Robot Journalism : The damage done by a metaphor

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FOREWORD I

Of all our clichés of the digital, there are surely none more pervasive than the doctrine of disruption. Haunted by the past and too preoccupied with the future to deal with the present, disruption finds expression as a gleeful prophecy more concerned with *when* than *how*. Disrupt politics; disrupt work; disrupt your diet; disrupt rental agreements. Against this backdrop, to stand still is to falter. (And who has the time, anyway?). But every now and then, something intervenes, something which forces us to take stock of our surroundings.

Suffice it to say that the view that awaits is not always to our liking. More rancorous and less welcoming than the image held in memory, any sliver of stillness has by now been replaced by a thunderous soundtrack of our own making. It is a jagged sprawl in which declaiming something with conviction imbues it with the essence of truth, in which the bulk of society is now made to think in terms of stunted ambition, and in which, even as there are more tools than ever with which to make sense of the world, there is also less time and less sense of how to use them.

But here and there, we also find oases of hope and optimism, liminal spaces in which to reimagine the 'structure of feeling', as Raymond Williams deemed it. Perhaps we are not witness to the wholesale corrosion of social bonds so much as we are witness to the maturing of other human appetites. Perhaps our anxieties are rooted in illusionary nostalgia for a 'pre-digital' of our own invention. And perhaps it is better to remain open to the possibilities of the present than to pay fealty either to a distant past or a yet-to-be future.

In this second issue of *UnMediated*, contributors tackle the doctrine of disruption from a wide range of vantage points. Weaving a common thread is the understanding that we must be careful not to take a purely diagnostic approach, and that the protection of voice requires unconventional partnerships and more nuanced theories of change. In reflecting on the dilemmas of the moment, we hope not only to discuss its causes but to show possible ways out.

TOMAS BORSA

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FOREWORD II

Claims that mostly commercial digital media and communications platforms are destabilising political orders everywhere are rampant. Whether it is our personal data, traces of what we do online, or what known and unknown others say to us and about us, misinformation is said to be undermining democracies and opening opportunities for other regimes to gain new heights of influence. Policy and regulatory institutions often seem to be on the back foot. There are local and global reactions, some evidenced and some not. It is not clear whether rights to freedom of expression, to privacy and to the resources and skills necessary for being active in the mediated world can be sustained in the future.

We need diverse ways of representing and critically evaluating change in the political order. Some are convinced that innovations in next generation artificial intelligence, machine learning, and the algorithms they spawn, will provide effective ways of responding to these changes. But students who have followed our graduate programmes at LSE know better. They know that it is not the latest algorithm or Internet of Things application that will determine whether societies are humane and equitable. They learn that critical research yields insight into consequential decisions taken by people that allow, disallow, and reshape the digital world. They understand that imaginaries of contemporary and alternative mediated futures matter.

This issue of *UnMediated* provides arresting and probing contributions. By inviting us to engage through visual and textual representations, they provide the opportunity to reflect on the mediated political order, its inequalities and exclusions. They invite us to think about how to achieve diverse, inclusive, equitable and just mediated societies. This can help to provoke challenges to practices that normalise the increasing delegation of responsibility for ethical choices to machines or to unaccountable owners of digital technologies and services.

I am delighted to welcome this second issue of *UnMediated*. It demonstrates the huge value of critical reflection on everyday encounters with the mediated world, and I celebrate the commitment of our students to stimulating critical thinking about politics, media and communication and society.
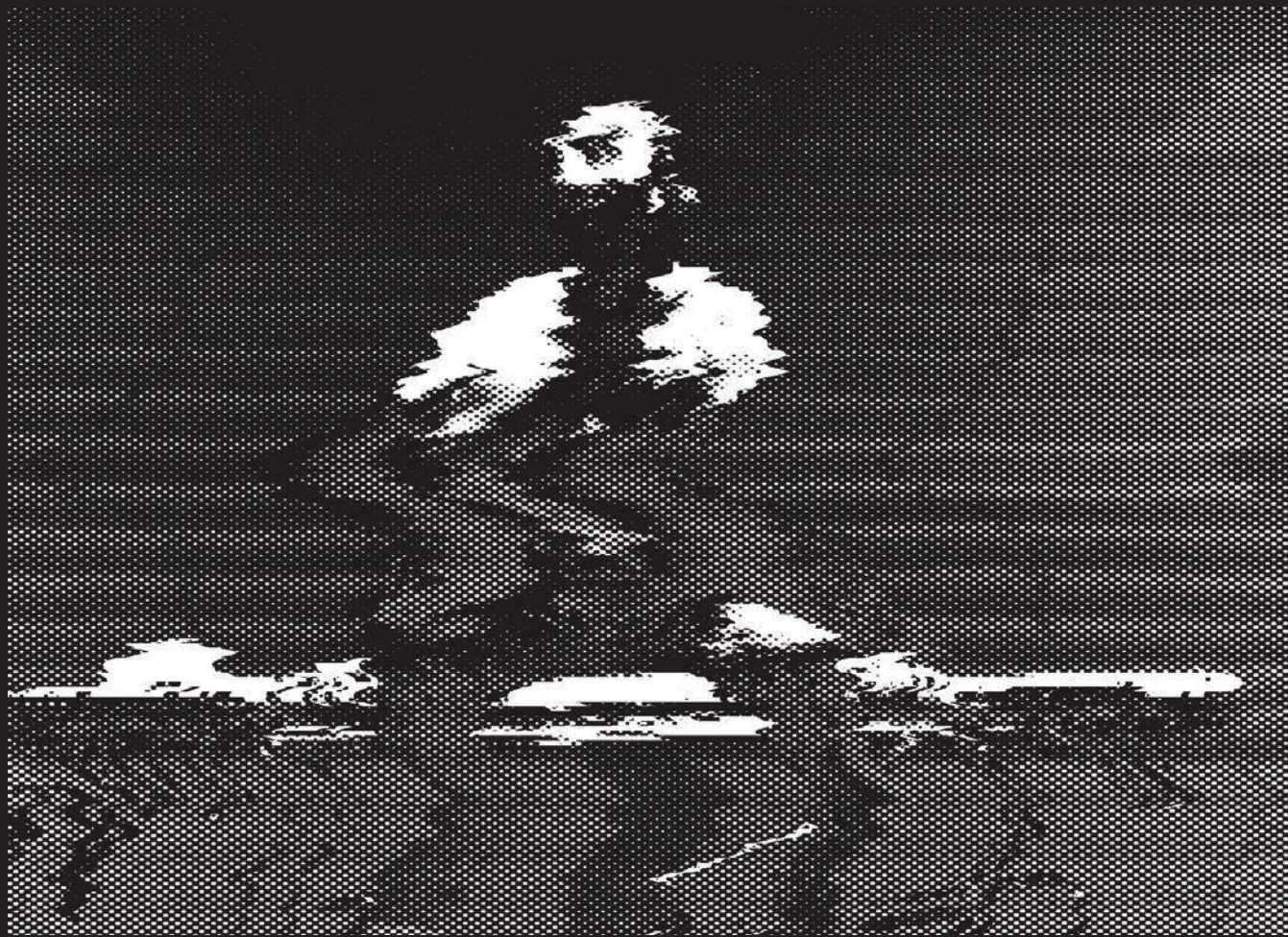
ROBIN MANSELL

PART I

PART II

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#NOFUTUREFORDEMOCRACY

WORDS

ROBERT HASSAN

You needn't agree with Francis Fukuyama when he announced the 'end of history' to accept that by around 1989 liberal democracy had crawled blood-spattered to the top of history's pile[1]. 'Victory' cleared the political space sufficiently for economic globalisation and the digital revolution to begin in earnest, transforming the world from a set of loosely connected planned economies into a tight agglomeration of unplanned ones. Around then, the robust and discrete post-1945 politics of social democracy, of socialism, of conservatism, and the like, became diluted and were funnelled through a narrow channel of market-facing politics we called neo-liberalism. Whether through collective disinterestedness or ideological commitment (or a mixture of each) this great transformation upset the sediment of two centuries of Enlightenment-derived political debate and decision-making processes. Now sediment spills forth in disorders that institutional politics cannot control.

Since 1989 many have sought after ways to understand or exploit the new reality. For some, it's the latest thing to seek to revitalise politics, to extend and enrich democracy through the digital tools that billions now have access to. Journalist-activist Paul Mason, for example, views 'digital democracy' as the basis of a radical politics for the 21st century[2]. And reformers of every opinion see social media as a powerfully inclusive platform that can take democracy towards formerly unreachable latitudes of participation. Neither view is actually very persuasive.

Today, when the anchors of Enlightenment values of justice and equality are wrenching, the crisis of politics is *disrupted* by this new digitality. Politics of some sort will continue, but the practices that sustained their modern liberal-democratic variants are being diminished by the remaking of every register of life through smartphone and laptop. Why do I say this? Because *digital life* reflects the digital logic of the digital tools we use – and this is bad news for democracy. Moreover, we collectively fail to appreciate the political import of digitality because the problem attaches to a fundamental element that has been absent from our understanding of political philosophy since the beginning of the modern age: *time*.

Some did see, however. Nobel laureate Douglass North admonished his profession in this way: 'Without a deep understanding of time, you will be lousy political scientists…time is the dimension in which ideas and institutions and beliefs evolve'[3]. And it took a Sinologist, Jean Chesneaux, to see what the political theorists didn't. 'Speed' he wrote:

> …has become one of the paramount values and
> requirements in our modern societies. Yet democracy
> needs time, as a major pre-condition for political debate
> and decision-making; it cannot surrender blindly to speed.[4]

Both saw time as a lost piece in the political puzzle. But they couldn't see or anticipate the adverse effect that digital communication has upon our relationship with the form of time – that of the clock – that was fundamental to how we conceived of and practiced modern democracy.

ANALOGUE POLITICS AND THE TIME OF THE WORLD

It's only in the dawning of digital life that we are able to contrast this life with the analogue life that preceded it. Here, too, barely any serious thinking has been done. But if we are attentive to the nature of analogue technologies – almost everything invented prior to the digital computer – and the human entanglement with them, then something remarkable is revealed: that we are *analogue creatures*, totally unsuited to the digital world being feverishly assembled, and totally unsuited to the form of time and politics that comes with it.

Analogue technologies manufactured modernity and its political systems. But why is their analogue form so important? Well, analogue technologies *correspond* to nature and the environment in that they are *proportionate* or *equivalent* to the conditions of their functioning. They simulate actions recognisable in nature or in the operations of our own bodies. To put this roughly analogically: an aeroplane is equivalent to a bird; the combustion-engine is equivalent to the horse (power); writing is equivalent to speaking; reading to hearing; clock-time broadly corresponds to the sun's rising and setting, and so on.

For millennia we could more-or-less work within the capacities and potentials of analogue technologies, notwithstanding the fact that, as Marx put it, capitalist competition meant that 'all that is solid melts into air' and so human affairs seemed always to be accelerating alongside the economy's productive processes. The fundamental point, however, is that we, too, are part of nature, and so the technologies we invented as equivalent and proportionate to ourselves and our environment, suggests that *we also are analogue*. Never in human history have we had to consider that before.

Acting as numerical quantifier of duration, the clock is one of the most consequential technologies ever created. It generated a rhythm that dominated society from the Industrial Revolution of the 18th century until the end of the 20th century. We internalised its cadence and synchronised our ways to its meter. As it was social, so too was it public. People acted, moved, thought, produced, consumed, reflected, wrote, discussed, within this public time. And because it was mathematical it gave the impression of predictability, of society moving forward, of progress in human affairs. The political thinkers of early modernity were in the front rank of this temporal revolution, and the institutions they founded

[1] Fukuyama, F. (1992). *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: Free Press.
[2] See, for example, Mason's speech 'Social democracy: radicalise or its over', delivered at the Europe Together conference, 18 October 2017. Full text available at: https://medium.com/mosquito-ridge/social-democracy-radicalise-or-its-over-c057e4f8c898
[3] North, D.C. (1994). 'Economic Performance Through Time'. The American Economic Review, 84(3).
[4] Chesneaux, J. (2000). 'Speed and democracy: an uneasy dialogue'. Social Science Information, 39(3).

'...ANALOGUE TECHNOLOGIES CORRESPOND TO NATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THAT THEY ARE PROPORTIONATE OR EQUIVALENT TO THE CONDITIONS OF THEIR FUNCTIONING'

to articulate modern politics similarly moved to the beat of public time, generating a speed where ideas and beliefs evolved – in their own time.

Within a formative modernity, various strands of political thought gathered to create institutional democracies in parliaments and congresses around the world. And within these, certain *cognitive* and *structural* processes activated their rhythms and these were sustained through information communication. The media of this communication was very much its message. The original democratic media was analogue: printed matter and spoken words, one the analogue of the other. Communication was written and spoken at a speed the sender could manage and the receiver could understand. The constraint upon successful communication is that we read and write and speak effectively only up to a certain point of rapidity, when incoherence and intelligibility cuts in to cause the process to break down, or forces the reader, writer, or speaker to slow down.

Similarly, in the political institution, procedural decision-making processes evolved and unfolded formally and rhythmically in practices such as the daily sitting, the committee system, review chambers, proroguing, filibustering, sunset provision in statutes, multiple reading of bills, and much else particular to differing national institutions. As intended, these worked like speed-bumps on the road to promote patience, reflection, reason and debate – key attributes of modern political thought. Like the cognitive dimension, the structural processes of the institutions seem obvious, tacit, and scarcely worthy of comment, but their temporal value and analogue nature has been discounted historically. These assume their critical importance only now, in our digital age.

Up until the 1970s, all of this was coordinated at a pace that scarcely changed, notwithstanding the arrival of mass media, radio, and television. In the wider modern world, however, things were different. Capitalism dominated, but was now in crisis and showing its age. Energetic competition drives innovation in technology, and for competition to be effective, efficiencies in production are achieved primarily by *doing things faster*. However, by this time the analogue tools of machine-age capitalism, essentially Victorian-vintage technologies, had reached their limit of competitive effectiveness.

Institutional politics began to look to free-markets as antidote to worsening economic malaise. And beginning in the Anglosphere, neo-liberalist governments took to withdrawing their participation in the post-1945 consensus. Market forces filled the space – and enabled the supercharging of economic globalisation and the revolution in digital technologies. In very short order, a burgeoning sphere of gleaming digitality began to detach from a rusting analogue world. Analogue time was not exempted; the crisis of capitalism was also a crisis for clock-time. Nine-to-five lives and nine-to-five economies were deemed uncompetitive. For the neo-liberalists, the very pace of life itself needed to pick up substantially if the new ideas on worker and machine 'flexibility' and what Jonathan Crary termed 'accelerated and intensified production and consumption'[5] were to prove profitable.

Just as Fukuyama declared game-over and liberal democracy the winner, the regularised time of the world which had stimulated economy, culture, and society for two-hundred years began to dissolve as globalisation and the digital revolution spasmed and twitched to new, and less governable rhythms. And in its secession, institutional politics and the democratic processes that we *still* hold to be somehow timeless and durable stood back and watched as a brand-new digital world raced down the road, over the horizon, and out-of-sight.

DIGITAL POLITICS IN DIGITAL LIFE: DISCOUNTING THE HUMAN SCALE

The first thing to say about digital technologies is that they are not analogue. They have no discernible equivalence to anything human or the natural world of which we are part. Consciously or not, many of us accede to a pervasive by-product of Cartesianism – that thinking is somehow akin to computation. Nevertheless, computers generate a binary logic entirely distinct from the human-technology symbiosis that not only created the processes of modern politics, but made possible civilisation as well. That's how alien they are to us. Think about your smartphone or laptop: mostly, we have no idea how it does what it does. We didn't ask for them but they were pushed into our lives as the solution to the problem of economic efficiency, despite the fact there *is* no solution to efficiency within capitalism. Analogue machines such as cars, clocks, airplanes, and engines that move and turn a million different things, express a human-machine activity that traverse time and space in a recognisable way such that we can grasp the link between its movement and its effect, the process and the

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[5] See: Crary, J. (2014). 24/7: *Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*. London: Verso.

continuity. Smartphone and laptop and wireless connection are not like that. They have no equivalence in nature, and as information technologies they are radically disproportionate to the human scale. As analogue creatures we are disconnected from their processes because we cannot easily discern the link between cause and effect, not least because they function at incomprehensible speeds.

In digital life, clock-time has no dominion. Modern time is displaced by post-modern 'network time', the time we create and experience when online. The experience of that time varies, because the density of connections and the speed of the network varies: the network may be fast or slow (relative terms anyway) due to traffic, or it may break down altogether. The only certain thing about the network is that the competition that drives its technological standards orients them always toward *acceleration* – and so the experience of speeding-up, like the network itself, permeates almost all of social life.

The networked society is the society of disconnected politics. Sheldon Wolin wrote that 'political time is out of synch with the temporalities, rhythms, and pace governing economy and culture'[6]. Except for one critical 'synch' – that between the networked economy and the political executive, the one branch of government still able 'to act with despatch' when prodded by economic imperative. The Global Financial Crisis of 2008 demonstrated how the executive will surrender blindly to speed when necessary. In September, as Wall Street reeled, the American Senate considered the first of the highly-experimental stimulus packages to revive a stricken economy. Officials had *only a weekend* (before the markets reopened) to cook up a plan. However, Senator Lindsey Graham, a prominent Republican and part of the crisis meetings, announced to a journalist afterwards that: 'The process that's led to this bill stinks. There is no negotiating going on here! Nobody is negotiating! We're making this up as we go!'. Of course they were. No one in Washington that weekend would have had the time to contemplate what Alexander Hamilton, founder of the American financial system, had said about political decision-making in 1788: 'promptitude of decision is oftener an evil than a benefit'[7]. Of course it is. And the world still lives with the consequences of 2008 promptitude.

The Arab uprisings of 2011 were widely regarded as a triumph of the democratic impulse through digital media. Autocracies tumbled as millions coordinated protests through Facebook and Twitter. But these activists had thrust themselves into an accelerated digital sphere where their Enlightenment-derived aspirations were too far out of synch with both the temporality of their ideas and the political realities of their region. The political analogue of nature's grassroots could not find the soil in which to strike, nor the time for cultivation. Indeed, there were no political green shoots to grow because there is no equivalent for the earth's soil in the virtual network. Moisés Naím generalised the same point:

…a powerful political engine is running in the streets of many cities. It turns at high speed and produces a lot of political energy. But the engine is not connected to wheels, and so the 'movement' doesn't move. Achieving that motion requires organisations capable of *old-fashioned* and permanent political work that can leverage street demonstrations into political change and policy reforms. In most cases, that means political parties[8].

'FOR DIGITAL NATIVES, NETWORKED COMMUNICATION WILL SEEM LIKE THE NORMAL CONDUIT FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTION'

It does mean political parties, but mostly these fail to inspire anyone. And in a political year that dumbfounded most, 2016 was punctuated by further, widespread and serious disenchantment with the institutional political process. People *see the disconnect*, but not its key technological and temporal features, and so notwithstanding resurgent authoritarianism in many parts of the world, the smartphone and laptop still look like positive and potent political tools to activists from Cairo to London, and from New York to Hong Kong.

Generations born into digital life will continue to take naturally to its tools to express themselves politically. For digital natives, networked communication will seem like the normal conduit for democratic action. Online activists will continue to flock and swarm like murmurating starlings, and may appear as inspirational, but the popular enchantment obscures self-organisation that is unstable, transitory and disengaged from the source of actual power that moves freely between the tight nexus of corporate boardrooms and executive-level government. Digital technologies, in short, serve only to widen the division between people and democracy.

[6] Wolin, S. (1997). 'What Time Is It?' Theory & Event, 1(1).

[7] See: Hamilton, A. (1788). The Federalist Papers: Federalist No. 70. Full text available at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed70.asp

[8] Naím, M. (2013). *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be*. New York: Basic Books.

Like the effects of climate change, there will be more extreme political events in the future unless we understand the underlying causes of the crisis of democracy today. There are many symptoms we do appreciate, such as structural inequality, but it will be impossible to address these unless we understand the nature of modern democracy in the digital age. We need to accept and reflect upon the ontologically radical nature of digital technology, upon the fact that the digital is different to every preceding technology and therefore different to us. We need to accept that time and our relationship to it (through technology) is central, and that the human scale has limits.

'FACEBOOK POLITICS IS THE POLITICS OF LAST RESORT, OF THE DESPERATE, OR OF THOSE GROWING MILLIONS WHO HAVE NOT KNOWN ANY OTHER WAY'

And there is the need for completely fresh thinking. To get us started: what about seeing time as possessing the modern quality of being *sovereign*, as belonging to the people? We readily accommodate the concept of spatial sovereignty, as in territory, and the personal space of the body as requiring political protection – why should time be any different?

By making time salient in our political philosophy we can then reflect and project, upon a new slate, what kind of democracy we need and want. If we see liberal, institutional democracy as enduring and evolving in its own human and analogue time, then we must understand the danger of the acceleration-producing capacities of digital communication. Reflection, reason, risk-aversion, education, research, debate, analysis, both inside the institutions of democracy and out, are all human states that are inimical to social acceleration and the binary logic of computer-based communication.

And what is digital life anyway? If computers are fundamentally oriented toward efficiency and competition, then we should recall the words of computer theorist and ethicist of the 1940s, Norbert Weiner, who wrote:

> Let us remember that the automatic machine...
> is the economic equivalent of slave labour. Any
> labour which competes with slave labour must
> accept the economic conditions of slave labour.[9]

Or we may seek to make institutional democracy more 'responsive'. But responsive to what? The needs of business? That would be relatively easy, and is what is happening anyway. But the needs of business are those of the present, of profit, of promptitude and executive-based decision-making, with the CEO always in the wings, impatiently awaiting the go-ahead. Responsive to the needs of people? Disconnection and subsequent lack of institutional responsivity is what drove the disenchanted to digital communication in the first place. Facebook politics is the politics of last resort, of the desperate, or of those growing millions who have not known any other way.

To at least appreciate the alien nature of digitality and the fundamental importance of time would be a step towards civilising our politics. Acceleration may be necessary and welcome in many facets of life, such as in routinised production of all kinds of things by tireless robots. But not open-ended acceleration in the lives of people, in the production of culture, in the quality of our relationships – and not least in the processes of politics. Digital technology must become something we can use to *enhance* humanity, not drive it.

We need consciously to pause to reflect and stop ourselves sleepwalking into the mists of the digital cloud – before time runs away and the institutional political process is no longer relevant to anyone. Then perhaps one day, when we have technology

[9] Weiner, N. (1948). *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

and time under more civic and civil auspices, we will come to realise how unthinking we had become to believe that we could improve democracy by means of strange tools that were developed in secrecy, were controlled by plausible-looking people fronting massive corporations that relied on advertising, and who, despite appearances to the contrary (hoodies and philanthropy), were implacably hostile to organised labour and government regulation, and who never asked us if we'd rather not have the next upgrade, because, hey, it's up to you, sister.

