. For Greenpeace NZ, video is just one aspect of generating visual material and connections with potential audiences. Other forms of social media and different types of outreach are layered throughout Greenpeace NZ's activist campaigns. As we have seen, these

assemblages are multi-dimensional and unique to each specific political action connected with the organization. As Greenpeace NZ is a local chapter of a global organization, their digital video practices are provided a greater chance to remain sustainable due to the strong support system of their worldwide network.

In contrast, Linda M.'s video practice, one that emerged from the Occupy Auckland movement and continued to document protests throughout Auckland for quite some time after the Occupy encampment was disbanded, lacked both a formal and informal support network (in marked contrast to the experience of Tim Pool). Subsequently, her practice struggled and eventually dissolved into very minimal production of new material. Furthermore, Linda's naïve faith in the power of mobile digital technology provided minimal impetus to craft her video material into more structured forms of visual narrative. Linda felt no need to empower or frame her footage into a format that more closely resembles the documentary form. Her belief that visual documentation, in and of itself, provides a sense of 'truth' is reminiscent of case studies found earlier in this dissertation that attempted to document the stop-and-frisk tactics of the New York City Police Department. Those endeavors, such as the *Stop-and-Frisk Watch* app or the video practices of Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye, were vulnerable assemblages that also struggled to adapt and pro-actively produce a wider documentary effect.

Similarly, rather than critique their own practices, Inspiring Stories vocalized their acceptance in the belief that digital video tools have the ability to emancipate individuals, rather than concentrating on the importance of long-term training of young people in order to empower them through the use of digital video tools and by helping them to understand how to create narrative structure

from footage captured with digital video cameras. Their concept of empowerment centered on the technology itself, rather through connections to wider traditions of activism or through efforts to politicize budding practitioners. With Inspiring Stories, there was no comparable effort to identify potential activists first and then train them, which has been the core methodology of the WITNESS and Video Volunteers approach.

Inspiring Stories' programming evolved into multiple threads and subsequently, their youth film program has suffered from an extension of resources that haven't necessarily reinforced a supportive foundation for the sustainability of their youth film workshop series. Similarly, yet in spite of the fact that Loading Docs is supporting a vastly different type of community engagement than Inspiring Stories, they too, find themselves in a similar situation. Loading Docs, merely a year old, seeks to create a sustainable network of documentary filmmakers engaging with short documentary filmmaking that appears online. Garnering success from its first batch of films, the challenge for the organization is centered on how they can remain sustainable for the foreseeable future. This is a difficult task; specifically as the short format documentary is still an economically immature format that has difficulty generating support and sustainable forms of income. Assemblages don't just evolve by themselves; they need to be sustained through thoughtful approaches to creative methodology.

The assemblages forming throughout New Zealand reinforce the notion that emerging forms of digital video practices struggle to maintain and sustain without a nourishing relationship between supportive structures, digital video tools and the creative capacities of individuals engaging in these practices.

Although it would be easy to assume that digital video practices thrive throughout a relatively digitally connected country like New Zealand, it is clear that these practices continually struggle to push creative boundaries and remain relevant. Throughout this dissertation it has been clear that digital video practices aligned with human rights, social justice and protest movements can only survive and flourish through the cultivation of long term support and the conscious realization that the technologies themselves don't produce change, it is the way that these tools are harnessed that creates political, social and creative change as assemblages.

## ***CHAPTER 8 – Conclusion***

### **8.1 - Affordable Digital Video Tools, Citizen Practices & The Documentary Effect**

This dissertation has argued that adaptable relationships between supportive structures, creative capacities and digital technologies are the cornerstones to sustainable digital video practices rooted in issues of human rights, protest and social justice movements. These emerging assemblings rely on interconnections between material and expressive elements as the delicate bonds of their creative capacities form, re-form and often dissolve. The creative practices examined in this study have been diverse in their stylistic approaches, varied in the territories in which they emerge, eclectic in their use of technologies and focused on the protest movements, human rights campaigns and social justice issues that they seek to document while only occasionally producing forms of documentary reconstruction. Digital video technologies, online platforms and the integration of these tools throughout the case studies of the previous chapters have demonstrated that distinctive methods exist and although some creative forms thrive, not all digital video practices prove successful.

I have considered these practices as assemblings, using Manuel DeLanda's interpretation of assemblage theory as a lens to examine the vital constituent elements that foster these practices, shape them and help determine whether or not they are sustainable. Assemblage theory is an interpretative framework from which to analyze multiple arrays and situate the formation, influence, sustainability, alliance and capacities of individual elements present within a possibility space. Utilizing assemblage as a theoretical framework for my research has been valuable in that it provides a lens from which to identify

elements and help delineate complex relationships that are often subtle yet significant. It can be easy to jump to conclusions about the ‘influence’ of affordable video tools as liberating digital technologies. Assemblage theory surfaces the intricacies found in these creative practices and recognizes the complexities at work in their formation. Nevertheless, assemblage theory can be complicated. Both diagrams and their assemblings consist of a multiplicity of factors. As a researcher utilizing assemblage, it is critical to acknowledge that I played an active role within these assemblings. Since assemblages rely on numerous elements, it was my task to identify the ones that I believed to be the most significant for my discussion. All elements cannot be accounted for, as that is an undertaking of immense proportions. Throughout my analysis, I was deliberately assembling. Yet this is the commitment that assemblage theory makes, it allows for possibilities to open up and assemblages to form. Essentially, I assembled my unique assemblage lens. I played an active role and made conscious choices as I sought to examine the most significant elements to sustainable digital video practices.

This project has focused specifically on both individual and community agency within the context of particular digital video practices within the United States, India and New Zealand. Capacity building is crucial to these practices and the acquisition of new skills is vital to extending boundaries and producing content. This dissertation has centered on the importance of human agents within assemblings in order to gain a clearer understanding as to how agency, technologies and creative capacities form as assemblages central to the formation of digital video practices surface. Its central question has asked how and why are digital video practices emerging in specific possibility spaces and what elements

are essential for the development of creative practices rooted in protest, social justice and activist movements?

Most of the video practices examined throughout this dissertation seem to rest far from historic traditions of the documentary form (with its production and distribution models developed within the spheres of film and television media, and directed toward theatrical and broadcast audiences). Many of the case studies examined in the previous chapters are underdeveloped in their practices and methods. Practitioners working alone tend to have limited access to support systems that might aid in the maturation of their practice. The individual practices of Christina Gonzalez and Matthew Swaye in New York City or Linda M. in Auckland stalled or disappeared due to minimal or nonexistent support from an organization, video network or protest movement. The growth of their work was stunted by lack of feedback and numerous challenges impeded their progress. Furthermore, their individual video practices tended to rely on a misguided faith in the perceived emancipatory power of digital technology and mobile video tools. Furthermore, these practitioners ceased to engage in the necessary questions of documentary ethics. Thus these practices remained stagnant in their forms of witnessing and did not transition creatively into a more directed manifestation of meaningful witnessing.

In contrast to their experiences, video practices fuelled by the work of one individual or a specific community organization that thrived for a long duration of time, such as the live streaming of Tim Pool or the India-wide reportage of the community correspondents of Video Volunteers, attribute their success and sustainability to qualities and resources earned through long-term trials and experimentation. These practitioners and practices tended to be highly conscious



as to how their creative work in the field was being perceived and the ways in which their media making considered and navigated ethical issues throughout the evolution of their witnessing. To reinforce, the creative practices most in tune with ethical dilemmas that might arise were often the most connected, closer to and purposeful in their intention to cultivate digital video practices that more closely resembled the documentary form.

With Pool, it was a wide and growing network of citizen journalists and those who supported citizen journalism who disseminated the links to his live streams. These support systems, both formal and informal, reinforced the validity of his practice and provided uplifting support that helped build Pool's confidence. Pool has a restless approach to technology and form. His capacities to connect and adapt his practice to changing elements found in the protests and movements he was covering and his ability to link these shifts to the possibility spaces of his tools in relation to his creative practice opened up workable solutions and preserved the validity and reach of his media making. Pool's relentless experimentation stretched his creative capacities, as well as tested the limits of his video tools.