We will remember all this and we will. ■

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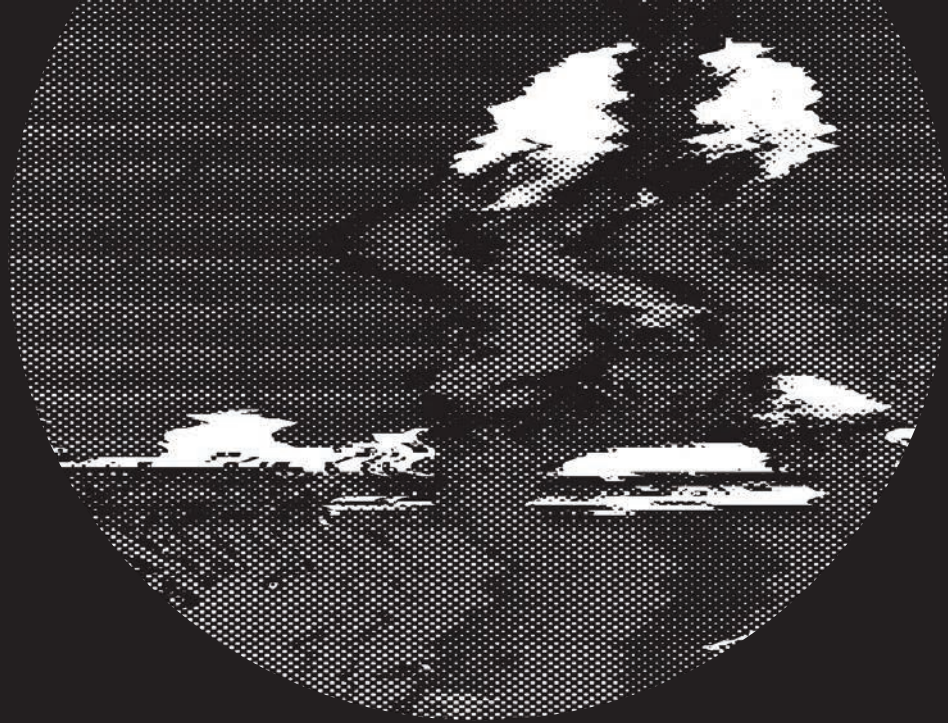
THE GEOPOLITICS OF DISINFORMATION:

A EUROPEAN VIEW ON RUSSIA'S INFORMATION WARFARE

WORDS

LUCA BERTUZZI

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In his seminal book *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, Edward Carr recognised three forms of power in international relations: military power, economic power and power over opinion[1]. In describing power over opinion, he labelled it 'a new development rendered possible and inevitable by the popularisation of international politics and by the growing efficiency of propaganda methods'[2]. Decades later, during the Cold War, Smith[3] stressed the geopolitical value of transnational flows of information in the competition between the two blocs, with the West having the upper hand thanks to its powerful cultural industries and pervasive media outlets. Of course, this battle for 'hearts and minds' was one fought both above and beneath the surface, as both blocs had invested heavily in refining their use of covert information operations[4].

As power over opinion continues to be transformed by what Floridi[5] and others have termed The Information Revolution, so too has the conduct of warfare. In such 'New Wars', the borders of the battlefield have blurred, as have the distinctions between military and civilian spheres more broadly. Whereas power over opinion was once seen as playing a primarily supportive role to the other dimensions of international power, a sophisticated program of information warfare can now hold the potential to destabilise adversaries considerably stronger in both military and economic terms. Unable to match the military and economic capacities of the West, Putin's Russia now stands at the cutting-edge of the 'weaponisation of information'[6]. Nowhere has this been more evident than in the disinformation campaigns conducted by the Kremlin in parallel to the annexation of Crimea. In the interview that follows, I speak with a member of the EU East Strategic Communication task force, established in the wake of this aggression.

Is Russia engaged in an Information War with the West?

Yes, and they are even public about it. The *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare* is really one of the best resources on this topic[7]. Many scholars on this issue analyse just the abstract terms, without really having experience on the ground. Giles analyses the original Russian strategic documents, which is extremely important. That's where you'll find your answer, in the analysis of Russian strategic documents like

[1] Of course, ideas surrounding 'power over opinion' pre-date Carr by centuries. Of particular import are Engels' theories of 'false consciousness', or Gramsci's writings on hegemony as a system through which the dominant class presents its interests as those of the entire society. In the same fashion, Bourdieu's writing on symbolic power as a means of tacit domination is in many ways indebted to Carr's earlier work.

[2] Carr, E. (1939). *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*. New York: Harper Collins.

[3] Smith, A. (1980). *The Geopolitics of Information: How Western Culture Dominates the World*. London: Faber and Faber.

[4] Bittman, L. (1990). 'The Use of Disinformation by Democracies'. *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence*, 4(2); see also: Romerstein, H. (2001). 'Disinformation as a KGB Weapon in the Cold War'. *Journal of Intelligence History* 1(1).

[5] Floridi, L. (2009). 'The Information Society and Its Philosophy'. *The Information Society*. 25(3): 153–58.

[6] Pomerantsev, P. and Weiss, M. (2014). 'The Menace of Unreality: How the Kremlin Weaponizes Information, Culture and Money'. *The Interpreter*, Special Re: 43.

[7] Giles, K. (2017). *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare*. Rome: Research Division, Nato Defense College.

the Military Doctrine, Information Doctrine, Security Doctrine. The *Gerasimov Doctrine* from 2013 is already notorious in this regard. [Russian general] Sergey Shoygu has been saying publicly that information has become another type of weapon, another component of the armed forces; Margarita Simonyan talks about Russia Today as an arm of the Ministry of Defence. Dimitri Kiselyov was reported saying to Neil MacFarquhar from the *New York Times* that 'it's becoming increasingly expensive to kill a person but if you persuade him you don't have to shoot him'. All the military terminology is there, what is becoming hard is to *not* see it. They are engaged in an Information War, and they are very open about it.

What are the main features of an Information War and of this one in particular?

The most commonly accepted feature of information is that it is a means to understand the world in a better way and to act accordingly. Here, you use information to mislead your opponent so that he acts in accordance with your strategic objectives. So, if Russia decides to invade Crimea, they would say that they are not there, in order to mislead the Western political leaders and public opinion, to make them believe that they are not there, that nothing is happening, [and therefore] that they do not need to act. So you have a kind of outline for achieving your objectives. We are talking about taking a foreign territory - that is a military objective – and you take information as another component that should help you in attaining this goal.

What is the difference between that and, for example, the United States saying Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction to justify military operations?

The difference is that [in that instance] you had mistakes in the system. When journalists recognised that Bush's administration was lying, there was a huge scandal, and they were all writing about it. On the other hand, [in the Russian case] you have the mistake *as a system*: a system that encourages lying, misleading, and journalists being rewarded for it. The journalists who were writing that there were weapons of mass destruction, they did not receive medals from the Bush Administration. It was not a wholesale plan. It was one part of the system misleading the other parts, and when the other parts of the system realised they were being misled, it became a huge scandal.

What was the starting point for this Information Warfare?

When you read literature on this topic, very often you read that the turning point was 2008, the war in Georgia, which Russia easily won in the military field, but [which it felt] it had lost in the information field. In Ben Nimmo's article for the *Digital Forensic Research Lab*[8], he wrote about [editor-in-chief of RT and of the state-owned *Rossiya Segodnya*] Margarita Simonyan and her older interviews. In one of these, where she describes the role of RT as a Ministry of Defence, Simonyan even tells us that this was the turning point for RT – that, until then, it was just about promoting Russia and promoting the Russian point of view. They realised that this does not work and so what they have started doing since then is also attacking the West, highlighting precisely these mistakes in our system that we have. Mikhail Zygar[9], who used to be editor-in-chief of *TV Dozhd*, wrote this book called *All the Kremlin's Men*, where he describes 2008 as the turning point for all of this. There was obviously some preparatory period, so if you take a look at those dozens and dozens of websites that are spreading pro-Kremlin disinformation, you would see that they change owners in 2010 or 2011. Suddenly, with the beginning of the war in Ukraine, they started spreading pro-Kremlin disinformation. So, there was obviously some preparatory period, and the war in Ukraine was basically the trigger for launching this information offensive.

What is the European Commission's role in responding to this?

There are different initiatives. Our team, the East StratCom task force, was established following the Council's conclusions, namely the decision of the 28 Heads of State. Then you have the initiatives of the Commission. Currently, under DG CONNECT, there is this so-called Fake News Initiative. There they basically do not talk about the role of Russia. So in a sense, the actor is ignored… they talk more about the consequences, how to deal with symptoms of this information offensive. They deal with fake news in general. If the question was 'what *could* be the role of the EU', well obviously if the European Union would decide to act more decisively then the response would definitely be better than if we have unilateral responses. So, it is definitely better when you have one strong European Union counteracting this information offensive rather than when you have singular countries counteracting it.

Can the EU do that independently from NATO? Does it have the capabilities?

I believe it does. Yes, of course, on the one hand we should definitely ask NATO to do more because [on the Russian side] there is definitely military involvement in this and they even have information warfare troops[10]. So indeed, partly it is for NATO to address. But partly it is also for the civilian sphere, because the threat we are facing is definitely multi-level. It is not only the army – that is, Russian armed forces – that are part of this challenge…it [also involves] high-level politicians, the Kremlin's diplomats, the so-called journalists, the NGOs (or better to say GO-NGOs, government organised NGOs). If you

[8] See: Nimmo, B. (2018). 'RT's Military Mission: Assessing Russia Today's Role as an 'Information Weapon.'' *Atlantic Council Digital Forensic Research Lab.*
[9] Zygar, M. (2016). *All the Kremlin's Men: Inside the Court of Vladimir Putin.* New York: Public Affairs.
[10] Giles, 2017.

'AS POWER OVER OPINION CONTINUES TO BE TRANSFORMED BY THE INFORMATION REVOLUTION, SO TOO HAS THE CONDUCT OF WARFARE'

have all these elements involved in this, and then we say that from our side it should be only the military body counteracting that, we are deliberately saying that we will face the challenge with less resources than the other side puts into it. In my eyes that is not very wise.

Could you describe some of the activities that East StratCom is undertaking to address the issue?

We have an action plan that was cleared by all the Member States, and this action plan gives us three main objectives. The first one, and the majority of our team [is] involved in this, is better communication of the EU's policies in the Eastern Partnership countries. [We do this] in order to explain to the Georgians and the Moldovans that the EU is paying for their roads and their hospitals and is not really forcing them into same-sex marriages. The second objective should be support- ing the independent media in the region, and here it is mostly cooperation with, for example, DG NEAR and other actors like the Open Media Hub. The third objective is to raise aware- ness about Russia's disinformation campaign, to show what the messages are, what the tools are, what the mechanisms are. For this we have the EUvsDisinfo campaign, with the web- site, the Twitter account and the weekly newsletter.

Of course, the European Union will always claim that the media outlets that it finances are indeed inde- pendent. But surely the counterargument from the Russian side would be that we finance media in the West just as they finance media in their region?

This is again almost the same as when are discussing weapons of mass destruction: just because two actors have the same tool, it does not mean they intend to employ them in the same way. Garry Kasparov has a nice example for this – that it is like comparing Jack the Ripper to a surgeon, just because they both have a knife and draw blood. [In this instance] it's import- ant to consider what you are trying to achieve – if you are trying to kill or heal the person. That is really the difference. It is possible to finance media and still give them some editorial independence. One small example: the European Union and some Member States co-finance this daily in Kiev, *European Truth*. Some of the articles are really not very pleasant either for the EU or for the Member States. They pose questions like, 'the Europeans have promised us a visa-free regime, where is it? Why have they not delivered when we have done every- thing?'. They still have editorial independence and they still act as journalists. Whereas, what the Kremlin is financing, this is not acting as journalism, this is acting as part of the Russian
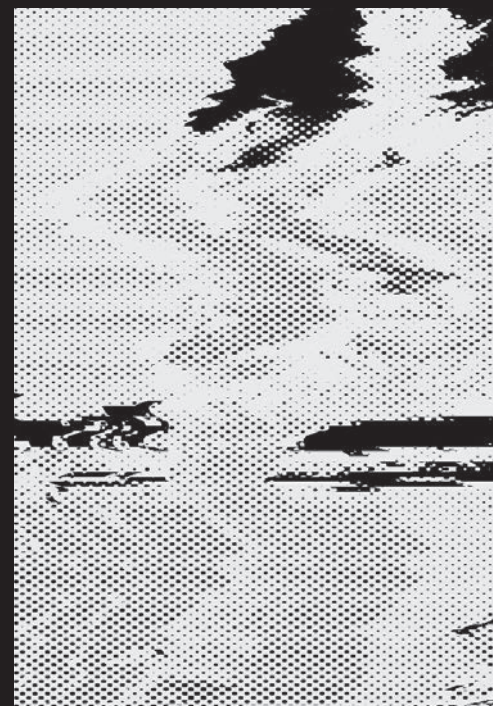
'THE KREMLIN ARE CURRENTLY USING DEMOCRACIES AGAINST THEMSELVES. IT IS THE SAME PRINCIPLE USED IN JUDO, USING THE OPPONENT'S WEIGHT TO HARM HIM'

armed forces. No matter how many times you show them that MH-17 was shot down by a Russian rocket, you will still see on [the Russian armed forces] website that it could have been a Ukrainian rocket, maybe a Mossad one, maybe the US. So they do not act as journalists, they are not trying to inform you, they are trying to mislead you. That is the difference.

And what is the difference between what Russian journalists are saying and traditional propaganda? Why do we need to call it by a different name?

The root of the word propaganda is *propagare*, that is 'to propagate', which is something you could even apply to an advertisement. You can use [the term] for the communication strategies of the EU: you are propagating that the EU is somehow good. When you call it disinformation, that is actually a more precise word because you are implying that this is false information being spread deliberately. You can propagate correct information, you can propagate that a country is good in

something. When you disinform, it is false information.

On another occasion you said that even if the West wanted, it cannot wage an information warfare against Russia because that requires an authoritarian regime. Does that mean that Russia is twisting liberal-democracy against itself?

This is what you see very often, that they use our democracy against ourselves. That leads to questions such as: if you want to counter this information offensive, would one not need to violate the freedom of speech? Yes, in a sense, the Kremlin are currently using democracies against themselves. It is the same principle used in judo, using the opponent's weight to harm him.

What is the solution without compromising our liberties?

During the Cold War we also had to face some information offensives. The Russians had front organisations like the World Peace Council and all these peace organisations protesting against Western aggressions, but never protesting against Russian aggressions in Afghanistan. And we counteracted this without harming or limiting our freedoms, so it is possible.

Do you mean with Radio Free Europe and public diplomacy in general?

Not only that. During the Cold War it simply would not have been possible for Russian journalists to receive accreditation to Brussels. We were indeed more determined to counteract it. And we would not perceive it as a violation of freedom of speech, we would just perceive it as common sense. We do not allow a part of the adversary's army into our territory. I believe that the difference here is that we are not determined to counteract strongly, maybe we do not even understand it as you mentioned in the first question, as an information war. I believe that not all the decision-makers have this kind of understanding of the problem. So until this changes, it's difficult to counteract.

So, if Russia is twisting democracy against itself, is the rise of the far right in Europe a measure of this success?

It is not the cause of the problem, but it definitely [goes] hand-in-hand. The current Kremlin, and the people who are helping its strategic objectives, are using European extremists – and not only from the far-right but also from the far-left – for their own information purposes. [One of the clearest] principles outlined in those strategic documents is using the protest potential of the population. That is, using these extremists that are the most likely to amplify your strategic narratives about the West being worse than or at least as bad as Russia… I cannot say I see there being a causal relationship, but it is definitely helping in the same direction, it is strengthening it. And it is definitely no coincidence that both right and left extremists in various countries like France, the Netherlands, Belgium, but also

Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania or Italy, they all use basically the same narratives. It is obvious that they have some kind of information 'help', so to speak.

War is defined as the continuation of politics with different means. What is Russia's war objective with the European Union? Is it aimed at disrupting democratic practices or is all this just a consequence of antagonism with the West?

There is a great book by Marcel van Herpen[11] called *Putin's Propaganda Machine*. In the beginning of the book, he describes the difference between public diplomacy as we in the West understand it, and as the current Kremlin wages it. The understanding in the West is that public diplomacy can be a non-zero sum game, meaning that you can have a more attractive Spain *and* a more attractive Portugal; no one loses, both are gaining. Whereas, from all we can see, it seems that the current Kremlin understands public diplomacy as a zero-sum game, meaning if you win, I lose. And now, what do you do if you are unable to make yourself stronger? They are unable to reform their economy [as shown by the past] 20 years' dependence on fossil fuels. They have to cut health expenses, they have to cut education expenses. There is nothing they can do in order to make Russia more attractive. Plus, the aggression against neighbouring states does not help. So, what do you do if you cannot increase your public image? You can only harm your opponent, there is no other option. ■

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[11] Van Herpen, M. (2016) *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft Power and Russian Foreign Policy*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

'‘TILL I CAN GET MY SATIS- FACTION’:

WORDS

CLINTON GLENN

unmediated

VIRAL VIDEO AND THE DISRUPTION OF HOMOPHOBIC NARRATIVES IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

In January 2018, approximately one month into the campaign for the Russian presidency, a video was uploaded to YouTube that quickly spread across social media and the mainstream Russian press. Roughly two minutes long, it featured first-year air-transport cadets from the Ulyanovsk Civil Aviation Academy grinding in their underwear to the 2002 hit song 'Satisfaction' by Benny Benassi. In time with the rhythm, the cadets gyrate and mime common household tasks such as ironing and mopping. The video is a clear parody of the original music video, in which scantily clad women use power tools as they mouth the lyrics to the song. The parody video opens with a rear shot of a cadet gyrating and thrusting his pelvis while walking up a set of stairs into a dormitory; he is half-naked, wearing a pilot's cap, a belt wrapped around his body, grey underwear, black fingerless gloves and thick black boots. As he walks into a hall, he points into a shower room where another cadet slides his leg seductively up and down the stall door. He points to another cadet, and the sequence continues. One passes a basketball around his body, while another sweeps the floor in a suggestive manner. The video ends with the cadets in a laundry room, each writhing next to the other. While there are no doubt homoerotic undertones, the video never positions itself as LGBTQ-friendly or even advocative. Nevertheless, in the wake of the video's release, Russian state-run media accused the cadets of disgracing the Russian military, who were threatened with expulsion from the aviation academy on charges of promoting 'gay propaganda.'[1]

The Russian public, however, viewed things in a decidedly different manner. In this article, I examine the discourse that surrounded the video, the reaction to it in various media sources, and the subsequent backlash from the Russian public. Here, the charge that the video represented a form of 'gay propaganda' is particularly telling, inasmuch as the label of 'gay propaganda' is employed to stifle dissent by casting the Russian LGBTQ community as subversive and foreign – a form of western influence in need of elimination. Finally, I address the question of why the video provoked such an outpouring of global solidarity, where other viral videos from Russia have not.

In the period after the video went viral, Russian-language media vilified the students for 'promoting gay propaganda,' tarnishing the reputation of the aviation academy, disrespecting their uniforms, and insulting veterans.[2] Reactions ranged from calling for their expulsion to the governor of Ulyanovsk Oblast promising an independent investigation and for charges to be brought against the students.[3] But ordinary Russians were not on board. In one instance, a Change.org petition was launched as a call for leniency, with the text of the petition pleading that the video was intended as little more than a joke.[4] Elsewhere on the internet, videos in support of the cadets began cropping up on *YouTube* and *VK*. On Russian social media, other groups created their own parody videos in a phenomenon that became known as the 'Satisfaction challenge'[5]. Participants ranged from a group of equestrians dancing in their stables to a Ukrainian swim team, students from a nearby agricultural college, as well as two Russian pensioners in their Krushchov-era flat. Most notably, another group of cadets in Samara created a video in support of the students and were similarly accused of disrespecting their institution.[6]

'THE CHARGE THAT THE VIDEO REPRESENTED A FORM OF 'GAY PROPAGANDA' IS PARTICULARLY TELLING'

In the course of my research, I looked at how the video was framed in major Russian media outlets: how it was described (and by whom), how its origins were contextualised, its staying power, and how it appeared to have been received in online and print journalism in both English and Russian[7]. I also examined how mainstream gay news organisations framed the video as evidence of politically motivated homophobia.[8] Notably, only a few of the articles I looked at discussed the actual upload, and those articles often contradicted one another. For example, American news magazine *Newsweek* claims that the video was filmed and circulated among the cadets and their friends to mark Tatiana Day, the traditional end of the school semester, and that it was later posted online and eventually picked up by the evening news. Contradicting *Newsweek's* account, the UK-based *Gay Star News* claims that the video was actually shot in October, three months before it hit the Internet, with little explanation as to why it was only uploaded in January.[9] Further, only a few sources (mostly Russian and British) rightfully point out that the video is predated by a previous parody done by British soldiers and uploaded to YouTube in 2013.[10] Whether the Russian cadets were inspired by the earlier video

[1] Novaya Gazeta. (2018). 'Чувствуй ритм, читай газету!'.

[2] Novaya Gazeta, 2018.

[3] Meduza. (2018). 'Ульяновским курсантам объявили выговор за пародию на «Satisfaction»'.

[4] Borisenko, A. (n.d.) 'Не Отчисляйте Ульяновских Курсантов,' *Change.org*, https://bit.ly/2MkShN9.

[5] Moscow Times. (2018). 'Saved by the Dance: Half-Naked Videos Swamp Russian Social Media'.

[6] Portnov, G. (2018). 'В Самарском Казачьем Корпусе Проверяют Информацию о Видео с Полуобнаженными Кадетами,' Kommersant.

[7] Specifically, I looked at news stories from major media outlets in the US (The New York Times, The New Yorker, Newsweek), the UK (The Independent, The Guardian, The Mirror), the English-language independent newspaper Moscow Times, state-run media in Russia (Kommersant, Izvestia), and two independent Russian-language news sources, Novaya Gazeta (based in Moscow) and Meduza (based in Riga, Latvia).

[8] These included the UK-based gay news outlets *Gay Star News* and *Attitude*.

[9] Hudson, D. (2018). 'Russian Aviation Cadets Face Expulsion for Twerking in Their Underwear', *Gay Star News*.

[10] Moscow Times. (2018). 'Support Grows for Russian Cadets Over Bawdy Viral Dance Video'.

is unknown, but it naturally leads to the question of originality. If we view the video as a parody *of a* parody, what does that say about the 'viral' nature of the video?[11] If the video is viewed as a mere copy, does this explain the subsequent climb-down of the Russian media and political establishment once they lost control of the narrative? As Clough and Puar remind us, viral media is inherently 'transformative; it has an open-ended relation to form itself.'[12] The problem with approaching viral media, and in particular the 'Satisfaction' video, is that it is extremely difficult to track from origin point to news story. Among all the stories I examined, I was unable to find any consensus as to when the video was released or who released it.

'RATHER THAN FALL IN LINE WITH THE NARRATIVE PUSHED BY STATE-RUN MEDIA, ORDINARY RUSSIANS PUSHED BACK'

The tension between the very public nature of social media versus the private sphere of a joke shared among classmates needs highlighting. Baym and boyd argue that the distinction between social media vis-à-vis traditional forms of media is the 'scale at which people who never had access to broadcast media are now doing so on an everyday basis and the conscious strategic appropriation of media tools in this process.[13] Social media thus provide opportunities for sharing media outside of the milieu of traditional media production. In the case of the 'Satisfaction' video, it is difficult to define just who the intended audience is or was. In attempting to triangulate this, one might consider individual user views (that are included alongside video content on YouTube), language, geographical location, IP address, or the type of media platform it was viewed on, particularly if it was shared from another source. Unfortunately, such metadata is rarely available to researchers, either because it is hidden behind the vagaries of corporate privacy policies or the complexities of coding structures.

Returning to the reaction following the video's release, the discourse around the video shifted from a focus on the actions of the students to a narrative of solidarity. Rather than fall in line with the narrative pushed by state-run media, ordinary Russians pushed back against what they saw as attacks on young men having fun and blowing off steam. In an opinion piece appearing in *The New*

Yorker, this response was singled out as proof that Russian civil society was not nearly as conservative as it is often depicted.[14] For its part, *The Independent* claimed that the reaction represented a 'protest awakening', only to backpedal by referring to Russian sociologist Marinna Murayeva's suggestion that aviation academies are 'often hypersexualised, and pranks are common' before adding that 'the flashmob reaction was more about part of Russia sticking up for the young kids; it might have been different had they been older.'[15] Here, *The Independent* seems to present two distinct possibilities: either this video is an example of 'kids being kids' with the backlash a result of the heavy-handed state response, or it is a much more significant manifestation of discontent within Russian civil society.