In respect to Video Volunteers, countless years of experimentation cultivating the best methods to train activists to be citizen journalists, along with continuously strengthening the organization as a solid support system for the community correspondents that produce their creative output, as well as continually re-adapting the organization's methods in relation to the digital video tools they acquire, has together fortified a fertile, long-term and wide reaching network of digital video practices and practitioners throughout India. As Video Volunteers has demonstrated, harnessing the creative capacities of both material

and expressive elements present within possibility spaces are crucial to the emergence of sustainable assemblages and healthy digital video practices.

It must also be acknowledged that the relationship between the case studies of this project and mainstream media are critical for the dissemination of these practices. Often in frustration at the kinds of content and issues being covered and regularly infuriated that localities, social groups, political concerns and unseen issues are being neglected, many video practices begin in implicit competition with mass media. Nevertheless, the mainstream media retains its power to establish social and political agendas. Attracting the attention of the mainstream can significantly boost the profile, and hence the effectiveness of many of the practices covered in this thesis. There is a profound ambivalence here. The live streaming of Tim Pool, for example, was hailed by mainstream media as a guiding light for nascent forms of citizen journalism. He was praised in traditional news outlets and this type of established media coverage is one of many factors that came to define his practice. Pool did not seek out press coverage. Television news channels and print magazines clasped onto Pool, the hip form of journalism he represented and the Occupy Wall Street movement as a whole. This embrace opened up opportunities for Pool that eventually led him towards a career within mainstream media.

In contrast, Video Volunteers has quite a different relationship with mainstream media. The organization is consistently seeking to create formal alliances with multiple forms of mainstream media in India. The issues that their community correspondents cover tend to be low profile, often centering on the documentation of problems affecting poor and marginalized communities throughout the country. Their issues are, unfortunately, not the issues that the

Indian press prioritizes. Therefore, to obtain and cultivate these relationships becomes a negotiation between the interests of the corporate press and their ability to network for their form of media and applicable social causes. However, Video Volunteers' linkages to mainstream media are also a bonus. Their work is most concerned with producing direct change in communities. Narrowcasting is a main focus of the organization. Publishing on YouTube, conducting community screenings and having their work embraced by mainstream media does not define the practice of Video Volunteers; yet, these components are also part of their assemblage and provide important routes for dissemination.

An organization such as Greenpeace New Zealand also has an intricate relationship with mass media and one that is built on a critical awareness and reflexivity toward mainstream media organizations. At once, Greenpeace NZ would like their actions to be covered by traditional press outlets and the organization itself tries their best to pique the interest of the mainstream. Yet complexities exist within this relationship and Greenpeace NZ understands that their messages can easily be tangled, misinterpreted or misconstrued. On the other end of the spectrum, Loading Docs yearns for recognition by both the mainstream press and global documentary tastemakers. Coverage of the films that they fund is critical to the sustainability of the project and vital for future funding cycles. Because Loading Docs' films are not directly addressing issues of social justice, human rights or protest movements, their relationship with mainstream media is much more direct. They require their films to be seen by as many people as possible. This allows them to justify the project and secure future investment from the New Zealand government's arts based funding initiatives.

A number of core elements continuously re-emerge to interact and affect the emergence of assemblages that surround digital video practices. This dissertation is especially interested in the interrelationships between the few continuities and common elements across diverse global practices. These specific five elements (also mentioned in chapter 2) are the principle components that make up the profile for a possibility space for digital video practices centered on human rights, social justice and protest movements. These fundamental parameters are both material and expressive with each being a ‘knob’ that can be turned up or down in terms of the intensity generated in the assemblages actualized in the case studies throughout this dissertation. This framework is one of the fundamental outcomes of my research and these five parameters could be utilized as a guide for research elsewhere in areas of the world such as Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia and beyond. These principal elements include:

1. Technological capacities (appropriate to the practice and context), especially the relationship to the network (the Internet and mainstream media),
2. Power structures (language, literacy, political and economic situation),
3. Formal and informal support systems (manifested through training, dissemination, community),
4. Creative capacities in individual and collective forms (specifically those exhibiting commitment, adaptation, sustainability),
5. Territory.

Although these few continuities are found across the assembling of the case studies in this project, a key insight that emerged from this research is that sustainable practices require conscious engagement, consistent cultivation and the

ability to adapt creative practices to shifts in the relationships between these elements. As we have seen with Tim Pool and Video Volunteers, access to technology, technological infrastructure and relationship to the network (or the lack thereof) presented unique possibilities for creative practices to flourish. Pool's relatively effortless linkage to technological infrastructure, the Internet and his ability to purchase cutting edge technology provided him with the opportunity to connect and broadcast his live streams quite seamlessly. Whereas with Video Volunteers, the majority of their community correspondents live in areas with minimal technological infrastructure and infrequent Internet access and opportunities to acquire cutting edge digital tools are highly limited. The organization has a very different understanding of a 'network.' In fact because of limitations in infrastructure, the organization is focused on the capacities of individuals, providing strong training programs and long-term organizational support to community correspondents. Thus the citizen activist media makers of Video Volunteers are well trained and more inclined to craft a persuasive short video story than Tim Pool in New York or Linda M. in Auckland. In the case of Video Volunteers, technological limitations actually encourage the creation of non-fiction narratives that more closely resemble traditions of the (short) documentary form.

These practices do not arrange spontaneously or in the absence of sustaining relationships across multiple elements. In many of the video practices I examined, a level of critical commentary that corresponds to stylistic elements that might produce the creation of a documentary argument, either subtle or otherwise, often do not exist. Therefore, projects like *18 Days in Egypt* or *Inspiring Stories* rely on misguided assumptions of the agency of citizens to

develop their own practices and thus flounder as sustainable entities because they put their energy and resources into technology as the solution, which in and of itself, is not a sustainable methodology for any form of creative practice. If anything, technology must maneuver into assemblages that support those properties meaningful to their assemblings (e.g. the Flip Cam in India) and only then will these potential digital video practices have a chance to produce long lasting effects.

Not all the case studies can (yet) be labeled ‘documentary,’ however those that show most promise in this regard have cultivated sustainable video practices through a realignment of resources that focus on providing long-term training through creative support for essential skills such as editing or providing instruction as per the basics of visual storytelling. These digital video practices are an important key focus of this dissertation because of their potential to profoundly change models of documentary production. These sustainable organizations and independent practitioners confirm the need for holistic approaches to digital video. For example in chapter 5, the New York City based WITNESS has long absolved itself from the responsibilities required to maintain an online platform that might provide a stage to disseminate human rights videos. Instead of relying on a specific software technology, WITNESS has a strategic sense of identifying and utilizing the available technologies. Additionally, they have a strong investment in the development of human capital. This is similar to Video Volunteers, which places emphasis on workshops, training and structured support for community correspondents. Furthermore, they also share in common an emphasis on personal experience and commitment to activist agendas.

Digital video technologies have outpaced the years required to cultivate best practices and have produced a number of unintended consequences that generate ethical dilemmas. The portability of smartphones with video capacities that allow for live streaming in areas of the world with highly networked infrastructure presents the possibility for rapid upload to the Internet. The practitioners I spoke with who live stream rarely ask the individuals they record for their permission to publish their image online. This can pose numerous problems in situations where subjects might be involved in what could be perceived as illegal activity (such as a specific public protest action). In areas of the world that are situated in conflict zones, the live streaming of footage has the potential to put many lives in danger. Conversely, many live streamers argue that the transparency of immediate upload usurps ethical dilemmas, as they believe documentation must be publicly shared to allow audiences to reach their own conclusions. Lacking from many of the conversations that surround this media are critical reflections on the possible adverse affects that these practices may produce. However, for organizations such as WITNESS and Video Volunteers, consideration of ethical issues is a large part of their ongoing dialogue.