More problematic was the link made to Pussy Riot. As *Novaya Gazeta* reported, the rector of the aviation academy explicitly linked the 'Satisfaction' video to the 'punk rock prayer' of Pussy Riot, who he described as 'sneering at the temple' of the Russian Orthodox Church. By way of association, it followed that the students had similarly desecrated the institution of the Academy.[16] This link served the dual purpose of emasculating the cadets – positioning them as feminised and perhaps a little queer – and of elevating the moral panic to include an anti-religious and blasphemous undertone. The mainstream Russian-language press repeated this claim, though it failed to register much outside of Russia. Here, the comparison between male air cadets, who are ostensibly representatives of the Russian government, and the subversive activism of Pussy Riot is particularly telling. To my mind, this reflects a fear in Russian media and political elites that such behaviour – which falls well outside of the conservative, heteronormative mainstream – represents an existential threat to the current political order. Here, Russian's self-appointed global leadership is challenged by 'degenerate' behaviour within its own national institutions.[17]

In his analysis of homophobia in Russian-language media, Persson underlines the power of media to shape public perceptions toward Russia's LGBTQ community, and how this serves as a way to 'manage the visibility of others' in relation to the interests of the Russian political elite.[18] Persson is careful to point out the disruptions that occur in the Russian political landscape, particularly in media stories that go against the dominant homophobic narrative, noting that 'if only for a short time, the limits of what can be seen, heard and said in the public space break down and can possibly be redefined.'[19] An initial analysis of the aftermath

[11] Clough and Puar describe virality as 'a form of communication and transmission in and across various and varying domains: the biological, the cultural, the financial, the political, the linguistic, the technical, and the computational.' Most significant among the characteristics of viral media are its ability to cross between different domains and its lack of network specificity. See: Clough, P. and Puar, J. (2012). 'Introduction,' WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly, 40(1/2). 13.

[12] Clough and Puar, 2012, 14.

[13] Baym, N. and boyd, d. (2012). 'Socially Mediated Publicness: An Introduction.' *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 56(3). 321.

[14] Gessen, M. (2018). 'How Russia's Hilarious, Homoerotic 'Satisfaction' Became a Nationwide Meme of Solidarity,' *The New Yorker*.

[15] Carroll, O. (2018). 'Russia's Reaction to the Spoof Naked Air Cadets Video Tells Us a Lot about the Country,' *The Independent*.

[16] 'Чувствуй ритм, читай газету!'

[17] For a more thorough analysis of the links between the Putin regime and far-right political and religious organisations in the West, see: Shekhotsov, A. (2018). *Russia and the Western Far-Right: Tango Noir*, 88-92.

[18] Persson. E. (2015). 'Banning 'Homosexual Propaganda': Belonging and Visibility in Contemporary Russian Media'. *Sexuality & Culture* 19(2). 257.

[19] Persson, 2015, 270.

[24]

of the 'Satisfaction' video would support such a claim – the notion that it represented anything other than a youthful prank quickly dissipated. However, in the long run, it does not appear to have shifted the frame of what is considered acceptable discourse in the public sphere, as charges of 'gay propaganda' continue to be brought against individuals and organisations. In the weeks following the Russian presidential election, the website *Gay.ru* was blocked by the federal media and communications agency Rosskomnadzor, despite the website operating for more than twenty years.[20] In a more recent case, Maxim Neverov, a 16-year-old from a small town in Altai Krai, was charged with disseminating 'gay propaganda' in the form of shirtless photos of men saved in a folder on his *VK* account. His prior activist activities had also made him a target of security services. He was convicted and fined 50,000 rubles (approximately US $736), though his lawyer will be appealing the conviction. Nemerov has also vowed to continue his activism despite the conviction.[21]

'THE AIM IS TO COERCE VIEWERS TO GO OUT AND VOTE, LEST THEY BE SEEN AS COMPLACENT HOMOSEXUALS'

After the initial period of virality had subsided, few journalists outside of Russia followed up to ascertain what sort of punishment had been handed out to the cadets. The English-language blog *Crime Russia*, which follows cases of corruption and state violence in the country, briefly outlined that the cadets had been reprimanded but were allowed to remain in the academy.[22] Evidently, the virality of the video lay primarily in its content and the response that it engendered in Russia, as its more substantive consequences appear to have had little impact either on how the video spread or its symbolic value in the Western press. The video also exemplifies the limits to charges of 'gay propaganda' (though homophobia continues to be used as a political weapon to motivate Russians to vote). In the wake of the 'Satisfaction' video, a professionally made video clip went viral, though no one claimed responsibility for its production and dissemination. In the

video, an 'ordinary' Russian man decides not to vote. He awakes the next morning to find that his son has joined the Communist Young Pioneer movement, that he has been drafted into the army (in a message delivered by a colonel and two black soldiers who dab instead of salute), and that his family has been forced to take in a gay man who cannot find a partner. The obvious message behind the video is that if people decide not to vote, communists, black people, and gays will take over the country.[23] More recently, another video has surfaced which targets voters in Samara. In the video, two men walk while talking about democracy. They then stand at urinals next to one another, take the bus, and arrive home, where they strip down to their underwear. The bedroom door closes and a short message appears, indicating the date of the local election.[24] The aim is to coerce viewers to go out and vote, lest they be seen as complacent homosexuals, and to insinuate that non-participation in elections enables 'gay propaganda' and a 'gay conspiracy' to continue its covert take-over of Russian society[25].

To sum up: while the initial charges of 'gay propaganda' did not stick with regards to the 'Satisfaction' video, this should not be taken as evidence of a sea-change in opinions towards LGBTQ rights in Russia. Rather, the limits of a law aimed squarely at a minority community come into sharp relief – something is only 'gay propaganda' if it supports LGBTQ rights or communities. If it is meant to whip up support for the government, then leveraging societal homophobia comes above the apparent illegality of the dissemination of such images. There is little evidence to suggest that the video resulted in a wider social movement pushing back against the regressive policies of the Putin regime. In effect, the video is evidence of a pushback from ordinary Russians, who refused to adhere to the political rhetoric emanating from the Kremlin and on state-run media, and exemplifies how certain forms of injustice – in this case, students being persecuted for a harmless prank – do not pass without a collective response. Whether this represents a 'one-off' event or evidence of broader discontent in Russian civil society remains to be seen. ■

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[20] Besanvalle, J. (2018). 'Russia Bans Popular LGBTI Site for Violating 'Gay Propaganda' Law,' *Gay Star News*.

[21] Cooper, A. (2018). '''Not Scared': Russian Teen Charged under 'Gay Propaganda' Law Will Keep Protesting,' *NBC News*.

[22] Crime Russia. (2018). 'Happy End and Satisfaction! Russian Students Reprimanded for Viral Underwear Dancing Video'. February 2.

[23] For a full analysis of the video, including its potential origins, see: Bekbulatova, T. (2018). 'Viral Videos Promoting the Presidential Election Are Popping up Online in Russia and Nobody Is Sure Who's Making Them. The Breadcrumbs Lead Back to the Kremlin,' trans. Chris Hernon, *Meduza*.

[24] Cooper, A. (2018). 'Russian Election Ad Depicts Gay Hookup,' *Into.com*.

[25] A recent poll by the Public Opinion Research Centre confirms that a majority of Russians believe that a gay conspiracy is attempting to 'subvert the country's traditional values.' See: Cooper, A. (2018) 'Majority of Russians Believe Gays Conspiring to Destroy Country's Values, Poll Finds', *NBC News*.

DARK MATTER, BLACK TRANSPARENCY, AND THE AESTHETICIZATION OF POLITICS

WORDS

LOUIS ARMAND[1]

Sunday 21 August, 2016, 2pm: the anniversary of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.[2] A group of bearded militiamen, shouting *Allahu Akhbar* and firing Kalashnikovs, while waving the black flag of DAESH (the so-called 'Islamic State'), suddenly appear on Prague's Old Town Square. They scatter the crowds of tourists gathered around the Jan Hus monument and the city's former Jewish quarter, causing a momentary wave of panic. Every capital in Europe is on TERROR ALERT following the Bataclan and Charlie Hebdo attacks. The militiamen aren't alone; they've brought prisoners in orange 'Gitmo' jumpsuits, and a camel. They seize women from the crowd, whipping those deemed to be immodestly dressed, and perform a symbolic stoning. A mullah in white taqiyah declares Prague a caliphate from the back of a desert-coloured Humvee.

The mullah, like every other aspect of this performance, wasn't #fakenews, but he *was* nevertheless a fake: the alter-ego of Martin Konvi ka, chief instigator of an ultra-far-right Czech anti-immigrant movement modelled on Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). Their DAESH-motiffed raid sought to dramatise the threat posed by the 'enemy at the gates', should it be permitted to enter Europe by stealth, under cover of the Syrian refugee crisis. It was a perverse enactment of what the anti-Islamists claimed to be defending against – like a paranoia that 'prepares its own terrorist plots, which it then prevents'.[3] Confronted by a 'threat' predominantly constructed by the media (no signs of a refugee crisis in Prague, though plenty of paying tourists), the intent behind the Prague Caliphate was to present the unpresentable: to supply, in Lacanian terms, a fundamental lack – not mere simulation, but 'real' obscenity, whose threat wasn't to be vested in *what* it purported to present, but in the ambivalence of the very act of representation.

As a political stunt, the invasion of Prague's Old Town Square had the virtue of getting Konvi ka arrested, however reluctantly, by the same authorities that had permitted it to take place and who were unable, in the ensuing media fracas, not to appear complicit. As performance art, its virtues were ambiguous, raising questions not only about the Alt-Right's seizure of initiative in the domain of dissident and subversive action claimed by the avantgarde, but about the very legitimacy of the avantgarde's ambition to abolish the gap between art and life. Beyond the Prague Caliphate's element of farce was a real manifestation of an extremism once again occupying the mainstream of Western politics and perpetuating real violence – no longer on fringes, but in the uniforms of state security, on the streets, at checkpoints and at border-fences. Neo-fascist parties hold parliamentary seats across Europe – their populist messages and tactics strengthened by the impotence of mainstream social democratic and labour parties on the one hand and, on the other,

a far-left populism from which it is frequently indistinguishable.

More importantly, the Alt-Right's recent re-appropriation of dissident and revolutionary discourse, married to a regime of (real or implied) violence, represents a crisis in the institutionalised culture of Western democracy, whose self-preservation strategies of the past 70 years have been principally directed at communism and the anti-capitalist 'left'. To a large degree, this strategy was internalised to the intellectual and cultural milieu of avantgardism and cultivated as a productive form of homeostasis: a *representation* of radical critique, whose insurrectional force – erupting from the 'real' – could be dissipated as 'art', and whose impetus could be channelled so as to fuel the engine of mass cultural commodification (whereas, borrowing Walter Benjamin's 1937 formulation, fascism's 'aestheticisation of politics' represents a hyperstitional feedback from 'art' into the 'real'[4]). In assigning a symbolically critical function to the avantgarde, revolutionary violence would not only be neutralised as art but, *as art*, would enhance the prestige of the status quo itself – as the perpetuation of an enlightened revolutionary spirit (through a constant yet stable renewal of the democratic process, etc.).

'AS A POLITICAL STUNT, THE INVASION OF PRAGUE'S OLD TOWN SQUARE HAD THE VIRTUE OF GETTING KONVIČKA ARRESTED, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY, BY THE SAME AUTHORITIES THAT HAD PERMITTED IT TO TAKE PLACE'

Within the institutional avantgarde, the revolutionary foundations of Western democracy – being dissociated from political life and reserved to mere aesthetic ritual – acquire the abstract status – like art itself – of an *acte gratuit*. Consider, for example, André Breton's 1929 pronouncement that 'the simplest Surrealist act would be to rush out into the street, pistol in hand, and fire blindly into the crowd', in contrast to the 2015 Paris attacks – in which 130 people were randomly gunned down or blown up by suicide bombers. Or Chris Burden's 1971 performance piece 'Shoot', in which the artist had himself shot in the arm with a .22 calibre long rifle by a marksman in the small Santa Anna 'F Space' gallery (likening the act of being shot to conceptualist

[2] When Russian tanks appeared on the streets overnight, the state's brief experiment in 'socialism with a human face' was brought to a rapid end.
[3] Metahaven. (2015). *Black Transparency: The Right to Know in the Age of Mass Surveillance.* Berlin: Sternberg. xiii.
[4] Benjamin, W. (1995). 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn. London: Fontana.

▲ Ai Weiwei (2005), 'Dropping a Han Dynasty Vase'.

sculpture), in contrast to the Kent State shootings of May 4 the previous year – in which the Ohio National Guard fired live ammunition at student anti-Vietnam War protestors, killing four and wounding nine. Or Ai Weiwei's 2005 performance (recorded as a photographic triptych), 'Dropping a Han Dynasty Vase', in contrast with the 2015 filmed footage of DAESH exploding the ancient ruins of Palmyra.

These *disillusionments* of the avantgarde achieve something of an apotheosis under the post-9/11 conditions of the US government's global 'War on Terror', hand-in-hand with the militaristic suppression and criminalisation of the anti-globalisation protest movement (Seattle, Prague, Genoa) – of which US and UK Occupy movements, the Indignados movement in Spain, the Greek anti-austerity movement, and last year's Hamburg G20 'riots' have been presented as isolated echoes. Meanwhile, nationalist, anti-immigrant, anti-EU, and quasi-fascist blocs across Europe (Pegida, Front National, Golden Dawn, Fidesz, AfD, etc.) have manufactured – as with the Tea Party that paved the way for the Trump presidency in the US – a collective spectacle of 'civilisation in crisis' (of which the proof is 'civilisation' itself, in its post-Nuremburg, liberal democratic iteration).

This seizure of initiative by the far-right hinges on a logic of cultural decadence – above all a *revolutionary decadence*: the dissolution of dissent as spectacle of critique, critique as art, and art as

commodity. It relies on the representation of *real* dissent as liberal democracy's 'dirty secret', suppressed by hidden conspiratorial hands manipulating the public agenda.[5] Its professed task is to emancipate discourse by *unconcealing* a 'truth' whose *self-evidence* it then opportunistically enforces by every means available. Its denunciation of science, the judiciary, the media and all proof-based (counter-) argument as *ideological* merely confirms that it itself represents something like a return of the liberal-democratic repressed. For it is precisely in the self-denial of liberalism's radically ideological nature – boldly put forth in the Fukuyamaesque post-historical, 'post-ideological' New World Order of cybernetic fiscal management – that the political obscenity of neo-fascism is affirmed, in the form of a secret that flagrantly exposes itself.

Between the performance of power and the operations of secrecy, the question of representation acquires a radically *ambivalent* force. While in self-proclaimed democracies the meaning of representation devolves – via principles of citizenship, habeas corpus, personal dignity – upon the concrete individual, this in itself has become an abstraction, seamlessly universalised in the distributed cybernetics of corporate 'legal personage', the 'hidden hand' of the marketplace (as proxy for social justice), and the 'collective agency' of global finance projected in the symbolic functioning of the State. This political *dark matter* stands in opposition to whatever logic of *transparency* underwrites those naïve views of social communication in which the techniquesof

[5] In the US, this conventionally assumes the form of First Amendment versus Political Correctness; in the EU, national sovereignty versus Brussels-enforced internationalism (i.e. immigration).

'THE ALT-RIGHT'S RECENT RE-APPROPRIATION OF DISSIDENT AND REVOLUTIONARY DISCOURSE...REPRESENTS A CRISIS IN THE INSTITUTONALIZED CULTURE OF WESTERN DEMOCRACY'

representation are as a window onto the 'real' experience of everyday life. Such fallacies cause us to lose sight not only of the mystification of politics and the dissimulations of a power shrouded in secrecy systems, but of the convulsive ambivalence (what James Joyce called 'ambiviolence') at the basis of what representation *is* – and, by declensions, of signification generally, including of course its most privileged form: the commodity.

Secrecy, however it may appear, isn't the opposite of transparency – for it is only in relation to the unpresentable that the secrecy/transparency dichotomy assumes its form as a political actuality. On the one hand as the guarantee of due process mediating (and being mediated by) the pragmatic functioning of the State, etc.; and, on the other, as their systematic disruption. Yet by the same token this subverts the very idea of the political itself, consigning it to a realm of 'impossibility': the 'science of the polis' as *representation* of the *un*presentable. And it's within these paradoxical arrangements of knowledge and nonknowledge that the spectre of *black transparency* emerges: what we might call the political unconscious, or the political *as* unconscious.

During a press conference on 12 February, 2002, then US Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld explained away the conspicuous lack of evidence linking Iraq to the supply of weapons of mass destruction to Al-Qaeda by famously telling reporters that:

> 'there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say, we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know… It is the latter category that tend to be the difficult ones.'

To which Slavoj Žižek duly replied: 'If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq were the 'unknown unknowns,' that is, the threats from Saddam whose nature we cannot even suspect, then the Abu Ghraib scandal shows that the main dangers lie in the 'unknown knowns' – the disavowed beliefs, suppositions and obscene practices we pretend not to know about, even though they form the background of our public values.'[6]

These 'unknown knowns,' completing Rumsfeld's matrix of permutations (of which it, itself, is the suppressed coordinate), can be said to 'stand for' a certain *unpresentability of representation* as such: the pretence not to know (as Žižek says) masking that which *cannot be permitted* to be shown, without subverting the system of representation itself. Of course, this system is really a system of non-presentation and vice versa: what the Abu Ghraib scandal *shows*, however, isn't the *place of danger* (its real position in the matrix), but where the danger *lies* (in its equivocation: as Lacan says, the enunciation is never identical to the enunciated[7]). Mimesis, here, always entails an act of contradiction *within itself*; of dissimulation in the absence of any possible similitude.

This is where Žižek's response becomes most interesting, pointing to the representation of a 'secret' that disavows knowledge of itself while nevertheless performing its own revelation *in advance*, as the core of what Žižek calls its 'obscene enjoyment'. Reflecting on the photographs of bizarre humiliations and tortures inflicted on Iraqi prisoners by US military personnel at Abu Ghraib, Žižek made the salient observation that 'the very positions and costumes of the prisoners suggests a theatrical staging, a kind of tableau vivant that brings to mind American performance art, 'theatre of cruelty,' the photos of Robert Mapplethorpe or the unnerving scenes in David Lynch's films.' Above all, 'recording the humiliations with a camera, with the perpetrators included in the picture, their faces stupidly smiling beside the twisted naked bodies of the prisoners, was an integral part of the process, in

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[6] Žižek, S. (2004). 'What Rumsfeld Doesn't Know That He Knows About Abu Ghraib'. *In These Times*.
[7] Lacan, J. (1966). 'Subversion du sujet et dialectique de désir'. *Écrits*, 793-827.

▲ An unidentified Abu Ghraib detainee, seen in a 2003 photo. Photo courtesy Associated Press.

stark contrast to the secrecy of Saddam's torturers.'

To be clear: the 'unknown known' isn't itself a pretence. If Abu Ghraib shows anything, it's firstly the *possibility of its being shown* – even more, the *desire for it to be shown*. This is its obscene dimension. Yet the dimension of the 'unknown known' whose existence *it is made to stand for* in Žižek's schema, is precisely that which, in the *showing* of the 'Abu Ghraib scandal,' *cannot signify*: it is the secret kept even from itself. Not an unconscious knowledge (the unconscious, in the Freudian sense, cannot 'know'), but rather the unconscious *of* knowledge, of which this 'scandal,' this *spectacle of revelation*, stands in the same relation as a symptom. It defines that point where reason 'itself' (the

State, the World Order) rests upon a rationale beyond its grasp (an 'unreason').[8]

Rumsfeld's 'unknown known' constructs an *alibi*, not for its concealment, but its revelation. Its analogue is the media frenzy around DAESH beheadings and American school shootings, paralleled by a #fakenews memetology that's only *too real* – one increasingly familiar from Trump rallies, Fox News, White House press briefings, and their often-surreal echoes across Europe and the rest of the world. This is the pornographic dimension of Žižek's schema: the manufactured transgression of a taboo 'secretly' performed in all its nakedness. As the accessible counterpart of *that which cannot be represented as such*, the 'Abu Ghraib

[8] This theoretical terrain is a familiar one, having served among other things as the background to the debate between Foucault and Derrida around the former's 1961 study *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. See: Derrida, J. (1978). 'Cogito and the History of Madness'. *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass. London: Routledge.

▲ Jonathan Hobin (2010), 'A Boo Grave', from the series *In the Playroom*.

scandal' exposes a certain prurient dimension of 'truth-showing', in which the *implied* witness is both spectator and perpetrator, and in which the entire logic of media-epistemology is implicated. The revelations of Abu Ghraib, against a backdrop of impunity, exposed the ambivalence of *that which knows* within the Western system of political representation – for which reason it (both the revelation and subsequent inquiries) remained, like American performance art, merely *une pièce de scandale* and not a revolution.

In the introduction to their 2015 book, *Black Transparency: The Right to Know in the Age of Mass Surveillance*, design collective Metahaven observe: 'Much has been written about political transparency in recent years. Many authors appear to think that the degree of transparency in a system should be measured purely by the amount of information in it that becomes available to outsiders. *How* that information is released seems to be less important.'[9] *Black Transparency* focuses on Metahaven's work with WikiLeaks, its branding and various tactics for making classified documents public – from mass unmediated data-dumps (the US diplomatic cables), to mobilising consortiums of investigative journalists to provide a critical narrative for leaked material (the Snowden files), to marketing and packaging individual items (the *Collateral Murder* Apache helicopter footage, showing the 2007 killing of Reuters journalist Namir Noor-Eldeen in Eastern Baghdad) for maximum effect. The book returns repeatedly to questions of pragmatic manipulation of information economies and media sensationalism by WikiLeaks in order to produce a 'shock and awe' effect to counteract the massive underwhelm

[9] Metahaven, 2015, xiii.

produced by Freedom of Information and an all-pervasive redac-tology reducing the right to know to an absurdist theatre of non-presentation.

Like *habeas corpus*, transparency is held to be a basic tenet of democracy, in which government occupies a space between individual rights to privacy and the privilege of national security. Today, this position is better defined as lying between the globalisation of surveillance and the industrialisation of secrecy systems, where 'transparency' means civic *compliance* – according to the mantra that 'those who encrypt are the terrorists'. This inversion of the principle of transparency raises anew the spectre of persecution against dissenting practice and of the denigration of the meaning of civil disobedience in the so-called information age. In the face of such threats, civil oversight is pushed into the shadows. Hence *black transparency*. Black transparency, in Metahaven's formulation, 'is a disclosure of secrets that aims to embarrass and destabilise their keeper. Originally an ethical imperative to blow the whistle on abusive government, *it is not insensitive to the allures and spectacles of propaganda*'[10]. Disclosure of this kind, in its presentation of 'real evidence,' in its appeal to a certain 'documentary realism,' is never far enough removed from staged revelations like Colin Powell's weapons of mass destruction performance-piece at the UN, with its multimedia forensic paraphernalia and covert intelligence on show for the world to see. This is for the simple reason that as critique approaches the horizon of social transformation, or the transformation of collective consciousness – the 'historical task' of revolutionary politics and the avantgarde – it draws into view a formal ambivalence in the *discourse* of 'truth' (between disclosure and concealment; disclosure *as* concealment).

In WikiLeaks, too, we encounter something like Lenin's exhortation to 'always try to be as radical as reality itself'[11]. It's a formulation for a Realpolitik in which the logic of secrecy systems is itself the most effective instrument of a critique of a culture of secrecy. Yet also, in which the logic of transparency is the effective instrument of subversion of a 'transparent society'. These dialectical parasitisms don't, however, represent a deviation or perversion of some primordial truth, but a consequence – indeed a condition – of discourse itself. For the *truth of discourse* lies in these fundamental ambivalences (language itself has no ethical faculty) – just as the 'Abu Ghraib scandal' is mediated on both sides by equivalent *logics of representation*, whether in the photographic spectacle of the prisoners/torturers or that of their mass media spectatorship, the official inquiries, the performances of contrition and deniability, etc.