Primarily, this dissertation has examined digital video practices emerging in and around the context of human rights, social justice issues and protest movements. As explored in chapter 2, visual documentation and the notion of bearing witness has been a central strategy in the documentation of human rights abuses ever since still cameras first reached the Congo Free State in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Meaningful witnessing and producing a documentary effect focused on fostering social and political change with regards to specific issues, directly correlates to the intentions of the case studies from previous chapters. From the

start of this project, my interest resided in the digital video practices flourishing on the periphery of the organizations entrenched in these practices and on the many sides of the protest movements and social justice issues that seemed both visceral and relevant to my research.

My research methodology was a qualitative process that focused on interviews with media makers and program facilitators. I selected a number of established digital video practices as well as a few that were relatively unknown and interviewed the practitioners. Focusing on specific digital video practices in the United States, India and New Zealand, I chose case studies in three democratic nations where I retain strong connections. Although these numerous case studies offered insight into digital video practices, these locations were also limiting. Tremendous creative experimentation in regards to digital video is proliferating throughout the world and a vast amount of research is waiting to be conducted. In regards to future research, I'm particularly interested in the assemblages forming from the use of mobile video by citizens throughout Latin America, specifically surrounding the student protests in Chile from 2011-2013.<sup>109</sup> As well, during the 2013-2014 protests in Brazil, citizens and video collectives used a number of exploratory methods to harness video technologies for social and political means.<sup>110</sup> Throughout Africa, innovative digital video practices in collaboration with online and mobile phone platforms are also developing. A number of elements found in digital video practices across Latin

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<sup>109</sup> The filmmaker and academic, Michael Chanan's short video documentary, "Protest Chile," provides a good overview to the issues of the student protests in Chile, see - <https://vimeo.com/33123752>. Accessed 15 September 2014.

<sup>110</sup> The work of the citizen collective, Mídia Ninja, is a good start to begin to examine recent citizen video practices in Brazil, see - <https://ninja.oximity.com/>. Accessed 15 September 2014.



America and Africa connect with the case studies of this project. Examining the relationships between elements that surround digital video practices within the spheres of human rights, social justice and protest movements is an emerging field of study. There are important gaps in knowledge and room for further academic analysis on how creative capacities, supportive structures and digital technologies operate within these assemblings, with broader political issues serving as a familiar catalyst in using digital video for advocacy, activism and art. Gaining insight into how parallel video practices focusing on issues of human rights and social justice are evolving in multiple locations throughout the globe would further illuminate how accessible digital video technologies and video practices situated on the cusp of the documentary form are assembling in disparate spaces of global possibility.

This project has been challenging in a number of ways. Digital video capabilities are constantly being reshaped as software evolves. Technological changes are fluid, yet they can also be rapid. As we have seen in a number of previous chapters, the integration of new video technologies have the capacity to rearrange formed assemblages and force them to re-work their methodologies. A number of the case studies explored in this dissertation seem to have already folded or are on the verge of collapse. As previously mentioned, the practices and organizations that are surviving are those that strive to stay sustainable. Yet sustainability requires a conscious effort to adapt practices to technological shifts and readjust creative output so that video practices reach their intended audience. Some practitioners and organizations acquire the wisdom to exploit creative capacities that are supported by other elements. These practices endeavor to make a tangible impact on the issues that they document; therefore practitioners

and organizations involved in the production and dissemination of these videos strive to reach the targeted audience through methods of broadcasting or narrowcasting or often both.

This dissertation has reconceptualized certain digital video practices, especially those related to human rights, social justice and protest movements within the contemporary moment and through this has examined possibilities for new forms of documentary practice and fresh angles for documentary agendas. Digital video practices within the context of human rights and social justice have the ability to produce what I have termed here a 'documentary effect'. The practitioners or organizations creating these forms of media often hope that their videos will be used in a purposeful way. To an extent, the makers themselves have the potential to direct their intentions. Many times however, the implications of assembling are beyond the control of the practitioners themselves. Assemblings inspire further possibility spaces, which often open up prospects for re-assemblings. Although the majority of the practices examined in this dissertation do not sit comfortably within previous definitions of documentary, many of these practices rely on video documentation or underdeveloped forms of narrative in order to produce a documentary effect or intentionality. These practices are suggestive of evolving technological possibilities and the growing relationships that support evolving practices.