This and not the specific content of the Abu Ghraib images

– however disturbing – constitute the real obscenity. And it is this disconcerting ambivalence that occupies the place of the 'unknown known' – and from which both the *disillusionment* of the WikiLeaks project and the 'obscene enjoyment' of Rumsfeld&Co's *licentiousness* stem. It's what provides the impetus of a certain 'critical kitsch', whereby the Abu Ghraib torture photographs are able to appropriate the status of avantgarde art (and to bestow upon the 'art' derived from them not controversy but belatedness, poignance, triviality). Žižek's contentextualisation of Abu Ghraib through reference to the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe[12] points to the related spectacle of art's vilification in a moral crusade by the same neo-conservative forces who authored US torture policy in Iraq and Afghanistan. It also points to a seemingly contrary movement within the avantgarde itself,[13] in which tabloid sensationalism is appropriated and fed back into an economy of outrage and denunciation from which its 'subversive' value solely derives[14].

This situation isn't far removed from the 1937 *Entartete Kunst* [15]exhibit, staged by the Nazis to denounce the cult of modern art and its corruption of (German) civilisation. Like *Sensation*, *Entartete Kunst* exploited a logic of 'degeneracy' as mass spectacle, inviting a seemingly paradoxical 'obscene enjoyment' in staging the prohibited under the guise of denunciation, or staging denunciation under the guise of art. To produce this effect, the organisers of *Entartete Kunst* hung paintings by Max Ernst, Alexander Archipenko, Raoul Hausmann and nearly 100 others, alongside choice specimens by psychiatric patients and children, in an overcrowded and intentionally disordered space graffitied with denunciatory slogans and propaganda screeds that resembled nothing so much as a Dadaist provocation. There's a suspicion that *Entartete Kunst* expressed – against the backdrop of Nazi revolutionary posturing – a desire to discredit competing avantgardisms so as to secretly usurp their language. By way of alibi, a coinciding exhibition was set up: the *Grosse deutsche Kunstausstellung (*or Great German Art Show) in Munich's expansive *Haus der deutschen Kunst*, filled with regime-approved art.

Famously, *Entartete Kunst* attracted three-and-a-half times the number who visited the 'official' show, yet of course *both* were official (just as Abu Ghraib stands for both the US's moralistic 'War on Terror' and its advocacy of torture). This masterful appropriation of the subversive idea finds an otherwise unlikely iteration in the more recent Skopje 2014 project for the reconstruction of the Macedonian capital, designed to erase the city's 'socialist modernism'. While the Nazi remodelling of German cultural consciousness assumed the outward form of an anti-modernism, the construction of twenty neoclassical façades within the centre of Skopje – alongside a plethora of state monuments (including the

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[10] *ibid* – emphasis added.

[11] Lenin, in conversation with the Romanian poet Marcu, during his exile in Zurich. Quoted in Motherwell, R. (1951). *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. xxiv.

[12] And by association the Culture Wars waged throughout the 1990s by neo-conservatives against artists like Mapplethorpe, as well as his contemporaries Andreas Serrano, Karen Finley and Chris Ofili.

[13] One that begins with Warhol's 'Death and Disaster' silkscreens and achieves its apotheosis in the 1997 Saatchi-sponsored *Sensation* exhibition in London.

[14] For example, Marcus Harvey's 'Myra,' a portrait of child-murderer Myra Hindley composed of children's handprints.

[15] Literally, 'degenerate art'.

very epitome of nationalist delirium, an enormous gold equestrian statue of Alexander the Great) – produced a hyperinflated postmodernism. Replete with red double-decker London buses and fake Arc de Triomphe, this parade of kitsch is reminiscent of nowhere more than Las Vegas and could just as easily have been signed by Damien Hirst or Jeff Koons, were it not for a lack of conscientious irony.

Conjured into being for the avowed purpose of erasing Skopje's previous reconstruction,[16] these multiple redactions in the social fabric produced, in place of a fabled 'collective memory,' a collage of memes that exposes a perverse preoccupation with *simulacra* while sabotaging in advance any critique of its *inauthenticity*. When Francis Fukuyama proclaimed postmodernism to be capitalism's masterstroke, he meant it in the same way: meaning the apparently unlimited capacity of commodification (the commodity being the 'empty signifier' par excellence) to absorb and integrate into itself any critique whatsoever by inverting the conventional operations of subversion. Skopje 2014, *Entartete Kunst*, Abu Ghraib, the Prague Caliphate, all have this in common as an appropriative strategy. And just as Martin Konvi ka's DAESH-inspired anti-immigration stunt was variously able to present itself as political subversion, performance art, and self-parody, so the delirious kitsch of Macedonia's *renaissance* equally serves as postmodern *coup de théâtre*, wherein the 'truth claims' of its nationalist mythology signify not as history but as art. As the 2016 Colourful Revolution (anti-government protesters lobbing paint-bombs) went a long way towards demonstrating, Skopje 2014's seemingly *inadvertent* postmodernism absorbed all attempts at defacement, integrating the protests into a living museum whose 'monuments' were instantly transformed into contemporary *objets d'art*. ■

'ENTARTETE KUNST EXPLOITED A LOGIC OF 'DEGENERACY' AS MASS SPECTACLE, INVITING A SEEMINGLY PARADOXICAL 'OBSCENE ENJOYMENT' IN STAGING THE PROHIBITED UNDER THE GUISE OF DENUNCIATION'

Louis Armand is a Sydney-born writer and visual artist, and Director of the Centre for Critical and Cultural Theory at Charles University in Prague. The author of eight novels, including *The Combinations* (2016), *Cairo* (2014), and *Breakfast at Midnight* (2012), he has also published ten collections of poetry – most recently, *East Broadway Rundown* (2015) and *The Rube Goldberg Variations* (2015).

[16] That is, a UN-supported project based on a design by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, following a devastating earthquake in 1963 that levelled much of the historic city.
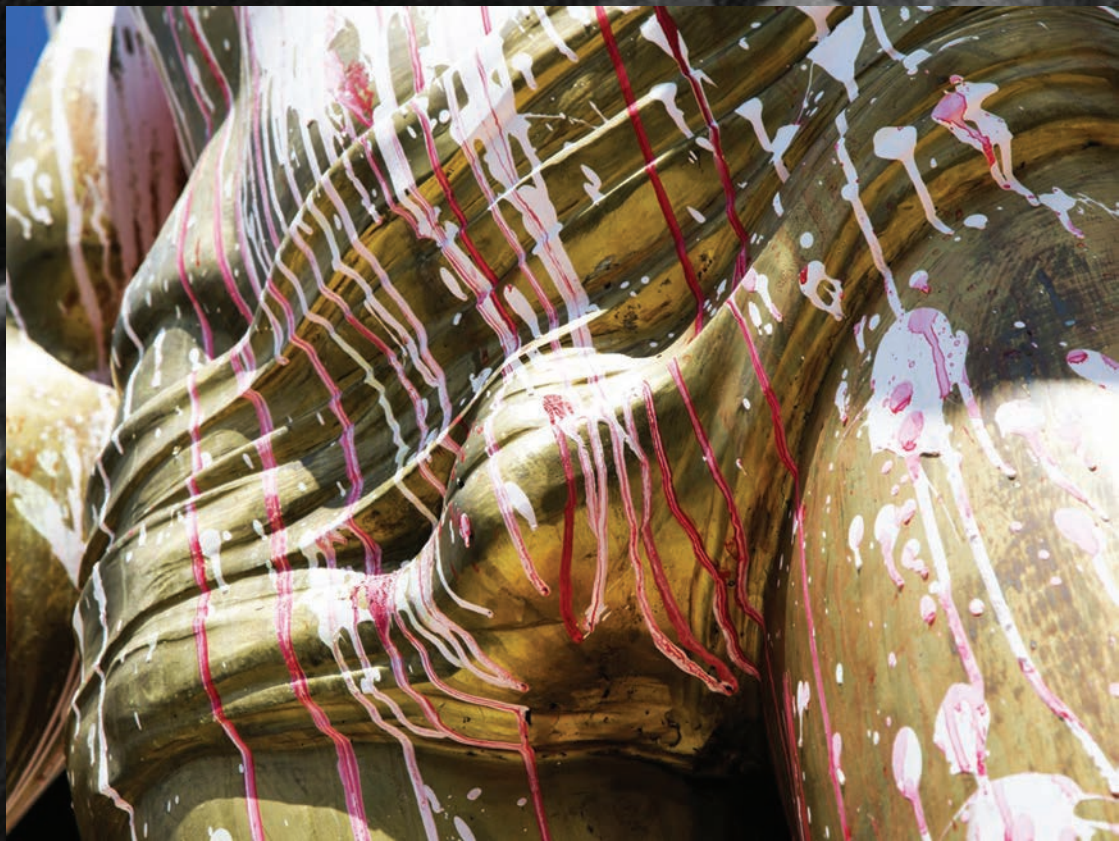
▲ Marco Zanin (2016), 'Chromoskopje'.

REPRESENTING EGYPT IN BERLIN:

JASMINA METWALY'S

WE ARE NOT WORRIED IN THE LEAST

AT SAVVY CONTEMPORARY

WORDS

RAREȘ GROZEA

Shot from a first-person perspective, the camera moves down a white, well-lit corridor into an empty gallery space, then up to someone positioned in front of the very video I am watching play across six monitors stacked in two columns. Around me, the gallery space is dark and crowded, and the voices emanating from the video works mingle with those of visitors engaged in casual talk and debate. It's the opening night of Jasmina Metwaly's solo show *We Are Not Worried in the Least*, curated by Antonia Alampi (Savvy contemporary, Berlin, 13 February – 11 March, 2018). The show consists predominantly of video works like the aforementioned *Six Lessons with Alaa*, in which performer Alaa Abdullatif presents a set of instructions on how to film a protest or large-scale political event, the footage for which was sourced from citizen-made recordings of Egypt's 2011 Arab Spring protests. Abdullatif's voiceover vacillates between the practical (tips on how to keep yourself out of danger), the stylistic (how to hold the camera and frame a shot), and the persuasive (how to gauge your audience). In lesson one, 'How to film an object in the sky,' we see footage of a helicopter; Abdullatif reminds us 'this visual might become relevant later on. This image might become *evidentiary*'.

Here, I couldn't help but draw a thread back to another exhibition that I'd seen not long before, namely Paolo Cirio's *Evidentiary Realism* (NOME, Berlin, 2 December 2017 – 17 February, 2018). Cirio describes 'evidentiary realism' as a means of representing social reality in light of technological and socio-political change that has made traditional techniques of realism (*viz.* the accurate depiction of what is seen) insufficient. These technological changes also open up the possibility of a more concrete 'truth value' for art, where it might also act as evidence, or at least an evidentiary aesthetic. In his opening essay, Cirio writes:

> 'this aestheticization of evidence differs from traditional documentary art. It can instead synthesize complex systems and make them accessible, catalyzing responses from the audience, who otherwise would not sense the evidence emotionally and visually.'[1]

Evidentiary Realism brought together visual, schematic representations of aggregate data and of networks (works by Mark Lombardi, Hans Haacke, and Navine G. Khan-Dossos), works using appropriated written documents (Jenny Holzer, Sadie Barnette, Suzanne Treister), as well as actual forensic evidence (Forensic Architecture[2]), all attempting to make visible obscured patterns of power. Particularly notable was Egyptian artist Khaled Hafez's 5-minute work entitled *The Video Diaries* (2011)[3], which, like Metwaly's work, invokes the artist's

first-hand account of the Arab Spring. The screen is split as a triptych, each segment containing alternating segments of still images, film footage, or a solid black background, while an acoustic guitar soundtrack overlaps with what one can barely make out as a mash between American news media reporting of the events and the sounds of protest. As Hafez notes, the work stands as a memorial to Ahmed Basiony and Khaled Said, two Egyptian men murdered in 2011, the former a friend of the artist.

In his essay accompanying the piece *The Magma of Reality*, Nicola Trezzi proposes reading the video first and foremost as a work of art – that is, 'through the filters of creativity, authorship, signature, and labour.'[4] Following the essay's interpretation, the

'THIS AESTHETICIZATION OF EVIDENCE DIFFERS FROM TRADITIONAL DOCUMENTARY ART. IT CAN INSTEAD SYNTHESIZE COMPLEX SYSTEMS AND MAKE THEM ACCESSIBLE'

stock/found footage and images can be said to circulate from a social archive to the artist, who retains primary agency over their manipulation. According to Trezzi, at the heart of this work (and others like it) lies the tension between functionality (the work's documentary function of conveying information about the past) and aesthetics, which he exploits to great effect by blurring the contours of representation through distorted facial features, juxtapositions, audio editing, and so on.[5]

It is against this backdrop that the two exhibitions can be set in dialogue. Following Trezzi's line of reasoning, Metwaly's

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[1] Cirio, P. (2017), 'Evidentiary Realism,' in *Evidentiary Realism*. Exhibition catalog, 7. Available at: www.nomegallery.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ER_Catalog.pdf.

[2] FA's theoretical framework is highly pertinent to any discussion of evidence-based art and its relationship with knowledge. See: Keenan, T. and Weizman, E. (2012). *Mengele's Skull. The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

[3] Full work available at: www.vimeo.com/30986724.

[4] Trezzi, N. (2017). 'The Magma of Reality,' in *Evidentiary Realism*, 69.

[5] As Trezzi writes, 'Art doesn't try to explain, to illustrate, or even to document, although it might use the language of documentation; rather, art tries to unfold it in order to make it more complex rather than more easy to explain and understand; more obscure, rather than shedding light on this topic or that topic'.
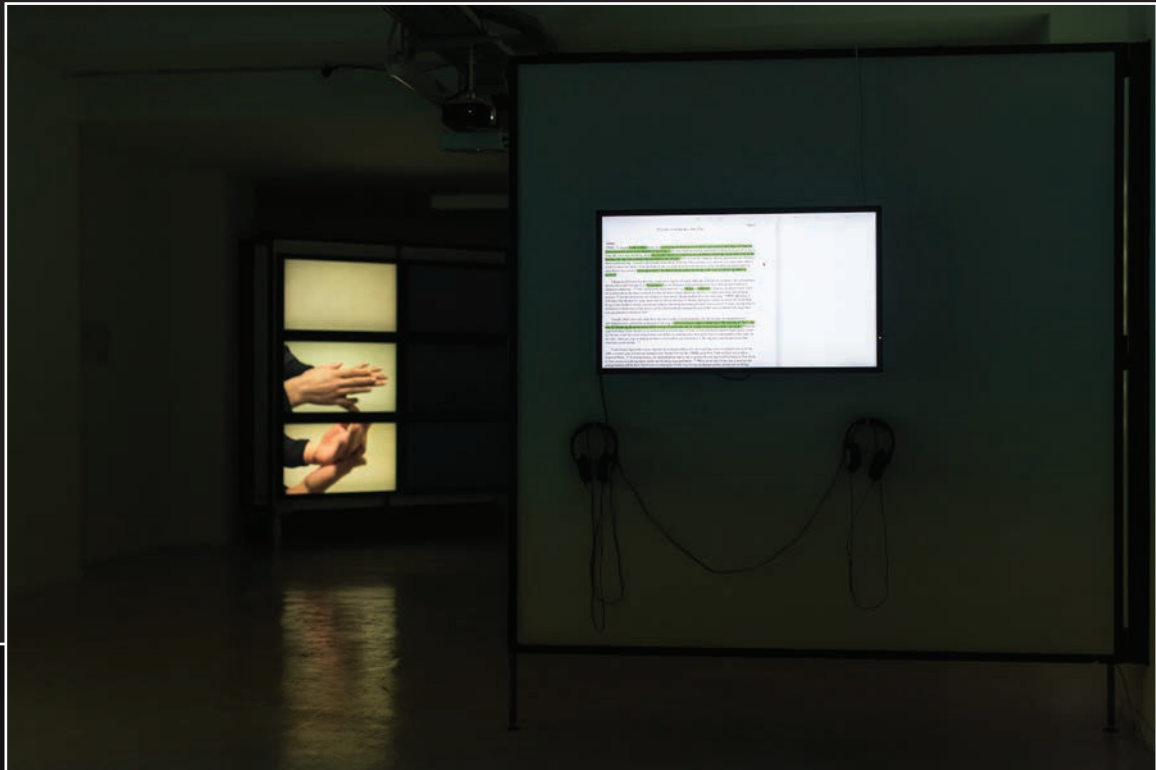
interventions primarily see her take the role of video remixer. Consider, for example, *Essam's Mobile Phone Footage*. The piece consists of footage shot by Essam, a worker at a glucose factory whose intent was to document the illegal demolition of his recently-privatised (and formerly state-owned) workplace under the pretense of renovation. As the workers were effectively kept in limbo, Essam intended to use the footage as evidence in court against the new ownership. For her part, Metwaly collected the footage and assembled it into a video lasting over 7 hours long, accompanied and complemented by *Evidence of Absence*, a 108-page transcript of everything spoken in the recordings.

'THE ARCHIVE...IS A CURATORIAL INITIATIVE, ALBEIT ONE WITH THE EXPRESS GOAL OF MAKING DATA INTELLIGIBLE'

However, as the exhibition catalogue notes, 'Essam was ultimately not allowed to present his filmic evidence in front of a judge.'[6] At issue was the very essence of the 'truth-claim' being established: not so much a question of whether Essam's footage might disprove the other side's claims, but whether it should carry the *status of* evidence.

Legal institutions also feature prominently in Metwaly's show. Playing on a screen near the entrance to the exhibition space, a lawyer recounts how he had jokingly cultivated an image as a less-than-serious representative of the law by sharing a photo on social media (*Untitled: Interview with lawyer from AFTE*). Elsewhere, a two-minute video shows a number of suited, stern-looking men entering a courtroom and taking their assigned places. As the exhibition text notes, this is a hearing *in camera*, in which filming is itself a breach of the law. The viewer is given little else to go off; left to guess the protocols they are operating

under, to reconstruct the choreography behind their movements and how such protocols integrate into a national legal system.

In the process of recording social movements, vast quantities of data are necessarily produced, and in a revolutionary context such as Egypt, the urgency of-self representation is amplified, given a skewed mediasphere and rulers with a vested interest in perpetuating state-sanctioned narratives. To that end, much of Metwaly's raw material is taken from Mosireen Collective's online archive 858.ma. Initially comprised of 858 hours of footage from protest activities across Egypt in 2011, footage continues to be added on an ad hoc basis.

Much of the footage has a seemingly mundane quality to it. In but one example, a man is seen holding up an Egyptian flag against a cloudy blue sky. Little else happens; as the exhibition text suggests, it is as much a study in boredom as defiance. Perhaps one of the functions of reinterpreting such iconic imagery is to stimulate the contemporary imagination,[7] to have the past performed, replayed through citation, remix, and reuse, years after and miles away from 'the thing itself'.

In a recent interview, Mosireen Collective touched on the question of what happens to an event once it's placed in an archive – of whether the fixation of the event neuters its essence of animation. They advocate for constant engagement with the material. As one member states, 'All you can do with a video file from 2011 is put it out and hope that someone else edits it and remixes it, or watches it and gets a new idea from it.'[8] In so doing, one can only hope that the evidence will find new life.

But the factual dimension is only one half of the story. Insofar as the archive is the result of sorting, of managing, of deliberate omission and inclusion, it is a curatorial initiative, albeit one with the express goal of making data intelligible. As Krypton, one of the collective's members argues,

> 'If you open [the archive] up completely and people start putting up footage from 'June 30 Revolution' and things like that, that would be a problem. There's a level of coherence that's a must in the body of it. It's a dangerous arena to enter into, because then you're sitting there deciding what's revolutionary or not, but I think there's a common-sense element to it also'.[9]

As another member states, in the process of curation it's important to concentrate on 'those moments where, for instance, someone drops their camera in front of something for 20 seconds, and other minutiae of the archive. There is something in experiencing and understanding these moments through watching them that gives a much richer picture of what happened, even

[6] *We Are not Worried in the Least* - exhibition text, 5. Available at: www.savvy-contemporary.com/site/assets/files/3408/metwaly_berlinale_handout_180211_web.pdf.
[7] As Deleuze and Guattari argue in their short essay 'May '68 Did Not Take Place', 'When a social mutation appears, it is not enough to draw the consequences or effects according to lines of economic or political causality. Society must be capable of forming collective agencies of enunciation that match the new subjectivity, in such a way that it desires its own mutation'. For a translated full text, see: https://palmermethode.com/2018/05/06/deleuze-and-guattari-may-68-did-not-take-place/.
[8] Mada Masr. (2018). '858: Archiving as a tool of resistance'.
[9] Ibid.

if it is not definitive.'[10] We might call this the aesthetic of the archive, which stands in contrast to its function as a 'pure' source of informational transmission. As Metwaly contends:

> 'The archive contains a lot of moments that seemed irrelevant at the time: where nothing really happens, or the camera suddenly moves towards the sky, or the images blur and don't focus on anything… Now I am interested in exactly these types of almost involuntary or leftover images. These are the moments that reveal a certain kind of temporality, something that has to do with the immediacy of the documented moment and essentially speaks of how the footage was made'.[11]

Far from unintended editorial blips, these breaks in the flow of information are tremendously important and lend a sense of authenticity and credibility to the events depicted. From the point of view of their utility as 'pure' evidentiary tomes, these aesthetics – their distortion, glitches, and occasional banality – might be seen as a hindrance. Their performative function, however, is perfectly preserved.

For all its strengths, the impact of Metwaly's *We Are Not Worried in the Least* is lessened by the very fact that the show took place in Berlin – a city with its own contentious political history, to be sure, but where present-day revolt seems entirely unlikely and the political stakes of such a show are low. As the exhibition largely avoids direct commentary or prescribed solutions, one is left only with the visceral impact of having made contact with an archive in all its grandeur. ■

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All photos by **Raisa Galofre**, courtesy of SAVVY Contemporary.
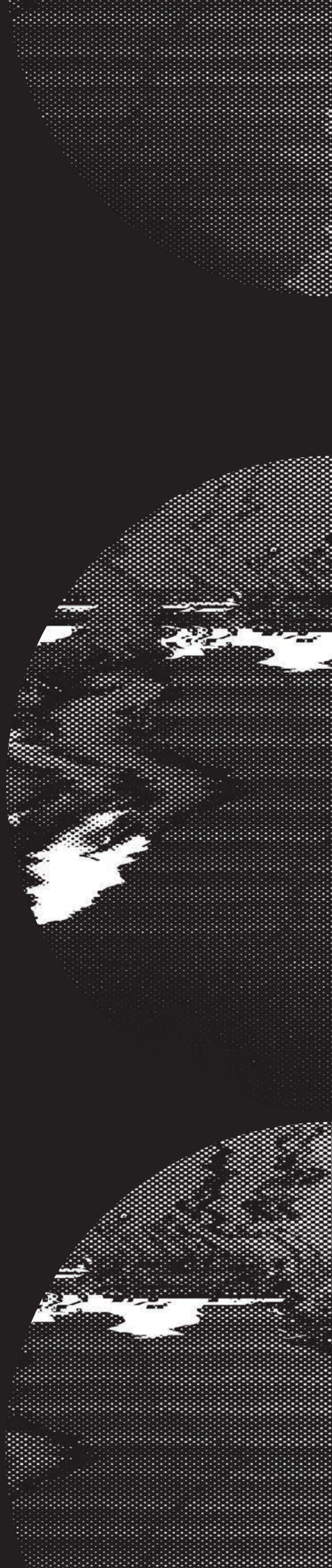
[10] Ibid.
[11] *We Are not Worried in the Least*. Exhibition text, 4.

WHY DIGITAL RIGHTS MATTER: IN CONVERSATION WITH TECHNOLOGY LAWYER CYNTHIA KHOO

unmediated

WORDS

SABRINA WILKINSON

Social networks, search providers and other digital platforms are playing ever more prominent and disruptive roles in global society. As intermediaries – that is, platforms that mediate content between end-users and other agents[1] – they hold power over media markets, control over personal data and play a significant role in the dissemination of information and news.[2] Despite intermediaries' influence in our everyday lives, and in the communications landscape more broadly[3], the development of a means for their regulation is slowed by a variety of stakeholders with diverging interests. At the same time, recent revelations about the strategies behind personal data being covertly used for corporate and political ends has resulted in public calls for regulation that, amongst other things, protects users' digital rights.

To discuss the challenges that intermediaries pose to robust digital rights, I sat down with Cynthia Khoo, founder and principal lawyer at Tekhnos Law, and LLM Candidate at the University of Ottawa[4]. A fierce proponent of digital rights working at the forefront of legal and policy discussions surrounding their protection, Cynthia works at the intersection of law, internet policy, and digital rights, and has dedicated her legal career to making an impact where internet law and policy meets civil liberties and human rights. Her legal practice is interdisciplinary and has cut across (tele)communications, privacy, copyright, freedom of expression, and intermediary liability law. Cynthia has worked closely with a number of non-profit groups across Canada on digital rights issues and acted as an intervener in the landmark case *Google Inc. v. Equustek Solutions Inc.*, before the Supreme Court of Canada. She also has extensive experience representing clients in proceedings before the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), including a key net neutrality proceeding determining zero-rating laws in Canada, and a landmark proceeding that established high-speed broadband Internet as a 'basic service' in the country. Cynthia has appeared in a variety of media on matters related to her work and has been involved in local and international digital rights conferences as both panelist and moderator, including RightsCon, the leading global conference on human rights and the Internet.

How do digital rights differ from human rights?

Digital rights are human rights as protected and mediated by the internet and digital technologies. They are not so much a special type of right, but pre-existing human rights, with the most prominent examples being the right to privacy and right to freedom of expression. The term digital rights emerged to characterize how the internet and digital technologies have changed the ways individuals exercise these rights and how they must be upheld. As a result of these developments, new legal approaches are needed to protect these rights in a meaningful way.

The extent to which our human rights depend on the internet today is seen in how many now consider internet access itself to be a human right, or fundamental right. This view has been adopted by the governments of France, Estonia, and Finland, as well as by the United Nations.

How have new digital rights disrupted traditional understandings of human rights?

Digital technologies have expanded human rights while at the same time putting them at risk in new ways. On the one hand, people are able to share messages with larger audiences than previously possible, which reflects an expansion to their right to freedom of expression. This has provided an opportunity for groups who have historically been silenced to reach more people with their perspectives. This expansion is also visible in the right to freedom of association. Individuals who were before limited by geographic boundaries are now able to communicate and organize together online. This has had enormous implications for civil rights movements – thinking of those such as Idle No More and Black Lives Matter – who have made powerful use of the internet's possibilities to advocate for themselves and their communities.

At the same time, new technologies have also put digital rights at risk, sometimes the same ones that are ostensibly heightened. If there is freedom of expression across the board, for instance, the speech of historically marginalised or vulnerable groups can actually be quieted or silenced altogether. If anyone can say anything in a shared online space, that can easily foster environments of hate and hostility, leading to a chill on expression by those most likely to be targeted. For example, women with a visible online presence on Twitter, such as female journalists, regularly receive rape threats and death threats from men who dislike something they wrote. In some cases, abuse and harassment can drive women off the website altogether, despite Twitter's utility otherwise as a dynamic public forum. This removes completely their ability to speak in that space, and results in a central public venue being further dominated by the individuals and groups creating the speech-restricting environment.

Certainly, some might say that no one is physically barring another from speaking. But, if someone knows what they say might lead to a barrage of threats, they are much less likely to say it. There is also another interesting point that has been made on this topic by Zeynep Tufekci. She has written that in the age of information overload, censorship is

[1] See: Tambini, D. and Labo, S. (2016). 'Digital intermediaries in the UK: Implications for News Plurality'. Info, 18(4).
[2] Moore, M. (2016). 'Tech Giants and Civic Power'. Centre for the Study of Media, Communication & Power (April), 1-86: https://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/CMCP/Tech-Giants-and-Civic-Power.pdf.
[3] Mansell, R. (2015). 'The Public's Interest in Intermediaries'. Info, 17(6).
[4] This conversation has been condensed and edited for clarity and word length.

no longer about controlling the speakers. Where attention is a scarce commodity, censorship is about controlling the receiver of speech. Another way to effectively silence someone is then to direct their audience's attention elsewhere – simply put, to distract or divert them. This has become easier to do than ever.

'IF ANYONE CAN SAY ANYTHING IN A SHARED ONLINE SPACE, THAT CAN EASILY FOSTER ENVIRONMENTS OF HATE AND HOSTILITY, LEADING TO A CHILL ON EXPRESSION BY THOSE MOST LIKELY TO BE TARGETED'

Another example of how digital rights disrupt traditional understandings of human rights can be found in how we think about the notion of privacy. Privacy law has traditionally been based on whether an individual was in a private or public physical space. One had the right to privacy inside one's own home, but not on the city street. Before the internet, that notion seemed to make sense. Now, however, we see the rise of smart-city projects such as Sidewalk Toronto, which seek to collect data from people living in or traversing through particular neighborhoods, tracking information such as where they walk, where they park and what they buy. Even though these activities are public, such collection of data may still violate privacy rights. Whereas privacy was previously about where an individual was physically, in the digital rights context, it's more about choice and control over who gets access to one's data and what happens to it. This is just one broad example of how current laws may inadequately uphold human rights in the face of new digital technologies.

What are the ramifications of digital rights violations?

At the outset, it's critical to note that not everyone experiences the same risks in the same ways, or the same consequences if digital rights are violated. For instance, privacy violations, particularly in terms of digital state surveillance, are disproportionately targeted towards certain groups, including Muslims, environmental activists, and black and brown individuals, who are subjected to carding and racial profiling. Predictive policing is another practice that has been shown to unfairly impact racialised groups. Historically marginalised groups are simply more likely to have their digital rights violated – and to suffer more severe consequences as a result of such violations – than someone who is white, male, upper-class and isn't politically engaged.

Tangibly, the outcomes of these violations and others can be very harmful. If an individual loses access to the internet, they are disconnected from employment, education, remote healthcare, online communities, and other elements of social, political and economic life. Again, this is particularly worrisome for marginalised groups. Consider a queer teenager living in a rural area whose most meaningful relationships are with people online. Self-censorship, where individuals are tentative to speak for fear of trolls or state scrutiny, is another example of a real ramification of digital rights violations.

At the highest level then, we can see these ramifications as an erosion of democracy itself because they undermine several of its fundamental pillars simultaneously. With regards to freedom of expression, people are afraid to speak and engage in politics because they don't want to bring down the wrath of trolls or threats or state scrutiny. With respect to privacy rights, people are tracked and targeted with the aim of increasing engagement – regardless of whether it is positive or healthy engagement. All these things are a scary scenario for having an informed and engaged populace.

Intermediaries such as Google and Facebook have played an increasingly prominent role in people's engagement with the internet. What challenges do intermediaries pose to the protection of digital rights?

The challenges that intermediaries pose to upholding digital rights is threefold. The first challenge is how to deal with the adverse consequences of monopoly power. Given that there are currently no truly alternative services, monopolistic firms are all but immune to boycotts. Facebook users, for instance, often have no other space where they can keep in touch with their communities, friends and families to near the same extent. Facebook is also where political groups can organise for social good, and there isn't yet a comparable tool activists can use to raise awareness and recruit supporters. Google is a similar case. While there are some search engine alternatives, the company still has the vast majority of the market, as well as a range of associated products and services. At the same time, it's difficult for politicians to adequately challenge these

companies, particularly given that these companies are often influential political donors that hold significant cachet.

The second challenge is the fraught public perception of these companies. While public opinion is certainly shifting toward a critical view of intermediaries, it wasn't long ago that these companies were considered, including by mainstream digital rights advocates, the 'good guys'. The understanding that intermediaries pose significant risks to digital rights is a paradigm shift that, for some, has yet to fully integrate itself into how we do things going forward.

Third is the challenge of knock-on effects. By this I mean that the harms that come about through intermediaries extend beyond the initial person(s) impacted. Tarleton Gillespie, in a recent talk, made the point that it doesn't matter if an individual has never read or shared a piece of 'fake news' (as originally defined) on Facebook – or whether they have Facebook at all. The fact that a critical mass of people on the platform do create, read or share fake news impacts that individual as a member of society, with far-reaching implications for democracy more broadly.

In light of recent political events such as the Cambridge Analytica revelations and allegations about Russian interference in the 2016 US federal election, policymakers have shown an increasing interest in the prominence of intermediaries online. What steps are they taking toward the protection of intermediary users' digital rights? What questions still aren't being asked or addressed?

I read an article about this a few months ago, also by Zeynep Tufekci,[5] whose point I agree with. She said that policymakers shouldn't ask anything; they don't need to. They know the issues and what the answers are – it's time for action. Pulling these companies in front of congress is just political theatre, unless meaningful legislation is actually made. Too often the focus centres around what happened, and stops there, whereas what needs to be equally addressed is: How we can prevent this or similar from happening again?

In any case, it's critical that those making decisions talk to the right people: the marginalized communities most impacted. A useful example here is the Sidewalk Labs project I referenced earlier. The initial consultation period for the project was only one year, which was not nearly enough time to address many of the concerns about data ownership, tracking, privacy and surveillance brought up by digital rights activists and other parties. For instance, it's yet unclear whether residents of and visitors to the area can actually opt out of having their data collected. If the Cambridge Analytica revelations and other digital rights violations were taken seriously, this project and

others like it would slow down or be put on pause altogether until concrete policies, agreements and contracts about these matters are put in place. *[Editor's note: after this interview, Sidewalk Toronto announced that the planning deadline would be extended to Spring 2019].*[6]

What trends provide the most hope for a robust protection of intermediary users' digital rights in the future?

One trend that provides some hope is that intermediaries have, to some extent, recognised their role in fundamental threats to digital rights, such as electoral manipulation and systemic harassment of oppressed groups. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, there is a growing public criticism towards these companies and an awareness of the risks they pose to an informed populace and functioning democracy. That said, I should note, public opinion is a double-edged sword. These are complicated issues and their nuances must be communicated carefully as these policy debates evolve.

Finally, some emerging digital rights organisations have put vulnerable groups at the heart of their mandate. One example is Open Privacy,[7] based in Vancouver, Canada, whose activities include conducting research and outreach to understand the privacy needs of marginalised communities, and from there develop tools that prioritise their consent and autonomy. These organisations provide a critical model that technology companies should follow, as well as some promise for a digital world that values people above their data. ∎

Recommended reading for those interested in learning more about digital rights:

Internet of Garbage *Sarah Jeong*
Queer Privacy *Sarah Jamie Lewis*
Digital Disconnect *Robert McChesney*
Twitter and Tear Gas *Zeynep Tufekci*
Algorithms of Oppression *Safiya Noble*
Weapons of Math Destruction *Kathy O'Neil*
Black Box Society *Frank Pasquale*
Custodians of the Internet *Tarleton Gillespie*

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[5] Tufekci, Z. (2018). 'We Already Know How to Protect Ourselves From Facebook.' The New York Times, April 9.
[6] Rider, D. (2018). 'Deadline for 'Sidewalk Toronto' Plan Pushed Back'. Toronto Star, June 26.
[7] Note that Cynthia sits on the Board of Directors.

STUPID PAKI LOVING BITCH:

THE POLITICS OF ONLINE ISLAMOPHOBIA AND MISOGYNY

WORDS

KATY SIAN

INTRODUCTION

In 2013 feminist writer Caroline Criado-Perez found herself subjected to numerous rape threats following her Twitter campaign calling for Jane Austen to appear as the new face on the £10 bank note. A string of female MPs have also experienced online abuse, death threats and harassment. Furthermore, many celebrity figures and those in the public eye have also complained of sustained online harassment (Jane, 2014: 558-570). Cases of women as victims of hate continue to escalate in the unregulated online world, whose sexism and misogyny appears to know no bounds.

Symbolic and systemic violence targeted towards women is not new; patriarchy is a staple feature of western societies. However, with the rise of the Internet and new digital technologies, an environment of hate and vulnerability has flourished whereby violence towards women (and minority groups) is increasingly made possible, without restrictions and without constraints. Gendered hatred continues to spiral in cyberspace as it has come to represent a discursive stage in which the distribution, performance and displaying of graphic sexual violence are routine practice (ibid.: 558). Online hate has thus become normalised as media systems continue to facilitate the monitoring, stalking and surveillance of individuals (Atkinson, 2014: 164). These shifts have worked to feed a (male) predatory relationship with women, whereby many female celebrities have often been targeted because they have gained a few pounds or lost a few pounds (ibid.). The contemporary mediascape has as such given rise to a culture of voyeurism, which continues to prop up hetero, white and hyper-masculine cultural norms that subjugate females (and those deemed 'other'). Subsequently, more and more individuals are increasingly finding themselves at greater risk of online stalking, bullying, hate and harassment (ibid.).

The contemporary phenomenon of cyber hate, cyber abuse, cyber bullying, cyber stalking, cyber threats/incitement, and cyber harassment continues to grow and spread at a rapid pace (Awan, 2014: 134). The Internet has enabled hate to propagate incognito. Online abuse thus remains extremely difficult to contain due to the use of anonymous screen names, virtual private networks and the TOR network. Furthermore cyber hate is often poorly monitored by law enforcement agencies. For Awan and Blackmore (2012) cyber hate can be seen as complex nodes of representation where perpetrators use digital technology and space to target and constrain those they believe to be a threat (Awan and Blackmore, 2012 in Awan 2014: 139). Awan (2016: 13) goes on to point out that such a form of power enables the offender to exercise dominance over groups they believe to be subaltern. As a relatively low-profile academic, who occupies a subordinate position as both female and ethnically marked, I was shocked to have fallen victim to online Islamophobia and misogyny, which is on-going and continues to circulate across different sites.

'GENDERED HATRED CONTINUES TO SPIRAL IN CYBERSPACE'

Based on a critical auto-ethnography documenting my experiences of online hate, this chapter will examine the challenges and burdens that women of colour are made to carry when they engage within online spaces to disseminate research and educate audiences around anti-racist/ colonial politics. The chapter is informed by a selection of online materials across a variety of platforms including Internet forums, YouTube, news comments sections, Twitter and Facebook, collected from 2013 to 2016. This forms what I will refer to throughout this chapter as the corpus, that is, the totality of the linguistic online material that has been documented throughout the aforementioned time period. A discourse analysis of the corpus will enable me to critically examine the logics of Islamophobia – its circulation and manifestation online – as well as the gender dimension involved in the abuse. It will facilitate an exploration of the way in which individuals, actions and language combine to produce meaning through a system of signifying practices (Hall, 1992: 275-331). This account situates itself conceptually within critical race and postcolonial feminist frameworks, as a means to unpick and unravel the complex and textured intersection between Islamophobia/racism, gender and online spaces. The chapter will go onto to conclude that the Islamophobic (and more broadly racial) harassment of women of colour online can be seen as the shift from the democratic to the demagogic, and as the replaying of the wider gendered and racialised nature of citizenship.

THE CONTOURS OF ONLINE HATE

The abuse began in 2013 following the publication of my first monograph examining Sikh and Muslim conflict. As someone who identifies as a Sikh, I researched extensively the notion of Sikh Islamophobia, which ironically became further validated through the online Islamophobia I received from some members of the Sikh community. One of the main components of my research was to challenge the idea of 'predatory' Muslim males targeting 'vulnerable' Sikh girls and forcing them to convert into Islam, what my work has described as the 'forced' conversions narrative (Sian, 2013). This is a tale that has been circulating

within the Sikh community for some time and one that is underpinned by Islamophobia, racism and Orientalism. The theme of 'forced' conversions to Islam is central within Sikh discourse as it reignites historical tensions between Sikhs and their antipathy towards Muslims (Sian, 2013: 55-69). This story emerged in the British diasporic Sikh community in the 1980s; however as it is largely based on anecdotal accounts and hearsay, there is little evidence to suggest that a genuine case of 'forced' conversion exists (Sian, 2011: 115-130). My research has thus been committed to understanding and interrupting anti-Muslim discourse circulating within the Sikh diaspora, and seeks to develop a wider conversation around collectivity and anti-racist politics.

I was invited to participate within a book launch, which was filmed by the organisers and posted online with my full consent; what followed was a barrage of Islamophobic and misogynistic abuse. Since then, almost every written/visual commentary piece I have been involved within has been trolled with a series of Islamophobic comments, all of which seem to bear a resemblance. For the purposes of this chapter, Islamophobia will be defined as a conceptual category to describe not simply 'unfounded hostility' based on the fear or hatred towards Muslims as proposed by the Runnymede Trust in their 1997 report *Islamophobia: a challenge for us* all but rather as 'the disciplining of Muslims by reference to an antagonistic western horizon' (Sayyid, 2010: 15). Islamophobia in this sense, according to Sayyid (2010) can be seen as the upkeep of the violent frontier between the notion of the west and Islam (Sayyid, 2010: 15). Through such an analytical understanding of Islamophobia, I will be able to demonstrate the various ways in which the corpus manifests itself through this framework, which is marked by wider structures of governance, rather than a few bad trolls. Soon after the organisers of my book launch posted the recording on YouTube, the following statements appeared in the comments section:

- SuperSos2012: Who is [this] bitch?? Looks like [a] porn star [.] Why is she [n]ot wearing her burka bitch.

- Roar-Sounds Djs: STUPID PAKI LOVING BITCH … LOOKS HALF HALAL … BITCH.

- DrSingha23: Dirty slut.

We see here specific Islamophobic comments, alongside general misogyny, that is, 'dirty slut.' The identifying name given on the third comment in particular, 'DrSingha23' is a clear indicator that this perpetrator is likely to be Sikh, using the common marker 'Singh' denoting a Sikh male. The first two comments are also clearly misogynistic using terms such as 'bitch' and 'porn star.' Such abuse, or 'sexualized vitriol,' exposes the way in which online spaces readily facilitate and host misogynistic rhetoric and symbolic forms of sexual violence (Jane, 2014: 566). Furthermore, the combination of racist/Islamophobic abuse is demonstrative of the additional challenges or multiple oppressions around the 'subaltern speaking' online, or rather her (in) ability to speak online (Spivak, 1988; Brah, 2005: 108). The comment that I should be wearing a burka is suggestive of the

anger around my perceived association with Islam; this is further made explicit with the second comment claiming that I am a 'stupid Paki loving bitch' and that I look 'half halal.' The comments seem to try and make a suggestion that I am in some way connected with Muslims and Islam with the inference that I somehow 'look' a bit Muslim, whatever that might 'look like.'

'THE MALE DOMINANCE OF SPACE IN GENERAL HAS BEEN LONG DOCUMENTED BY MANY FEMINIST WRITERS'

The resentment about my work challenging Islamophobia, both within the Sikh community, and at the state level, is a key trope across the corpus; there appears to be a real sense of anger from the perpetrators around the idea that I somehow align myself with Muslims/Islam. In other words, the notion that I am an Islamophile is a dominant theme that continues to arise in the abuse, with numerous comments claiming I 'sleep around' with Muslim men. Alongside the suggestions that I am an Islamophile, we can see also the way in which the misogyny is equally as present and explicit with the repetitive use of the word 'bitch' and constant references to sex and promiscuity. Other examples of this trope have appeared on several Sikh forums:

- Mrggg123: Sounds like she has already converted to me, the actions and signs are all there to be seen. Apparently she was known to s*** pakis in her uni days….

- Chatanga1: do you know anything about this katy kuty?

- HSD1: Her name is Katy Sian and she is an out and out islamophilic apologist. She was on the 'board for antiracism' or something at the University of Leeds, a city with a disproportionate number of grooming cases.

- Sikh Sangat Forum: She's allegedly been having relationships with Muslim guys while at university who brainwashed her with Palestine and pro-Islamic nonsense. She calls herself a Sikh, but her name, her tweets, her book, her whole agenda and antics

suggest otherwise. She has said nothing pro-Sikh in her whole set up, she has no clue about grooming cases regarding Muslim rape gangs that have been caught a few months back. The numbers of Muslims caught grooming non-Muslim girls for sexual exploitations is in the thousands…we need to ask ourselves why is it always or mostly the Muslim males that are involved in this?…Katy Sian would probably back out of the debate, she is a politically correct liberal, pro-Islamo-fascist apologist, and might as well wear the burka over her head. She ignores the cases of countless Sikh female victims of Islam…which are probably in their hundreds if we add them up from all the years this has been going on since the 1980s.

The notion that I have engaged in sexual relationships with Muslim men seems to be an issue that the perpetrators are obsessed with. There is a strong voyeuristic element running throughout these comments, with an emphasis on Muslims and rape. The perpetrators appear to desperately try and account for the fact that my work does not subscribe to Islamophobia, and offer different theories and explanations as to why I am not anti-Muslim. They claim however that I am anti-Sikh, a self-loather, who has betrayed her community and allowed Islam and Muslims to 'brainwash' me with the suggestion that I have converted, or rather been forcefully converted into Islam.

Once again we see the misogyny quite clearly, for example, above, 'Chatanga1' asks, 'do you know anything about this katy kuty?' kuty referring to the Punjabi word for bitch. Alongside the explicit hatred for Muslims, a very male presence is also prominent on these forums and message boards. The male dominance of space in general has been long documented by many feminist writers. For example, Frances Heidensohn (1985) examined extensively how women are constrained in the public sphere through the dominance of men, that is, outside of the domestic sphere, other spaces have been largely dictated by male codes leaving them excluded, and less able to participate as they tend to be threatening for women (e.g. the workplace, streets at night, pubs) (Heidensohn 1985: 183-188). We can see how over 30 years on, this same logic appears to apply to the online space, a space overwhelming dominated by patriarchal norms.

The Islamophobia is rife throughout these comments; we see the perpetrators referring to Muslims as 'Pakis,' notions that Muslims are more likely to rape 'kufrs' (non-believers), a clear disgust at pro-Palestinian campaigns (and anything deemed 'pro-Muslim/ Islam') as well as ideas of global jihad. In her work on digital Islamophobia in the context of Sweden, Karina Horsti (2016) points out that over the past 15 years, the trope of Muslim gang rapes as part of the feared Islamisation of Europe has become prominent in the counter-Jihad movement and in the radical right-wing parties across Europe (Horsti, 2016: 2). The comments posted clearly appear to reproduce these fears feeding an Orientalist discourse, which constructs Muslims as sexually barbaric, and as threatening the 'purity' of the west by apparently sexually exploiting non-Muslim women.

The perpetrators are likely to be racialised themselves, but it appears that they have internalised racist, colonial narratives around Muslim 'others.' The idea of threatening racial others has been a central feature in the story of western nations. A brief glance at the history illustrates the way in which the figure of the racially marked male in particular has been mobilised to represent a 'threat.' Vron Ware (1996), for example, examines the way in which British fascist literature became obsessed with the theme of black men raping 'vulnerable' white women in attempts to re-establish white supremacist ideology, in which the sensational portrayal of 'vulnerable' white females besieged by hyper-masculine racial 'others' became one of the most powerful icons of racism in the British landscape:

> These constructions derive their apparently hidden (but no less effective) meanings from the historical memory produced by centuries of slavery and colonisation. The image of the defenceless white woman whose safety is threatened by the predatory and violent black male can be traced back to discourses of white supremacy. (Ware, 1996: 81)

At the heart of these racist tales of the 'vulnerable' white community at the hands of 'treacherous' black men is the idea of whiteness and the maintenance of white privilege, in other words, the replaying of colonial ideas of whiteness as the norm and 'others' as somehow abnormal. Such narratives are constitutive of western racial histories and have become institutionalised within state practices, as well as internalised and reproduced by not only the majority population, but also ethnic minorities themselves, particularly against the backdrop of the war on terror.