Correspondingly, it can be difficult to pinpoint or foresee the exact documentary effects that many of these practices venture to attain. Many of the case studies in this dissertation are far from maturing into creative practices that might resemble the documentary form and are contradictory regarding how they perceive the purpose of their creative practice and working methodology. Yet

often these assemblages can be dynamic and far-reaching. Footage from one of Pool's recordings helped absolve a university student who was falsely accused of criminal conduct by the New York City Police Department.<sup>111</sup> Pool's recording was used as evidence in a legal case and proved that police accusations were false.<sup>112</sup> In a broader sense the flood of documents demands approaches for them to be used more meaningfully. *18 Days in Egypt* is an example of one such experiment.

In some of the case studies of this dissertation, video practices produce a documentary effect that creates change in a purposeful and demonstrable way. Video Volunteers is a rare example of an organization producing content that is transparent in its intentions. The organization is very specific in their storytelling methods and approaches to media dissemination. As such, their videos directly contribute to constructive forms of change making. Through their distinctive form of digital video, the organization narrowcasts their reports to the individuals who have the responsibility and power to fix a problem and action a solution. In

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<sup>111</sup> At the time, Alexander Arbuckle was a NYU journalism student who happened to be working on a school photojournalism project documenting the point of view of police officers patrolling the Occupy movement. He was charged with disorderly conduct but eventually exonerated with the help of Pool's video evidence.

[http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2012/05/in\\_the\\_first\\_oc.php](http://blogs.villagevoice.com/runninscared/2012/05/in_the_first_oc.php).

Accessed 15 September 2014.

<sup>112</sup> In the interview I conducted with Pool on June 27, 2012, he told me: "In May, it was announced that the first Occupy Wall Street trial in an arrest case, was, resulted in an acquittal because they used my footage as evidence. So, that's kind of the point. You know, that powerful interests aren't allowed to decide what the past is [...]. You've got police officers who lie under oath and they did and that aren't held accountable for it. But at least now we know for sure, the truth. And that's, you know, it's a small step. I, you know, I'd much more appreciate to be able to go back in time and see, you know, every event in its entirety about what led up to, you know, World War I and World War II, even the Napoleonic Wars. Because all we have is what is written by the victors. The people who win get to decide what the past was. And that's what we are led to believe. That's changing. That's the point" (Tim Pool, interview with author, 27 June 2012).

these situations, the documentary effect is produced through the production of a narrative, which in turn challenges authorities to act on injustice. This contemporary method of meaningful witnessing directly links back to traditions of documentary photography that emerged from the formation and assemblage of human rights movements directly connected to the atrocities taking place in the Belgian Congo at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, Video Volunteers believes that the villages and cultures that become part of their reportage must also be present on the Internet in order to exist in a digital world. As such, the organization sees their uploaded videos as a necessity, at once, both as online occupation and proof of existence. If their stories are not digital, then those who utilize the Internet to conduct research might not be able to locate an interpretation of their reality; failing to call attention to a people, a place, an issue, a language and a culture. Certainly, the online diffusion of this type of form and content requires further research. Yet importantly, these practices are embedded within the local, involving local correspondents sensitive to local concerns, looking to use video advocacy to target social and political change in their localities with implications that are global. The irony being that perhaps this method of practice is more effective in some sense than Tim Pool's broadcast anything, live stream everything approach. For community correspondents, their video practice provides the possibility for global audiences to bear witness to local and regional, social and political issues. Without a cultivated practice supported by a creative community (e.g. Video Volunteers), similar impediments to crafting documentary content encountered by individuals in New York or Auckland would have emerged within this specific Indian context.