Islamophobia is a topic that has been documented extensively (e.g. Said, 1997: 2-69; Rana, 2011: 134-175; Sayyid, 2010: 5-19; Poole, 2009: 28-52; Richardson, 2004: 33-53; Allen, 2010: 83-187; Tyrer, 2013: 21-40). Over a decade since the collapse of the twin towers, public and political discourse remains saturated with negative representations of Muslim populations at both a domestic and international level; the construct of the global Muslim 'threat' is thus a notion firmly entrenched within the psyche of western states (Sian et al., 2013: 80-116). The war on terror heightened the conditions under which ideas around male Muslim bodies as hyper-sexualised flourished across popular and political sites. As Gargi Bhattacharyya (2008) suggests, the construct of the 'savage black rapist' has transformed into the image of the dangerous brown male who is typically seen to have come from a primitive, barbaric culture, rife with misogyny and the oppression of women. To complete this narrative, he is represented as being unsatisfied sexually due to his traditional family structure and devoted to honour killings, regarding females as merely exchangeable objects (Bhattacharyya, 2008: 19).

Such a description resonates strongly with the assertions made by the online perpetrators who explicitly feed this Islamophobic discourse. The image of the 'threatening' Muslim male is well established, from debates on honour killings, grooming and forced marriages; the notion that the Muslim male is working to destroy the west appears to hold an ideological appeal in the

Global North. This Orientalist fantasy has, unsurprisingly, come to occupy discussions in the online world. For example, Horsti's research found similar expressions of Islamophobia circulating on the blogosphere:

> On one hand, the bloggers depict Muslim men as strong agents, who deliberately and strategically rape for the purpose of conquering the West. On the other hand, they depict Muslim men as non-thinking, animal, or virus-like organisms. In the latter instances, the bloggers erase a conscious agency by describing rape as an 'infection,' 'epidemic,' and 'pathology'. (Horsti 2016: 11)

The Islam and rape trope is clearly racialised whereby Muslim male bodies are constructed as sites which require urgent policy intervention. The criminality of Muslim men is read through a cultural prism, so that it establishes an association between culture and crime; such constructions work to both replay racial histories and maintain racial hierarchies. These representations uncover underlying concerns around the governing and managing of 'unassimilated' 'foreign' and 'incompatible' bodies whereby the violation of women by 'impure foreigners' translates into the violation of the nation. It does not matter whether the online abusers are Sikh, non-Sikh, brown, black or white, as they are ultimately subscribing to an Islamophobic language which constructs Muslim as 'other.' These hegemonic forms of Islamophobia, masculinity and patriarchy were made further explicit through a wave of Twitter abuse which I came to experience, with accusations that I am an Islamist sympathiser.

As my work has continued to develop, I have become more engaged within anti-racist politics at both the academic and grassroots level, connecting with networks through social media, particularly Twitter. There appeared to be one dedicated troll under the name, F-Equivalence-Watch, @LiberalCraig, who continued to harass, stalk and abuse me. @LiberalCraig created several fake accounts under my name, or using one very similar, featuring my profile picture to suggest the account(s) belonged to me as offensive tweets were posted. After reporting the fake accounts to Twitter, both were removed. ■

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'THE CRIMINALITY OF MUSLIM MEN IS READ THROUGH A CULTURAL PRISM, SO THAT IT ESTABLISHES AN ASSOCIATION BETWEEN CULTURE AND CRIME'

YOU ARE NOT IN CONTROL OF YOUR DATA

AND YOU NEEDN'T BE

WORDS

JOCKUM HILDÉN

On May 25th, 2018, the European Union's *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) entered into force. The new regulation set out to protect the personal information of all residents in the European Union, hitherto unsatisfyingly protected by a directive dating back to 1995. While the new regulation was in principle similar to its predecessor, it introduced two significant regulatory innovations: extraterritorial application and sanctions modelled after competition law. The extraterritorial application of the GDPR means that all organisations that process the data of EU residents to a significant degree are subject to the regulation's provision. The sanctions, for their part, were seen as historic, and threatened non-compliant actors with fines of up to 20 million or 4 percent of annual global turnover (whichever is highest). What was once one of the most lobbied regulations in Europe eventually became the bogeyman of the ad tech industry.

The fear was almost tangible as a flurry of consent and re-consent emails were sent flying in the weeks before the May 25th deadline: 'Review our privacy policy, stay in touch, we care about your privacy', they said in varying iterations. What they didn't say was that these same companies had two years to prepare but had failed to do so until the very last moment. Some US-based firms were even less prepared than their European counterparts and decided to block Europeans' access to their webpages and services altogether. When trying to access a site from a European location, Error 451 popped up:

> Unavailable due to legal reasons. We recognize you are attempting to access this website from a country belonging to the European Economic Area including the EU which enforces the General Data Protection Regulation and therefore access cannot be granted at this time.

So much for the free and open internet. Others decided to strip their sites of all ad tech and tracking technology until an acceptable privacy policy had been drafted, resulting in a significantly smoother user experience rebranded as the 'Premium EU Subscription' (in the case of the *Washington Post*). For the most part, however, the typical end-user was merely encouraged, nudged, and threatened into consenting to various tracking schemes.

Data protection – European legalese for information privacy – has of course been part of the European legal framework since

at least the 1970s, and emerged from legislators' fears that the public use of electronic databases might be susceptible to abuse. In response, they determined that it was necessary to award citizens' personal information the full protection of the law. It would not be long, however, until the commercial use and trade of personal data prompted discussions of an international common framework for data protection.

The first international document on data protection was the 1980 OECD Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data[1]. A few months later, the Council of Europe opened Convention 108 for signature with the same aim. While these two documents did provide some fair principles for data processing, they did not deliver any direct effects for citizens. Moreover, a key goal of the OECD principles was (as the name indicated), to ease flows of personal data, not make them harder to come by. The inefficiency of these safeguards was demonstrated by the fact that many companies responded by relocating their personal data processing to Belgium and Spain, where national data protection laws were altogether absent (despite having ratified Convention 108 and being members of the OECD). Concerned with this development, data protection authorities in France and Germany (where fairly rigorous data protection laws were already in place) pushed hard for a European Community Directive on data protection that eventually saw the light of day in 1995. This came to be known as the Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC). The main goal of the Directive was to harmonize data protection laws within the European Community, so that companies would not relocate their data processing activities where the regulatory environment was most permissive. While the Directive provided common standards for data processing, it did not harmonize sanctions.

The problem with the Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC) was not so much the rights awarded to citizens nor its inability to foresee future technological innovations, but that it lacked teeth. The cost of noncompliance varied between EU member states but was unlikely to be very high – in practice, many companies would disregard data protection rights completely and even deny their existence when citizens requested access to their personal data.

In the online domain, the so-called *ePrivacy Directive* entered into force in the early 00s, providing additional protection for

'IN MANY RESPECTS, THE GDPR IS A HUGE IMPROVEMENT ON PREVIOUS REGULATORY PARADIGMS'

'NAMING AND SHAMING WILL ONLY GET US SO FAR'

interpersonal online communications, prohibiting unsolicited online marketing, and requiring that website operators provide information on their cookie practices. A 2009 amendment subjected internet cookies to prior consent. It was somewhat maliciously rebranded as the 'Cookie Directive', in reference to the ubiquitous banners that informed a user that cookies had been deployed on the visitor's computer. The effectiveness of the measure has been widely debated.

It would take over twenty years before the Directive received a much-needed update. In principle, not much has changed with the introduction of the GDPR, except that the loopholes have been made slightly smaller and the provisions more detailed. In practice, however, everything has changed, since non-compliant companies now run the risk of hefty fines and companies without a physical presence in the EU must abide by the same rules if EU citizens access their services – hence Error 451.

In many respects, the GDPR is a huge improvement on previous regulatory paradigms, and companies are clearly taking the new regulations seriously, despite many misguided attempts to comply to the new law, as exemplified by emails that require people to 're-consent'. Nevertheless, the GDPR rests on the assumption that people will indeed exercise their rights and consent to data processing only when they believe that their privacy will not be compromised to too-high a degree. While there are six lawful bases for data processing in the GDPR,[2] online ad tracking requires consent which explains the sudden surge in privacy policy popups. This has essentially given rise to a new kind of Marshmallow Test where the delayed reward is abstract, might not materialise, and consists of the omission of a negative life

event or just an unfavourable societal development. Compare this to the joys of finding out your personality type, reading up on the summer bodies of celebrities, or the latest political scandal. It requires enormous self-constraint not to eat the marshmallow.

At the same time, companies reliant on ad tracking are using so-called 'dark patterns' to nudge users into consenting to pervasive online tracking. The most glaringly deceptive practices include those used by Forbes, whose option to disable ad tracking would immediately disable the whole website, or Yahoo's GDPR consent page, which provided a list of hundreds of advertising partners that had to be ticked one-by-one in order to opt out. 'You are in full control of your data', indeed.

To anyone who has ever used the Internet it should be blatantly obvious by this point that consent cannot, should not, and will not be an expression of the free, unbent will of people weighing the pros and cons of data sharing. The problem is that data protection law has not departed from its OECD origins and is fundamentally about both increasing the privacy of individuals and lowering the threshold for data trade, a legal oxymoron if there ever was one. The solution to the former policy problem has been to grant people rights that they are often unaware of and unable to efficiently claim, and the solution to the latter has been to harmonise legislation and provide plenty of exceptions to the rights. It goes without saying that the latter strategy has been more successful than the former.

There are, of course, privacy activists that claim their rights and make complaints if they get an inadequate response from a data controller. Austrian privacy activist and lawyer Max Schrems stopped the Safe Harbor agreement that permitted the transmission of personal data from the EU to the US. Schrems stressed that the agreement could not be valid considering the National Security Agency's extensive surveillance programme that was revealed by whistleblower Edward Snowden. The ECJ agreed with Schrems and invalidated the agreement, causing a slight panic in the tech industry and a diplomatic crisis that temporarily endangered trade relations between the EU and the US. But lengthy legal proceedings are not a solution for the silent majority. The best hope is to look to the provisions that spell out the obligations of the actors that collect and process personal data. But for those provisions to be effective, their enforcement has to at least seem unforgiving.

In the UK, Information Commissioner Elizabeth Denham has announced that the ICO will not apply GDPR sanctions unless absolutely necessary:

> Issuing fines has always been and will continue to be, a last resort. Last year (2016/2017) we concluded 17,300 cases. I can tell you that 16 of them resulted in fines for the organisations concerned. And we have yet to invoke our maximum powers. Predictions of massive fines

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[2] These are consent, contract, legal obligation, vital interests, public task, and other legitimate interests. See the ICO's website for more information: https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/lawful-basis-for-processing/.

under the GDPR that simply scale up penalties we've issued under the Data Protection Act are nonsense.

It is as if the ICO missed the memo about using fines as a deterrent and regards it as a punishment of last recourse. Stating that you will not use the powers conferred to you is like having a Doomsday Machine but proudly declaring to the world that it is broken beyond repair; *of course* charities will not be smacked with 20m fines and rendered bankrupt for failing to inform data subjects of their rights – but there is no point in saying it out loud. If soft law and softer measures had been enough, the OECD principles would have sufficed in their own right. Consider that in January 2018, the ICO fined Newday Limited £230,000 for sending 44 million spam emails, amounting to half a penny for each email sent. That's hardly a business expense, let alone a deterrent. Obtaining valid consent to send those emails would have been far more expensive. As such, naming and shaming will only get us so far. Any real improvement to privacy and security requires that organisations regard data protection violations as a real risk. ■

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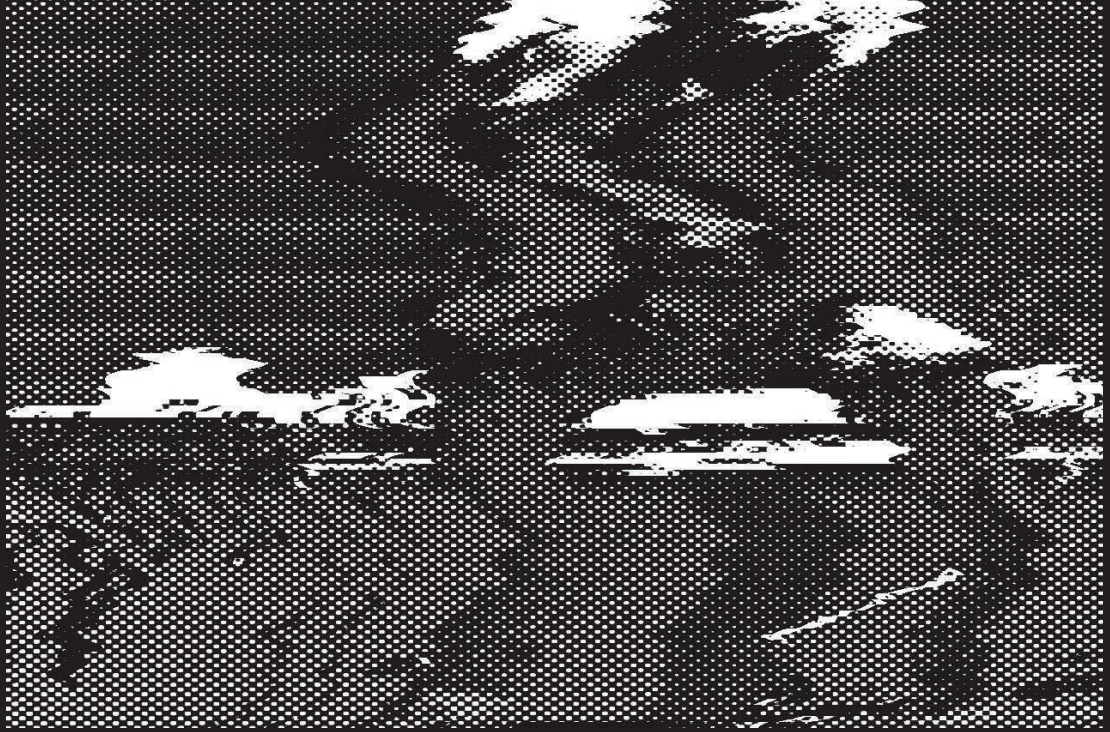
A NEW CULTURAL LOGIC? NETWORK CULTURE AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

WORDS

TYRONE HALL

unmediated

T echnologies – particularly media formations such as the printing press, radio, television and the Internet – have long commanded an overdetermined position in the structuring of human perception of prevailing conditions and of the possibilities for social and political change. As such, the spectrum of reactions associated with the socio-political and economic expectations to the network and the various platforms it enables are broadly consonant with the history of technological invention and deployment. But the expectations generated by the network are distinct in scope. This is particularly true of the assertion that, as the technological dominant of our time, the network presages a new culture and logic that transcends the capitalist logic that underpinned late capitalism.

This bout of techno-centrism is bewildering, because both the network and its attendant logic are patently congruent with capital. As a distinct phenomenon, network culture stems from the gradual maturation and diffusion of the networked ecology and the subtle and ongoing transition it denotes. The networked technologies that now underpin everything from production to communication to travel have emerged alongside a series of consequential economic, social, and cultural adaptations since the breakdown of the Fordist regime of accumulation. Unlike the specialized, decentralized and adaptive nature of networked technologies, Fordism dominated an age of intensive accumulation and mass production with monopolistic regulation of the economy. The shift from the staid, centralized approaches of Fordism to the more liminal networked modality opens vast opportunities to examine the significance of network logic. The networked ecology – namely the Internet and emergent Internet of Things – enables 'us to do things we did before more often and more easily, or do things we could previously barely imagine'[1]. Accordingly, the affordances of the networked era alter all facets of life, including the idea of media itself. So fundamental are these changes that Castells, Varnelis, and Webster[2], among others, believe they inaugurate a whole new type of society – variously known as the post-industrial, consumer society, media society, information society, electronic society, or networked society, among others. In other words, the network's technologically induced changes, particularly their informationality, signal that capital – the dominant logic that once vanquished Royal and Ecclesiastical authority – has itself been surpassed.

As the diversity of these conceptualizations implies – varying from celebration to moral revulsion – the implications of networked culture and logic (be it heightened or new) are manifold. The centrality of 'information, knowledge and culture to human freedom and human development' means networked culture and logic underpins economic, social and cultural changes[3] that transcends the coevolution of liberal markets and democracies over the past two centuries. There are few facets of life that remain unaffected, from the value of work, to the construction of culture, to the pursuit of freedom.

In contextualizing this notion of a network culture, it may be instructive to probe the basis on which this epochal break is asserted – from post-modernism to network culture for Varnelis[4] and a more voracious form of capitalism for Castells[5]. In accordance with Terranova[6], I understand a network culture and logic to 'emerge within an informational milieu' with dynamic and shifting flows. This milieu, ushered in by the merger of information and communication technologies with their supposed democratic, economic, and ideational affordances, has given rise to a new way of conceiving contemporary societies that prioritises information as a distinguishing feature of the modern world. These declarations (technological, economic, occupational, spatial and cultural) of an epochal disjuncture are established based on a techno-economic paradigm and economic periodization. Specifically, they account for change by noting the adoption of ICT as a marker of transition to a new era. But there is little clarity as to what kinds of ICTs, adoption rates, or modalities of use define the transition point. This lack of conceptual precision is evident in Castells' (2000) use of both the economic and occupational formulations in volume two of his trilogy. (Specifically, the artificial separation of industries into information and non-information domains to illustrate that the aggregate volume of networked informational activities is greater and/or improving at a faster rate than the latter).

Beyond arbitrarily truncating sectors and occupations, economic and occupational approaches do not distinguish between the quality and quantity of networked culture. They do not distinguish between the productive adoption of informational tools,

'THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IS UNDERGOING SEISMIC TRANSFORMATIONS UNDER NETWORK CULTURE'

[1] Gere, C. (2002). *Digital Culture*. London: Reaktion Books. 9.

[2] Castells, M. (2015). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press; Varnelis, K. (2008). The Meaning of Network Culture. In K. Varnelis (Eds.). *Networked Publics*. (145-163). Cambridge: MIT Press; Webster, F. (2006). *Theories of the Information Society*. London: Routledge.

[3] Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1.

[4] Varnelis, 2008.

[5] Castells, M. (2000). *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed.). New York: Blackwell.

[6] Terranova, T. (2004). *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. London: Pluto Press. 8.

'HOW DOES ONE CREDIBLY AND CONSISTENTLY SEPARATE THE INFORMATIONAL ELEMENTS OF LABOUR AT AMAZON THAT INVOLVES MY PLACEMENT OF AN ORDER?'

which have social, educational, economic and other uses. This lack of precision elides the possibility of identifying productive forces separately from the banal and non- (or counter-) productive, the quality and intensity of which would indicate the orientation and substantive nature of change brought forth by this profusion of the network logic. My contention here is that having identified and noted a profusion of networked activities to establish an epochal demarcation comes with the usual limitations of periodization, particularly those manifested in the quality and quantity conundrum. Heuristically, a consequential profusion of networked activity has value for asserting the occurrence of an epochal change, to the extent that scholars widely agree on three broad periods (the classical era, modern era and postmodern era) and no cultural moment since the turn of the 20th century has lasted more than a quarter century.

If a profusion of networked activities constitutes that marker, the structural changes it enables must be qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of capital. It is on this basis that I argue for probing the extent to which this profusion of network logic is emerging, and by whose hand. The salience of this point is captured by both Castells (2000) and Varnelis' responses to charges of presentism (networks are not novel), by noting they have only now become the dominant paradigm (it's now profuse). Though an important concession, it seems oblivious to its own parochialism when one considers the uneven expansion and access to networked infrastructure and platforms even in metropolitan centres such as London and Toronto. Perhaps my charge is foreseen in Castells' (2000) distinction between the logic of the network and the power of the network (how many are on), which would indicate residual benefits for the dis/poorly-connected amidst what Atton terms the 'intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities'[7]. So, declaring the digital or networked logic as the new dominant is profoundly political, and carries structural impacts across domains.

The global economy is undergoing seismic transformations under network culture, which thinkers such as Benkler believe renders features of classical capitalism, namely the primacy of industrial production and the omnipresence of class struggle, staid and inapplicable in our times. Many orthodox Marxists vehemently reject Benkler's assertion, and they are justified given the emergence of new categories of economically disadvantageous workers subjected to short-term, insecure work. In fact, labour precarity has expanded in some regions. A legion of call centre jobs and other rudimentary Business Process Outsourcing activities have substantially replaced traditional middle-class prospects for college educated people in the Caribbean and other middle-income regions. So, there is an explosion of networks structuring a new economy driven by information such that it is considered a global information economy or informational capitalism. However, work is characterized by a preponderance of people engaged in occupations in largely decentralized and loosely coordinated information sectors or immaterial labour in industries that are often hastily considered distinct and contemporary. Castells (2000) points to a decline of manufacturing employment and the rise of service sector employment as a sign that manual work and its prerequisite, physical strength, has declined as non-manual work, and its informational prerequisite has increased. While Castells' (2000) formulation gives primacy to the intelligence, educational training and experiences of the individual, there is a bewildering degree of subjectivity and presentism involved in demarcating informational work, and the cumulative impact they have because they are networked. How does one credibly and consistently separate the informational elements of labour at Amazon that involves my placement of an order, queries regarding delivery challenges with a live digital agent, warehouse and courier activities, particularly where elements of the services are outsourced?

Network logic's materialisation in the economic realm is fascinating when viewed against social context, and its technical and scientific genealogy given its indication of a cultural shift directly associated with the maturation of digital computing and strong link with increasingly mobile networking technology. These networked technologies emerged in the 1980s with the

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[7] Atton, C. (2004) *An Alternative Internet.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 12.

development of Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). The development of TCP/IP, coupled with the transference of the backbone of the Internet from the American military to commercial telecommunications interests by the mid-90s, afforded the emergence of a global distributed network that allowed for cheap, ubiquitous connectivity around the world[8]. The management of these technical standards and protocols by a set of apparently altruistic technocratic organizations assures the open evolution of the Internet and underscores the free, meritocratic-ethic that underpinned the structuring of the terrain. The logic of the network is distinct as it ruptures a 'core distinguishing feature of communications, information and cultural production since the mid-nineteenth century'[9] that limited ownership. The increasing role of non-market and non-proprietary production in software development, journalism, online gaming, and immaterial labour (e.g. the open source and open access movements) are among the most significant outcomes of networked-enabled production.

Conventional liberal political theory is confounded in this dynamic because it takes the market, the terrain in which the logic of capital traditionally thrives, to be a given. However, the networked logic is distinct as the rise and prominence of broadly accessible decentralized, self-directed and affective work enables sustainable and efficient engagement in cultural production. As my genealogical pointer indicates, the Internet, the backdrop for the network, is premised on this open, non-proprietary basis, which runs counter to orthodox neoliberal economic logics. But to contend that the emergence of a new modality and logic of production displaces a two century-old formation would seem to understate 'the persistence of embedded structures of power'[10] and the ends to which they are directed. Therefore, the starting point should be to question the ends to which these new sustainable non-market, affective and productive affordances

are being directed rather than what the Internet-enabled network logic affords.

My contention is that the network and its attendant logic are congruent with capital – so even if the emergence and profusion of a new, sustainable and manifestly productive logic is upon us and is indeed at the core of global economic life, it is questionable to assert its dominance. Conceptually, the network is merely a mutation of the network topos in its 'twenty-first century neo-imperial formation'[11]. In this mold, one is inclined to contend that the congruence of networked logic with capitalism is so significant as to renew the salience of Hardt and Negri's charge that the post-cold war formation of Empire is indeed upon us in all its decentered, deterritorializing and expansionist tendencies[12]. Structurally, too, the capitalist impulse remains fervent. There is remarkable consonance between the present-day ownership and routing of network infrastructures (e.g. undersea cables) and (neo-)colonial patterns of extraction and transfer, especially between Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean and the United States, where western private interests continue to vie for control.

The network's conceptual and structural congruence with capital's history are significant because informational networks and logics underpin the continuance of western economic dominance, particularly in high-end manufacturing and services. Networks have afforded new tools for transnational corporations such as Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, Apple and Cisco Systems to flexibly manage decentralized global production and services and stem profitability, productivity and competitive challenges brought forth by the Fordist crisis. Network logics can thus be seen to enable a more efficient, if not rapacious, form of capitalism that shifts parts and services and taps global resources seamlessly, in accordance with cost and profit considerations rather than national or ethical

[8] Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

[9] Benkler, 2006, 4.

[10] Wasko, J., Murdock, G, and Sousa, H. (2011). What is Critical Political Economy? In J. Wasko, G. Murdock, & H. Sousa (Eds.), *The Handbook of Political Economy of Communications* (1-10). Chichester: Blackwell Publishing. 4.

[11] Terranova, 2004, 41.

[12] Hardt, M and Negri, A. (2000). *Empire.* Durham: Duke University Press.

'THE LOOSENESS OF INFORMATION AS AN EPOCHAL MARKER RENDERS DECLARATIONS OF NETWORK LOGIC'S DOMINANCE WANTING'

commitments. The implication is that network culture and logic constitute an organizational principle directed towards established capitalist economic ends. So, in economic terms, the looseness of information as an epochal marker renders declarations of network logic's dominance wanting.

There's also a strong link between the preponderance of affective work in the networked economy, which is a source of value, and capital's primary motive: the enclosure of value. *The Huffington Post*'s transition from a fledgling hotbed of blogging to a global news platform acquired for c. US$315 million (none of which was earmarked for freelancers and bloggers) typifies how networked affective activities are effectively mined for profit in ways consistent with capitalist excesses. Even social cooperation is mined for its profit potential. But neither a celebration of the scope and mundanity of Internet practices nor a fixation on inherited binaries (producer-consumer, market-non-market) allow us to move much beyond a techno-determinist reading of the networked era. Technology's social embeddedness demands that we foreground the nature of use alongside its social, cultural and economic context.

The logic of the network also carries implications for the construction of culture and the pursuit of freedom, justice and democracy beyond the limits of conventional liberal democracy. The network affords a wide range of prefigurative activities that run counter to dominant practices, including alternative currencies, banking platforms, anarchic social actions, and the pursuit of democratic and economic reforms. However, the profusion of these networked

activities, and the manner and ends to which they are directed and/or curtailed requires unpacking. Castells (2015) points to the possibility for counter-public spheres (Twitter, online newspapers, blogs, among others), and new spaces for seeking freedom and desires (revolutions and democratic aspirations), even culture, and our subjectivity. The corporatization of the most widely used platforms, alongside the apparent inability of tools such as Oculus Rift to broach social challenges such as sexism and racism, points toward the need to view these assertions with great caution. In other words, the technical and genealogical enablers of the network must be considered against capital's systematic enclosure of value that delimits possibilities that conflict with capital's interests. The continued dominance of capital is exemplified by Alphabet's recent flirtations with the redeployment of Google in the burgeoning Chinese market in accordance with the state's draconian free-speech restrictions. Technology's embeddedness and co-constitutive nature must also prevail.

A multifaceted critique of the social Web – including issues of labour, privacy, transparency, and property – is consistent with Wasko et al.'s (2011) call for keen attention to the embeddedness of structures, and is important for understanding the ends to which the liberal democratic and ideational affordances of the network and its logic are being directed. The enclosure of the digital commons is therefore of central concern and forms the basis on which contemporary media activism is exercised around copyright, most emblematically in the creative industries where remix is central to production. The triumph of Marvin Gaye's estate in the copyright infringement case again the producers of 'Blurred Lines' on the murky basis of a 'groove or feel' rather than 'lyric and arrangement' underscores the possible enclosure of the creative commons in the network era, where aspirants from Manilla and Michigan can, theoretically, collaboratively mine YouTube's archive for content to create masterpieces. Concerns about net neutrality are also indicative of enclosure, including recent campaigns against throttling or monthly caps on bandwidth by ISPs. In this techno-cultural reading, limitations on free speech and access to information are emerging both through changes in law and industry practices and in the architecture of the Internet. So, contrary to the optimism around the profusion of the networked logic, it seems that non-market production logics present less of a challenge to the capitalist formation, and fall short of addressing Adam Smith's call for a durable modality to solve problems in the sphere of culture that are beyond the scope of the market.

However, techno-cultural limitations are not explicit control mechanisms on the order of Taylorism or totalizing governmentality. Our pursuit of freedom and democracy within networked terrains are the result of diverse factors, which open questions about the virtual/networked terrain in terms of culture, power, and communication in ways that transcends the emergence of a hegemonic consensus. In terms of the ideational, liberatory and self-exploratory affordances that Castells (2015) and Varnelis hope the profusion of networks will allow us to explore more vigorously, there is no utopia. Amidst greater activity within the digitally enabled networked terrain, outcomes are invariably complex, top-down, and bottom-up. Consistent with Hayles' view of

the post-human condition, subjectivity remains emergent[13]. The differentiated outcomes will simply be marked by the indetermination of the multitude of flows (informational dynamics) we must now contend with. In other words, the enclosure of the network logic and terrains on which Benkler, Castells, and Varnelis assert we can pursue freedom and democracy, might be true if the liberal conceptions are not conceived in strict, singularly autonomous and essentialist terms, which is very much consistent with how it has always been.

Having taken a plunge into the quotidian that involved a genealogical look at the techno-cultural context and informational dynamics that underpin network culture, I have found heuristic value in the concept. Network logic in its current form along the topos of the Internet is certainly new and significant, but because it is malleable (as are all technologies), it is congruent with a more longstanding and voracious logic: capital. As evident from the subtle adaptations and co-optations which capital deploys as it encloses value, the implications for work, freedom and self-construction will remain central, but the degree to which the logic of capital structures these facets of life is still a matter of negotiation with new non-human, informational dynamics functioning as significant actors. ■

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[13] Hayles, K. (1999). *How We Became Posthuman*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

'INSTEAD OF THE EXTENSIVE AMOUNT OF LABOUR, ITS INTENSIVE AMOUNT INCREASED':

BOGUS SELF-EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEMPORARY UK

WORDS

CHRISTIAN GARLAND

'Instead of the extensive amount of labour, its intensive amount increased': these words, from Marx's *Capital* Vol. 1[1], are applicable to the contemporary phenomenon of bogus 'self-employment'. Understood as the trend for Capital to attempt to reconfigure the Capital-Labour relation to its own advantage (and to the disadvantage of labour), in a paradigm of normalised 'self-employment', the atomization of labour compresses remuneration (what would simply be known as wages in a contractual employment relation) by shifting the responsibility for employment onto the individual[2]. Indeed, this disruption to earlier versions of what may be said to constitute 'work' and the resultant disruption to every facet of life for those living it, is indicative of the shifting social terrain of society and social structure in the early 21st century. 'Work', which remains the primary means of social reproduction in Modernity, can be said to be undergoing its own crisis, and 'self-employment', in its differing contemporary forms, is a manifestation of just such a crisis. The crisis of 'work' is ultimately the crisis of capitalism itself, and the re-classification of employment as 'self-employment' by capitalist enterprises serves to re-compose the Capital-Labour relation into a wholly one-sided and atomised relation of micromanaged self-exploitation and unfreedom. This article aims to critically explore these relations, and the broader ideologies supportive of them.

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The status of those in contemporary 'self-employment' – hypostatised into ultra-individualised self-ownership, stripped of all agency – is very much more than a hint of things to come in the fractured, dislocated form that 'work' increasingly takes in developed economies. In the UK, such 'self-employment' takes two major forms[3]. The first is that of the digitally-enabled 'gig', as offered by firms by such Uber, Addison Lee, Deliveroo, Hermes, and even the 24-hour plumbing firm Pimlico Plumbers. For these 'virtual' (non) employers, the 'work' on offer is intermittent, the overheads high, and ownership either delayed indefinitely or supplanted from the worker entirely. The second form is that of 'sole traders', which includes merchants dependent on platforms such as Etsy or eBay as well as door-to-door salespeople, both of whom are classified in official employment figures as self-employed. Particularly in the case of sole traders, net incomes can be so small and erratic as to force a disproportionate share toward unemployment benefits. Similarly, someone classified as self-employed by Uber or Deliveroo is told that they are 'their own boss', their earnings determined entirely by their own efforts. As such, a taxi driver or courier can easily earn less than the minimum wage as a non-employee 'independent contractor' and may be forced to make ends meet by applying for a *de facto* wage supplement from the ever-more punitive state benefits system.

In the UK, the ideological con of successive Conservative governments throughout the last decade has been to make the fallacious claim of 'record numbers in employment', and 'record falls in unemployment'. This disingenuous claim can be made only because the categories for recording employment have been altered accordingly and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has instructed civil servants to use the new datasets concocted by incumbent Conservative governments. There are many ways to represent what may in itself be 'factual', but which becomes meaningless when decontextualized and made to appear as if something completely different is being said; this manipulation of data is the very quantum of ideology – not *technically* lying, but very far removed from anything resembling honesty. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has long specialised in false equivalence. Take, for example, the claim that:

> Full-time work continues to be the driving force behind the rise in employment. Average weekly wages grew by 2.3% including bonuses over the last year. Wage growth has remained above 2.0% every month since the beginning of 2016. The Office for National Statistics has also announced that the unemployment rate remains low at 4.7%. It has not been lower since 1975.[4]

'THIS MANIPULATION OF DATA IS THE VERY QUANTUM OF IDEOLOGY – NOT TECHNICALLY LYING, BUT VERY FAR REMOVED FROM ANYTHING RESEMBLING HONESTY'

Conspicuously absent from this claim is the fact that no comparison can actually be made between the late-2010s and the mid-1970s, since today's definition of 'in employment' is completely different to the metrics used 43 years ago. The disingenuous tactic of 'moving the goalposts' for the purposes

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[1] *See*: Marx, K. (1867). Chapter 20: Time-Wages. *Das Kapital*.

[2] This sleight-of-hand is only helped along by legal technicalities which serve to obscure the stark reality of what this constitutes in material terms.

[3] Although this article centres on the UK, the upheaval and disruption wrought by such bogus 'self-employment' exists in many other contexts as well.

[4] See: *'Press release: Employment rate at new record'*, 17 July 2018. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/employment-rate-at-new-record-high

of padding out employment figures is spun ceaselessly by the DWP's propaganda machine, and is regurgitated by media outlets as if it were undisputed fact. Ideology, after all, seeks to legitimise existing structures of power by a combination of claiming 2+2=5 and ceaselessly changing the terms by which the issue is framed and defined.

Among the categories comprising today's apparent 'record numbers in employment' are what is known as 'workfare' – that is, unemployed claimants compelled to work *unpaid* as a condition of continued access to social security benefits. Workfare provides free labour for businesses and charities, enforced by benefits sanctions, and failure to abide by these conditions results in removal of the state's already meagre 'subsistence'[5]. In official figures, workfare counts as 'employment-related' and is thus included in the employment total, just as the Conservative policy of mass sanctioning of claimants removes those suffering the arbitrary loss of income from the claimant total. Similarly, zero-hours contracts – in which no guaranteed work hours are provided week-to-week – make up nearly 2 million of the total 'jobs' included in such 'record figures'.

Perhaps the biggest skewing of data stems from the distinct tendency over the last 5-6 years for a substantial portion of unemployed or occasional labourers to register as 'self-employed'. This amounts to 4.79 million people, or nearly 15 percent of all people in work in 2018[6]. The ONS lists sole trader demonyms such as 'director, manager, or senior official' or alternatively 'sole trader' as the highest occupational groups, all-the-while noting that 'due to the nature of self-employment many people manage their own business and will state they are in a managerial role despite the level of responsibility they have'[7]. For a sole trader doing some kind of piece work, such as selling Avon catalogues or selling goods on eBay, the erratic income (the 'quantum of the means of subsistence', in Marx's words) is individuated accordingly – and is, once again, conveniently categorised as 'in employment' for the purposes of official statistics.

* * *

Recent legal rulings have asserted that Hermes couriers are indeed employees entitled to (at least) the minimum wage, along with being granted employment rights and holiday pay. This follows earlier verdicts in cases brought against Uber and taxi firm Addison Lee, couriers CitySprint, and Royal Mail-owned eCourier, each of which asserted that individuals employed by these organisations were to be given the legal classification of 'worker' or 'employee', and not simply 'independent contractor'. Although the employers in question are (predictably) appealing, the material consequence of workers being deemed employees, and not

'THEY ARE EXPECTED TO JOYFULLY EMBRACE THEIR OWN SERVITUDE AND HOLD THEMSELVES ACCOUNTABLE FOR EVERY SETBACK OR FRUSTRATION'

simply 'independent contractors', is that they should receive the right to minimum wage, holidays, and sick pay.

The business models of such companies is simple: extract labour whilst circumventing the costs and liabilities associated with being a *bona fide* employer by shifting responsibility back onto the shoulders of the ultra-precarious non-employee. 'Work' (wage labour) is thus individualised as the sole responsibility of the worker, whose labour is made cynical use of but who, in gaining the apparent 'autonomy' of becoming 'their own boss', is cut loose and abandoned. Remuneration is directly tied to the amount of work that they 'agree to', and its intensity re-purposes them into what amounts to a relation of ultra-precarious, hyper-individualised atomization – *the* keynote condition of existence under neoliberalism. In order to maximise efficiency, such an unfreedom gives rise to self-tracking, and ultimately, provides the basis for what Moore designates as the 'Quantified Worker', in which performative metrics of (self) monitoring and surveillance determine and map (non) existence[8].

The decades-long neoliberal process of re-composition and restructuring of employment relations and thus *class relations* displays what Marx outlined in his own critical theory as the Capital-Labour relation: massively and structurally unequal, the

[5] For more information, see: www.boycottworkfare.org.
[6] Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2018). *Trends in self-employment in the UK*. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/trendsinselfemploymentintheuk/2018-02-07
[7] ONS, 2018.
[8] See: Neff, G. and Nafus, D. (2016). *Self-Tracking*. Cambridge: MIT Press; see also: Moore, P. (2017). *The Quantified Self in Precarity: Work, Technology and What Counts*. London: Routledge.

former feeding 'vampire like'[9] off the latter, only ever so far as it needs its lifeblood. This vampiric social relation in which Labour creates Capital also delineates the Scylla and Charybdis of the terms of material existence: work become increasingly precarious or contingent, existence defined by social vulnerability and contingency, and it must be restated in creating limitless on-demand contingency, which is, as James C. Scott notes, 'premised on a deskilled, standardized workforce in which one 'hand' could be easily substituted for another'[10]. So too, as life becomes ever-more fragmented, and work itself becomes ever-more insecure, is human subjectivity utterly consumed, demanding nothing less than *total existential affect,* as those in (temporary) possession of it are compelled to be 'always on', just as they are expected to joyfully embrace their own servitude and hold themselves accountable for every setback or frustration.

Late Capitalism (and its neoliberal variant) has enjoyed 40 years of hegemony in the United Kingdom and remains the dominant model across the world. As such, the crisis of 'work' or wage labour[11] through a reconfiguring of the Capital-Labour relation (that is, the employment relation) in terms of bogus 'self-employment' can be seen as the apotheosis of neoliberal society in terminal decline. Paradoxically – or not, it might perhaps also be offered – in a society like the United Kingdom, where class relations are more diffuse and opaque than ever before, the individual's relation to the means of production is itself becoming increasingly unclear and the ideology of positivity, with its uncritical 'recognition of that which is'[12], is everywhere apparent. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse invokes *The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness* and *The Triumph of Positive Thinking*[13], and in the contemporary United Kingdom, both are embedded in the demand – in work and in everyday life – for 'flexibility' and a 'can do attitude'. It is a compulsory positivity – positive-affect-as coercion – the aim of which is to inculcate and introject a version of affect that is accepting and compliant to conditions of power-lessness and subjugation, ideally with the objectified subjects not even recognising them as such.

Bogus 'self-employment' – in which the individual is substituted for an atomised monad, micromanaging their own exploitation and subjugation at the whim of market forces – masquerades as agentic 'freedom' but is in fact a profound *unfreedom,* in which all societal context and consequences are individualised as the responsibility of individuals. Whilst 'work' or 'economic activity' becomes that much scarcer and more insecure, it nevertheless remains the major form of social reproduction in contemporary society, necessarily remaining the primary means for material subsistence for a majority of its members. And yet there is a terminal asymmetry between work and social reproduction for a significant and growing number of this same majority, which can only be said to portend a sense of premonitory foreboding – the outcome of which remains to be decided. ∎

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'BOGUS 'SELF-EMPLOYMENT'...
MASQUERADES AS AGENTIC
'FREEDOM' BUT IS IN FACT
A PROFOUND UNFREEDOM'

[9] Marx, K. (1867). *Capital Volume One*. Chapter Ten: The Working-Day, Section 1 – The Limits of the Working Day.
[10] Scott, J.C. (2012). *Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 65.
[11] To say nothing of the fact that automation of toil precipitates a further social crisis in a society in which 'work' remains of paramount importance.
[12] Adorno, T. (1961) 'Ideologie', in Lenk, K. ed. Ideologie (Neuwied: Luchterhand); quoted in Marcuse, H. (1964). *One Dimensional Society One Dimensional Man: The Ideology of Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press. 120.
[13] Marcuse, 1964.

unmediated

THE CIRCULATION OF PROTEST: A USEFUL METAPHOR AND FRAMEWORK?

WORDS

BART CAMMAERTS

In this book, I adopted the Circuit of Protest as both a conceptual metaphor and a methodological approach to analyse and assess a specific social movement through the prism of mediation. The circuit addresses simultaneously: (1) the production of symbolic meaning and a collective identity; (2) a set of self-mediation practices; (3) a variety of media representations; and (4) the ways in which all of this subsequently influences citizens. I argued also that a dynamic interplay between agentic opportunities and structural constraints operates at each of these moments, which, taken together, constitutes a mediation opportunity structure for movements and activists.

Given the increased importance and centrality of the media, and in particular of communication in this digital age, it seems apt to use the various ways in which media and communication are both instrumental in and constitutive of protest, as a productive prism to study a social movement and protest from a variety of angles. A focus on the circulation of movement discourses and frames by activists, as well as mainstream representations of protest, producing its own frames, addresses in conjunction with each other: (1) the symbolic and the material aspects of a political struggle; (2) the appropriation of alternative media by social movements and the mainstream media representations of protest; and (3) the production of meaning and its reception by citizens. The metaphors of circulation and a circuit imply something circular and dialectic rather than one side or a moment dominating or determining the other(s). As such, by adopting circulation as a metaphor, determinisms in terms of privileging one moment over and above another, or one side of a dichotomy over another, are avoided. Instead, the tensions as well as the interconnections between the two sides of the dichotomy, and between the different moments, are of interest.

I shall now briefly assess each of the above-mentioned mediation dialectics from the perspective of the Circuit of Protest, and their relevance to debates in social movement studies, as well as media and communication studies. The production of the symbolic was influenced and partly shaped by material circumstances and affordances. The material, in this regard, relates to the material conditions underlying the political opportunity structure, out of which the movement emerged, as well as the media and communication technologies it used to communicate the symbolic. The political opportunity structure has a material foundation, namely the real

consequences of austerity for many people. The symbolic side of the struggle mobilized these material consequences to increase its resonance and induce moral indignation. Media practices and the affordances (hidden as well as explicit) embedded in the media and communication technologies also have a distinct materiality, which increasingly shapes the way a social and political struggle is waged.

At the same time, however, the symbolic impacts also on the material, and this was especially apparent in terms of the kinds of direct actions and protest displays the movement created,

which had highly performative, and thus symbolic, aspects to them. The strategies of mild disruption enacted by the movement also aptly combined the symbolic as well as the material aspects of its struggle. Here we can observe how media-savviness and lay knowledge among activists of how the media operates shape direct action, which could be denoted as the mediatization of protest; but this occurs, I would argue, as part of a much broader and more complex mediation process.

By highlighting this dialectic between the material and the symbolic aspects of protest, the Circuit of Protest also speaks to debates in social movement studies between those highlighting resources (Resource Mobilization approach) and those highlighting the cultural aspects of a social and political struggle (Culturalist approach). At the same time, the Circuit of Protest also addresses tensions within media and communication studies between those privileging the study of media texts and content, and those focusing on practices. The symbolic and the material work in conjunction with each other. At times, the material shapes the symbolic, and at other times the symbolic shapes the material.

'THE METAPHORS OF CIRCULATION AND A CIRCUIT IMPLY SOMETHING CIRCULAR AND DIALECTIC RATHER THAN ONE SIDE OR A MOMENT DOMINATING OR DETERMINING THE OTHER(S)'

The dialectic between alternative media – used by activists to self-mediate their diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames – and mainstream media – which presents its own mediation of protest – is at the centre of the movement under study and, I would argue, of all contemporary social movements. Setting up social media accounts, deciding on which hashtags to adopt, and using these to mobilize for direct action and to assert a collective identity, are generally the first actions activists take. These should be seen in terms of the long-standing efforts of movements to establish independent or alternative means of communication – to *be* the media. Alongside alternatives, we can observe a high degree of what Rucht (2004)

'ANOTHER WAY IN WHICH THIS DIALECTIC BETWEEN ALTERNATIVE AND MAINSTREAM MANIFESTS ITSELF IS THROUGH THE AMBIGUITY OF THE INTERNET AS AN ALTERNATIVE INDEPENDENT PUBLIC SPACE'

called adaptation strategies. In the anti-austerity movement, this could be observed in terms of the repertoire of contentious action and the types of direct action enacted, as well as the ways in which activists attempted to manage journalists and their media representations.

Another way in which this dialectic between alternative and mainstream manifests itself is through the ambiguity of the internet as an alternative independent public space. Whereas social media are widely used as alternative channels of communication by activists, exploiting the potential of bypassing the mainstream media, these corporate online spaces are, of course, inherently mainstream and can be closed down at any point. This also demonstrates that we need to make a conceptual difference between alternative content and alternative channels of communication (Cammaerts 2016). Online platforms are not truly independent platforms at all; they are corporate spaces, and dependence on them makes activists vulnerable. This can also be linked to a long-standing debate within (alternative) media studies regarding the nature and the boundaries between alternative and mainstream media, which ultimately are relational concepts. Alternative media is that which is not mainstream, but empirical reality is often more complex (Bailey et al. 2008). This complexity also operates at the level of the relationship between social movements producing alternative content, and the channels through which they distribute this content.

In addition to this, the dialectic between alternative and mainstream, in the context of the Circuit of Protest, highlights a set of processes, mediation practices, repertoires and resources that are internal to the movement (as highlighted by the Resource Mobilization approach), and the opportunity structures that situate themselves outside the movement (as foregrounded by the Political Process approach). The latter relate, for instance, to: surveillance by the state, potentially hostile media organizations, social media platforms taking editorial decisions, and the very nature of the affordances of networked communication technologies and platforms. The former has relevance for skills of activists, access to knowledge and technologies, creativity, and

innovation to circumvent the barriers put in place by those outside and operating against the movement.

The third and final mediation dialectic of relevance here focuses on the relationship between the production of meaning and its reception. As indicated at several points throughout the book, this is an elusive dialectic. The aim of this study was not to 'prove' conclusively causal effects, but rather to try to understand the intricacies of the reception process, as well as the various ways in which citizens negotiate, adopt or resist the circulation of movement discourses, frames, and collective identities. This revealed a complex interplay between hegemony and counter-hegemony, and between dominant meanings and resistant ones.