The use of assemblage theory as a theoretical framework to analyze emerging forms of digital video practices rooted in human rights and issues of social justice is a major contribution to documentary scholarship. Over the duration of this project, I engaged with a community of practitioners that have rarely been given the opportunity to express their creative approaches to digital video practices. Opening up these communities to academic scholarship is essential for the expansion of knowledge. As these contemporary global practices expand, proliferate and mature, they must not be ignored. Although assemblage theory seems to be most suited towards exploring the complexities of the contemporary context, I have briefly suggested its capability interrogating periods of documentary photography and have touched upon re-analyzing direct cinema through an aperture of assembling. Furthermore, this project has embarked upon an examination of specific local video practices within a global framework and provides wider comparisons while offering localized analysis.

This project has positioned New Zealand within a global context to suggest broader sets of possibilities that exist throughout the world, yet acknowledges that certain practices have also failed to develop distinctive and innovative forms of digital video. Case studies within New Zealand provide a perfect example of the type of context in which digital video practices should be assembling. Yet there are significant constraints. New Zealand is a nation that offers a wide and open canvas of possibility. Yet as the case studies from chapter 7 make clear, there has yet to be a long-term and necessary commitment to investing in the cultivation of creative capacities of both practitioners and organizations that is needed to assemble sustainable digital video practices. There is no question that creative digital video practices must be fostered and supported

through education, workshops, training, communities and support networks. These assemblings need to engage individuals with a sense of political urgency, a motivation to communicate and a method to identify an impetus to catalyze practices within difficult circumstances. Supportive infrastructure and clearly defined goals identifying whom these practices are intended for are critical to producing far-reaching and impactful communities of digital video practitioners. In New Zealand, this level of engagement is only beginning.

The value of my research lies not only in its conceptual approach, but also in its methodology and fieldwork. Citizens experimenting with video technologies and methods of documentary media are rarely given an opportunity to discuss the evolution of their creative practices. In the course of my fieldwork, I conducted interviews with more than 35 practitioners. These practitioners come from many walks of life and have varying intentions as to the nature of their work and meaning behind their practices. To give these practitioners a platform to elucidate upon their approaches to emerging video tools, editing software, methods of narrative creation and numerous challenges that they face in the field provides rare insight.

Throughout the fieldwork of this project and during the writing process, I have engaged with practitioners experimenting with new video technologies, online platforms and creative methods of storytelling, that have all produced varying degrees of effectiveness regarding the reach, scope and sustainability of their creative practices. The digital video practices that are persuasive in their message are the ones that forgo an over-emphasis on technology, disregarding the ease of these traps, and instead cultivate creative capacities and supportive structures to plan, produce and create networks and communities of practice that,

at once, uphold practitioners and practices. A few of these organizations and even fewer independent practitioners have formulated practices that have sustained over time, offering exciting experimentations of the documentary form, pushing the limits of both digital technology and their creative digital video practices. These sustainable practices, at times, are reminiscent of and link to, traditions of the documentary, yet they also utilize new technologies to morph creative styles, reinvent approaches to subjects and push the limits of what is and what might be the future of the documentary form. Like tradition, these living assemblages are fragile and prone to change. Documentary filmmaking has always been open to reinvention. So too, in its limited life span, have the methods behind the proliferation of digital video practices. Documentary remains an elusive art form and the diffusion of video technologies throughout modern societies does not automatically engender the ability for meaningful audio-visual communication.

The relationship between creative capacities, supportive structures and digital technologies are the key to sustainable assemblages and critical to the cultivation of digital video practices focused on human rights, social justice and protest movements. These types of digital video practices are distinct in their formation and specific to each possibility space. The capacities of elements within these possibility spaces to connect are critical to the formation of these assemblings. Practitioners must read potentials and engage with their creative instincts. Technologies must be harnessed and adapted. This relationship is malleable. It consists of both deliberate and unintentional teamwork. The digital video camera and its associated hardware and software will not work on its own. Crucially, supportive structures must be in place to provide assistance, knowledge, wisdom, community and creative nourishment to the practitioners and

digital video practices embarking upon new and uncharted territories of creative possibilities. The emergence of digital video practices is reliant on the cultivation of these elements in order to produce sustainable practices that have the capability to redefine limitations and potentially challenge definitions of the documentary form.



***APPENDIX:  
LIST OF PRACTITIONERS INTERVIEWED***

**United States**

Guy Davidi – Co-Director of the film *5 Broken Cameras* (June 1, 2012 / New York City)

Emad Burnat – Co-Director of the film *5 Broken Cameras* (June 6, 2012 / New York City)

Jigar Mehta – Co-Creator of the website *18 Days in Egypt* (June 14, 2012 / New York City & San Francisco via Skype)

Ed Kashi – Photojournalist (June 20, 2012 / New York City)

Tim Pool & Geoff Shively – Citizen journalists, live streamers & creative technologists (June 27, 2012 / Brooklyn, NYC)

Angad Bhalla – Filmmaker & Director of *Herman's House* (July 3, 2012 / Brooklyn, NY)

Catherine Colman – Employee at Google NYC (July 11, 2012 / New York City)

Sam Gregory – Director of WITNESS (July 12, 2012 / Brooklyn, NYC)

Donna Lieberman, Director of the NYCLU & Alberto Morales, New Media Associate at the NYCLU – (September 9, 2012 / New York City)

Jason Van Anden – Creator of the *Stop and Frisk Watch App* (September 11, 2012 / New York City)

Christina Gonzalez & Matthew Swaye – Videographers & Activists (September 12, 2012 / Harlem, NYC)

**India**

Jessica Mayberry – Co-Director of Video Volunteers (January 23, 2013 / Bardez, Goa)

Stalin K. – Co-Director of Video Volunteers (January 24, 2013 / Bardez, Goa)

Sulochna Pednekar – Community Correspondent from Goa (January 25, 2013 / Bardez, Goa)

Devidas Gaonkar – Community Correspondent from Goa (January 27, 2013 / Bardez, Goa)

Zulekha Sayyed – Community Correspondent from Mumbai (February 6, 2013 / Nagpur, Maharashtra)

Amol Lalzare – Community Correspondent from Mumbai (February 7, 2013 / Nagpur, Maharashtra)

Manish Kumar – Principal Trainer for Video Volunteers (February 7, 2013 / Nagpur, Maharashtra)

Bhan Sahu – Community Correspondent from Chhattisgarh (February 11, 2013 / Nagpur, Maharashtra)

Akbar Gulzar – Deputy Director of Training for Digital Green (February 14, 2013 / New Delhi)

Laxmi Nautiyal – Community Correspondent from Uttarakhand (February 21, 2013 / Dehradun, Uttarakhand)

Ajeet Bahadur – Community Correspondent from Allahabad (March 6, 2013 / Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh)

Shankarlal – Community Correspondent from Uttar Pradesh (March 8, 2013 / Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh)

Piali Bhattacharya – Assistant Manager for Campaigns at Breakthrough (March 12, 2013 / New Delhi)

Roopak Chauhan – Adobe Youth Voices India Program Manager (March 21, 2013 / New Delhi)

Sajad Rasool – Community Correspondent from Kashmir (April 2, 2013 / Budgam, Jammu & Kashmir)

## **New Zealand**

Guy Ryan – Director and Creator of Inspiring Stories (December 4, 2012 / Wellington)

Dr. Max Schleser – Senior Lecturer at Massey University (December 9, 2012 / Wellington)

Lu Davidson – Project Coordinator and Workshop Facilitator at Inspiring Stories (May 19, 2013 / Raglan, Waikato)

Komako Silver – Workshop Facilitator at Inspiring Stories (May 19, 2013 / Raglan, Waikato)

Linda M. – Independent Videographer (July 11, 2013 / Auckland)

Nick Young – Head of Digital at Greenpeace New Zealand (July 12, 2013 / Auckland)

David Jacobs – Founder & Director of Connected Media & The Outlook for Someday (July 12, 2013 / Auckland)

Anna Jackson – Co-Director Loading Docs (April 12, 2014 / Auckland)

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