It suggests a move away from the classic Gramscian view of power and hegemony towards a more Foucauldian view, which not only rejects a simplistic bifurcation between domination and subordination but also complicates the nature of what Gramsci called consent. We can refer back here to the notion of the technologies of the self, which was adopted to study the self-mediation practices, but which implicates technologies of domination and compliance, as well as self-reflection and resistance. This Foucauldian approach to political discourse, hegemony and resistance is above all relevant in the context of the vivid debate in social movement studies regarding the role that ideology plays in the formation and sustainability of social movements (Diani 2000; Klandermans 2000; Oliver and Johnston 2000). This debate exposes a tension between two main ways of articulating ideology within social movement studies. First, ideology as the belief system underpinning a movement, informing the collective framing efforts of movements, the construction of collective identities, and the fostering of actions. This links neatly to the discussion above about the cultural and symbolic aspects of social and political struggles, and thus of agency and contingency. Second, ideology as social order and common sense against which social movements fight, as the symbolic resources which legitimate domination.

This second – more Marxist – way of approaching ideology points to the more stable societal structures that tend to be contested by movements. As the analysis of the interplay between the production and reception of meaning implies, these two ways of mobilizing ideology in view of social struggles are not mutually exclusive; rather, they interact and constantly influence each other. A movement develops its own ideology, but at the same time it needs also to unsettle and expose the ideological nature of the political order and of common sense, something the UK's anti-austerity movement has arguably attempted to do, with mixed success.

* * *

The Circuit of Protest, as presented and developed in this book, constitutes a productive conceptual and methodological framework to study a particular movement, and has yielded interesting results. As well as providing an empirical model to study the various ways in which media and communication are relevant for activists and protest, the circuit enables us to bridge, or at the very least, to address, some important tensions within social movement as well as media and communication theory. It enables us to think about the symbolic and material sides of a contentious struggle in conjunction with each other. It stresses the interplay between a set of processes that occur internally to a movement, but accounts also for the movement's external context. It explicitly implicates public opinion and non-activist citizens in the process of contentious politics. Furthermore, it positions a dialectic and productive articulation of power centrally at each of the different moments of the circuit. This avoids determinisms, and leads, I suggest, to a more sophisticated and nuanced perspective on the nature of the success and failure of a movement and the struggle waged.

Mediation, as also discussed at length by Martín-Barbero (1993), is a very apt and productive theoretical concept to study contentious politics. Silverstone's double articulation of mediation allows the linking of the symbolic aspects of media and the materiality of communication technologies. It also enables the consideration of the usage of communication technologies and the resulting mediation practices, on the one hand, and media/journalistic representations on the other. By linking mediation and opportunity structure conceptually, a dialectical position is taken *vis-à-vis* one of the core dichotomies in the social sciences: namely, between structure and agency. In terms of contentious politics, the concepts of alternative and mainstream media are highly relevant in equal measure – the former in view of the self-mediation practices of the movement; and the latter in view of the circulation of its frames beyond the like-minded. This brings us to the complex nature of reception and the notion of active audiences.

As this study showed, researching the reception of movement frames is worthwhile, and a crucial component to understand and discuss the ambivalent nature of the circulation of protest. As Silverstone (2006: 42) put it, mediation is not just a matter of what appears on the screen, but is actually constituted in the practices of those who produce the sounds and images, the

'MEDIATION... IS A VERY APT AND PRODUCTIVE THEORETICAL CONCEPT TO STUDY CONTENTIOUS POLITICS'

narratives and the spectacles, as well as, crucially, those who receive them. Finally, the circuit is a holistic conceptual and methodological framework which enables the study of the 'processes of production, content, reception and circulation of social meaning simultaneously' (Philo 2007: 175). The Circuit of Protest needs to be applied to a wide variety of social and political struggles, and as a result of this, inevitably be improved and built upon. Be my guest! ■

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RE-EXAMINING PUTNAM: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE DIGITAL AGE

WORDS

ANDREW BULOVSKY

Robert Putnam[1] argues that when it comes to civic, political, and religious participation in the United States, social capital[2] is in decline. The culprit? Technological advances that impact how we spend our time. Putnam's chief concern is that a decrease of in-person, interpersonal social interactions reduces overall levels of social capital, which damages the social foundations required for a healthy and well-functioning democracy. At first blush, these are serious concerns. But Putnam's analysis is incomplete, as it misunderstands how younger generations[3] tend to engage with technology and society. Among younger generations, social capital is not in decline – it is simply acted out differently. And while Putnam's claims centre around American civic life, his shortcomings warrant attention because the social dynamics of the Internet carry global ramifications.

It has been more than 50 years since Mancur Olson[4] first articulated how and why collective action occurs. In the decades since, there have been no shortage of studies on how the Internet may variously constrain, facilitate, or otherwise augment collective action[5]. While the Internet may provide new tools for political organising, the positive impacts are not without their parallel shortcomings. For instance, rather than learning about politics or connecting with like-minded peers, citizens may prioritise activities that take them away from others. With a limited number of hours in a day, using the Internet for social recreation or gaming that does not result in offline connections means fewer hours with family and friends – and at least for these users, the Internet may therefore have a deleterious effect on pre-existing interpersonal relationships[6]. Additionally, it's important to remember the in-group differences that exist: within the same generation, 'there are individuals with low levels of interest in politics, who appear to have significantly different informational and practical needs than those with higher levels of political interest'[7]. Thus, while the communicative affordances of the Internet may impact upon the development of social capital differently from person to person, it has enabled those who are particularly motivated to engage with politics in new and positive ways.

We need to understand how those who choose to leverage the Internet's technological and communicative affordances develop social capital. If these citizens are ignored, we miss out on an opportunity to understand how they act out their citizenship, and risk ostracising them from the political process entirely.

DIGITALLY FACILITATED COLLECTIVE ACTION

Among other factors, the Internet has affected how we create and maintain social capital by expanding social networks[8]. As such, we must adjust our definitions of social capital and citizenship to take into account the new ways in which younger generations engage in digitally facilitated collective action. Put simply, younger generations participate in collective action differently than previous generations; Rather than attending a Lion's Club meeting, as Putnam would expect, younger generations engage with non-traditional organisations – sometimes called Social Movement Organisations (SMOs)[9] – that often recruit and retain members through digital networks, such as the Black Lives Matter or DREAMer movements. These organisations are significant both for the sense of belonging they instill among members, and the social capital they produce. By enhancing the potential to articulate interests and reach out to others, the Internet promotes collective action, which affords individuals increased agency in their ability to aggregate information, associate with a cause, and act towards a common goal. While these goals differ and are by no means limited to policy change, their common origin is the Internet.

This common origin exists because the Internet has lowered the threshold required to get involved in a cause. While the risk of 'slacktivism' looms large (whereby individuals merely engage in a tokenistic, fleeting act of political engagement in the form of a Like or petition signature), the past decade contains plenty of examples of significant offline collective actions which either originated online or were in large part helped along by the Internet[10]. One of the earliest examples of the dialogic nature of offline collective actions and online social networks comes from the Million Mom March, held on May 14, 2000 in Washington, DC. In this case, the Internet provided a platform for organisers to reach interested participants and arrange a series of demonstrations arguing for stricter gun control[11]. The online organisation helped mobilise interested participants, who turned out in greater numbers than would have been possible without the Internet. Put differently, the online organisational capacities of the Internet augmented the embodied, offline movement. More recently, the UK Labour Party's 2017 launch of *M.app* was intended to notify

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[1] Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

[2] Throughout this piece, I define social capital as the benefits achieved from communication and interaction with others, which results in a heightened sense of agency over social decisions and an increased feeling of belonging with their chosen communities.

[3] I use the expression 'younger generations' to refer generally to citizens aged 18-35 (a demographic more likely to participate in digitally facilitated collective action than older generations).

[4] Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action: Public goods and the theory of groups*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[5] See: Bennett, W. L., and Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Shah, D. V., Kwak, N., and Holbert, R. L. (2001). ''Connecting' and 'disconnecting' with civic life: Patterns of internet use and the production of social capital'. *Political Communication*, 18.

[7] Xenos, M.A. and Kyoung, K. (2008). 'Rocking the vote and more: An experimental study of the impacts of youth politics portals'. *Information Technology & Politics*, 5(2).

[8] Note, however, that research by Robin Dunbar indicates that there is a 'cognitive limit' (of approximately $n = 150$) to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships.

[9] Elliott, T. and Earl, J. (2018). 'Organizing the next generation: Youth engagement with activism inside and outside of organizations'. *Social Media and Society*, 4 (1).

[10] Consider, for example, the Tea Party Movement, the Arab Spring, or the collective bargaining protests in Wisconsin.

[11] Bimber, B. (2003), *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

users of key votes and help coordinate protest actions[12]. While both of these movements had differing end goals, the crucial point is that the Internet *changed* the very nature by which they were organised.

Of course, a movement is not guaranteed success just because it is organised online. Consider, for example, that the Million Mom March failed to convince Congress to pass gun control legislation and that the Labour Party last held office in 2010. The crucial point is that offline collection action is increasingly facilitated

'PUTNAM'S CHIEF CONCERN IS THAT A DECREASE OF IN-PERSON, INTERPERSONAL SOCIAL INTERACTIONS REDUCES OVERALL LEVELS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL'

by online communication and organisation. And although these movements do not always achieve their goals immediately, the lowered threshold for action can help to create a far-reaching digital presence that can draw interested actors in over time. By way of example, the protests surrounding the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen saw the hashtag #cop15 used over 100,000 times. While the original hashtag eventually died out, the feeling of involvement that it had engendered was rekindled the following year as #cop16 took its place (and has continued to be reappropriated since). Put differently, the use of these hashtags allowed activists to pick up the mantel and carry forward the political idea, despite having no formal organisational structure.

This is not to say that the Internet has no downsides: on the contrary, the Internet – and social media technologies in particular – may be co-opted by authoritarian regimes to shut down attempts to hold governmental elites accountable[13]. This negative potential aside, for many citizens the Internet still empowers interested actors, provides new and unique ways to become involved with civic life, and fosters new connections between otherwise distinct (and often geographically distant) communities. These benefits are particularly pronounced in younger generations, who are more likely to use the Internet in the first place.

CHANGING NOTIONS OF CITIZENSHIP

Putnam concluded that younger generations are less engaged with politics than their parents' generations. However, this observation rested on a narrow and romanticised understanding of political participation and citizenship, which involved individuals participating 'in civic life through organised groups, from civic clubs to political parties, while becoming informed via the news, and generally engaging in public life out of a sense of personal duty'[14]. While this is a good starting point, it is an incomplete definition of citizenship.

In an era increasingly defined by online political participation, formalised and hierarchical organisational structures have been usurped by more nebulous and network-oriented structures. For example, as with countless other organisations of a similar stripe, the American non-profit 'Defenders of Wildlife' now relies principally on email listservs to develop their membership rolls; in this way, anyone interested in their causes may sign up to receive emails, thereby creating an additional layer of group membership that allows for mobilisation on an individuated, case-by-case basis[15].

The relationship between a citizen and the State is personal and is acted out according to an individual's own preferences. And while academics have recognised this fact, there is a dearth of literature on how one's identity as a citizen is affected by digitally facilitated collective action. Simply put, there has been inadequate attention paid to how younger generations come to terms with their citizenship in the digital age. This failure is significant because a failure to understand the ways in which members of younger generations express their civic responsibilities represents a botched opportunity to help connect younger generations to the political process. My point is not to declare one citizenship model 'correct' or 'better', but to aim for inclusivity in our definition of citizenship, with the dual aim of honing younger generations' interests through civic education and educating established institutions and politicians about how to connect with a wider group of citizens.

BUILDING BRIDGES

A more inclusive definition of citizenship would help educational institutions and politicians themselves connect with more citizens. Where educational institutions need to improve upon their ability to provide a rich civic education, politicians need to make headway in connecting younger generations to the political process. At present, the dominant model of civic education is outdated. For instance, a nationwide analysis of civic education programs in American high schools (aimed at youth aged 14-18) found

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[12] Armstrong, K. (2017). 'Momentum's new activism app could change politics forever.' *Wired*.

[13] Bulovsky, A. (2018). 'Authoritarian communication on social media: The relationship between democracy and leaders' digital communicative practices'. *International Communication Gazette*, 81(1).

[14] Bennett et al., 2011, 838.

[15] Bimber, 2003, 141.

that such programs typically neglected to teach students about the impact of social media on political participation[16], and instead favoured courses on political history and institutions. While the latter are no doubt valuable in their own right, they must be complemented with lessons on how younger generations can connect to the political process as it looks today. Failing to do so has significant consequences: respondents from the same survey were overwhelmingly turned off by these traditional programs, and expressed a reduced interest in voting or working on campaigns. If we want younger generations to be more engaged with politics, we must meet them in the middle.

There is time to turn these programs around. Civic education reform should include four key lessons: (1) circulating information that matters, (2) communicating about issues, (3) evaluating information, and (4) mobilisation[17]. Together, these lessons combine to create the central element currently missing from civic education programs – namely, helping younger generations identify how they may actively participate in today's political process. In practice, this would mean that rather than simply teaching a student how government works, students would learn about their role in the process and encourage them to get involved. This might mean teaching them the 'workings of citizen-organised political processes,' such as 'how civic networks are organised in popular online social networking forums… to the workings of direct consumer campaigns to change the labour, environmental, or trading practices of corporations'[18]. Rather than simply relaying information to students, this approach would emphasise personal agency and privilege discussions of their active involvement in political decision-making.

An additional reform to civic education programs could involve an expansion of what counts as a credible source of information. Instead of relying solely on textbooks and traditional authoritative sources, programs could take into account information produced in peer knowledge networks, such as Wikipedia or blogs. These sources would not *replace* textbooks – they would *complement* them. In so doing, civic education programs could keep up with the times. By recognising that many citizens in younger generations act out their citizenship differently, a more inclusive civic education program would take a pragmatic approach and tailor their programs to these young citizens, rather than turning them away from politics. These reformed civic education programs would not only help younger generations develop research and communication skills, they would facilitate the citizenship process itself by forging a stronger relationship between young citizens and our political institutions. This approach, coupled with changes in outreach efforts from politicians, would help younger generations engage with the political process.

Politicians across the globe have made Internet-facilitated efforts to reach out to voters. In the United States, President Obama went to unprecedented lengths to reach voters through his campaign website, regularly informing voters of event updates. In the United Kingdom, as discussed above, the Labour Party has endorsed an app to help citizens organise. While these efforts are a step in the right direction, they remain anecdotal. Only a limited number of campaign websites actually empower younger generations to form their own political networks or propose their own action plans. For instance, there has been an increase in Congressional candidates in the United States whose websites try to communicate directly with younger generations, which indicates the beginning of a 'healthier pattern… for young citizens interested in the electoral process'[19]. Politicians should take heed, as a candidate's use of the Internet's communicative affordances can pay off in the form of more votes[20]. The lesson for political candidates is to leverage the Internet's communicative capabilities to connect with citizens who act out their citizenship differently. This not only benefits politicians, but makes for a healthier political process overall by increasing political engagement.

Younger generations are the future leaders of our respective countries, and we must take into account the ways in which they engage with politics and act out their citizenship. These are not radical reforms. First, civic education programs should meet younger generations where they are by complementing lessons on political history and institutions with discussions about how they may directly participate in political decision-making. Second, politicians and political organisations should strive to become more accessible. These reforms would strengthen the connection between citizens and their elected representatives, which could make politics more responsive and inclusive. In an era where political disillusion is commonplace, we can do better. ■

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[16] Kahne, J., Hodgin, E., and Eidman-Aadahl, E. (2016). 'Redesigning civic education for the digital age: Participatory politics and the pursuit of democratic engagement'. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44(1).
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Bennett et al., 2009, 111.
[19] Xenos, M.A. and Bennett, W. L. (2007). 'The disconnection in online politics: The youth political web sphere and U.S. election sites, 2002-2004'. *Information, Communication, & Society*, 10(4). 455.
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THE LIMITS OF
THE
LIMITS OF
DISRUPTION:
THREE LESSONS FROM BRAZIL

WORDS

CÉSAR JIMÉNEZ-MARTÍNEZ

'Have you seen what's happening in Brazil?' It was a cloudy afternoon in London in June 2013, and I was attending my very first conference as a PhD student. I was jumping from café to café, meeting academics whose work I had found inspiring. I told them I was researching the branding and marketing efforts of the Brazilian government ahead of the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. In one of those encounters, one academic asked, 'have you seen what is happening in Brazil, *right now?*'

A quick online search showed me. Media organisations from the UK, the United States and Brazil were reporting that thousands of Brazilians had taken to the streets of cities all over the country, originally to protest against a public transportation fare increase. Nonetheless, by the time the foreign media had begun covering the demonstrations in earnest, the protestors' agendas had broadened to include demands for gay rights, complaints over corruption among politicians, and most importantly, objections to the exorbitant sums spent on preparing for the upcoming 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games[1]. The latter became particularly salient in the media, given that the timing of the protests overlapped with the Confederations Cup, a two-week football tournament that served as a dress rehearsal for the World Cup scheduled for the following year[2]. Ultimately, the demonstrations grew to become the largest period of social unrest in Brazil since 1992, with one million people taking to the streets of 353 cities on June 20th alone, and estimates that one in every twenty Brazilians took part at some point[3].

Techno-optimism permeated both those early journalistic accounts and some of the first academic pieces written in the aftermath of the demonstrations. Commentators celebrated digital media – also called 'new', 'social' or 'alternative' media – as a key factor to understanding the origin, coordination and communication of the protests. Some of these commentators stressed that, through the employment of digital media, collectives like *Mídia NINJA[4]* challenged popular national newspapers and newscasts such as *O Estado de Sao Paulo* and *Jornal Nacional*, which originally framed the protests as simple acts of vandalism. Instead,

Mídia NINJA and other collectives attempted to make visible a more positive narrative for the demonstrations, with scholars claiming that these collectives were 'far richer in information and lighter on sensationalism than the printed newspaper and static TV coverage'[5]. This is a particularly relevant issue in the Brazilian context, where 'mainstream' media have traditionally represented the interests of more conservative sectors of society[6].

Such views were in line with the intellectual trends of the time, which invariably claimed that digital media gave visibility to images and accounts that challenged authority and the powers-that-be[7]. Those were the days before discussions about Cambridge Analytica, ideological echo chambers, or fake news, the days when some believed that the Arab Spring had actually been a Twitter or Facebook revolution[8]. Indeed, accounts at that time suggested that the events in Brazil had been a 'tropical spring'[9], even though it was winter in the southern hemisphere. In other words, the June 2013 demonstrations were viewed as another example of an alleged global trend in social movements, apparently without clear leadership, which occupied public spaces, employed digital technologies to coordinate their actions and by-passed traditional forms of media. As sociologist Manuel Castells stated, 'it also happened in Brazil'[10].

BEYOND TECHNO-OPTIMISM

Although techno-optimistic views still prevail in relation to the protests in Brazil, more nuanced perspectives have appeared over time. Some authors have noted that, whilst digital media were crucial in helping protesters coordinate their actions, these media also fragmented the interests of the various groups behind the demonstrations[11]. Others have observed that social movements within Brazil have become increasingly wary of the neoliberal trends and concentrations of power that have characterised the Internet of late[12].

That is not to say that digital media played no part. A survey carried out in eight Brazilian cities revealed that 62 per cent of protesters had heard about the demonstrations through Facebook, and that

[1] Gohn, M. da G. (2015). Brazilian Social Movements in the Last Decade. In P. Almeida and A. Cordero Ulate (eds.), *Handbook of Social Movements across Latin America* (361–372). Dordrecht: Springer.

[2] Cammaerts, B., and Jiménez-Martínez, C. (2014). 'The mediation of the Brazilian V-for-Vinegar protests: From vilification to legitimization and back?' *Liinc Em Revista*, 10(1).

[3] Branford, S., and Rocha, J. (2015). *Brazil under the Workers Party: From euphoria to despair*. Rugby: Practical Action Publishing.

[4] *Mídia NINJA* is a network of activists and alternative journalists established in 2011 as part of the network of cultural circuits Fora de Eixo (Out of the Axis), which live streamed and disseminated photos and information about the protests through social media.

[5] Conde, M., and Jazeel, T. (2013). 'Kicking off in Brazil: Manifesting democracy'. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 22(4). 445.

[6] de Albuquerque, A. (2017). 'Protecting democracy or conspiring against it? Media and politics in Latin America: A glimpse from Brazil'. *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 1–18.

[7] Bennett, L. (2003). New media power: the Internet and global activism. In N. Couldry and J. Curran (Eds.), *Contesting Media Power: Alternative Media in a Networked World* (17–38). London: Rowman and Littlefield; Castells, M. (2009). *Communication Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[8] Beaumont, P. (2011). The truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world. *The Guardian*.

[9] Spector, F. (2013). As Brazil's protests spread, is this a Tropical Spring? *Channel 4 News*.

[10] Castells, M. (2013). Redes de indignação e esperança. *Movimentos sociais na era da internet*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar. 182.

[11] Porto, M.P., and Brant, J. (2015). Social media and the 2013 protests in Brazil: The contradictory nature of political mobilisation in the digital era. In L. Dencik and O. Leisters (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Social Media and Protest* (181–199). London: Rowman and Littlefield.

[12] Morgans, C. (2018). 'New media and the disillusion of Brazil's radical left'. *Latin American Perspectives*, 45(3).

75 per cent used this platform to invite their contacts to participate[13]. To put these numbers in perspective, Brazil's 76 million registered Facebook users (as of 2013) made it the third largest Facebook market, and the second largest in terms of daily usage at 47 million[14]. Other studies suggest that, outside the United States, Brazil has the largest number of Twitter, YouTube and Facebook users, most of whom are middle-class, young and reside in the main urban centres[15].

My own research supports this more nuanced view. Between 2014 and 2016, I conducted more than 60 interviews in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Brasilia, London and New York with individuals who covered the protests or took part in them, including activists, members of media collectives, journalists, foreign correspondents and government officials. Through those interviews and my own observations, a more complex picture emerged, which recognised the importance of digital media, but also stressed some of their limitations. Three lessons arise from the Brazilian case which may be applicable to other settings.

1) THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN 'OLD' AND 'DIGITAL' MEDIA ARE BLURRED

In recent years, various journalistic and academic analyses of episodes of social disruption have described protests as a clash between 'old' or 'mainstream' media – such as newspapers, radio or television – vis-à-vis 'new', 'social' or 'digital' media. The assumption behind some of these viewpoints is that the so-called 'mainstream' media protected the establishment and dismissed social movements, while 'new' or 'digital' media exposed *the truth*[16]. As stated before, similar perspectives could be found in Brazil, where alternative media collectives such as *Mídia NINJA*

were praised for challenging the dominance of national newspapers and television newscasts, and allegedly showing what was *really* happening[17]. As one foreign correspondent told me:

> 'I was watching a lot of videos on YouTube, which was probably the next best thing to being there, because it was unmediated'.

This clear-cut division between different forms of media is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. Firstly, it has become clear in recent years that digital media are not the monopoly of radical forces. Governments, private corporations and the 'mainstream' media are also online, and journalists have embraced digital tools in their daily reporting. In my conversations with a collective of foreign correspondents, I was told that they had created a WhatsApp group to share real-time information about meeting points and safety recommendations during the coverage of the demonstrations. Similarly, a Brazilian reporter recalled an episode in which a photo she took of one of her colleagues being arrested during a protest went viral. This was later used by lawyers to secure the release of the journalist.

Despite claims that traditional media are simply being by-passed by digital technologies, 'alternative' groups still rely on 'old' media, such as radio, television and newspapers, to communicate their messages[18]. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, activists in Brazil such as those belonging to *Movimento Passe Livre* (Free Fare Movement), which were responsible for organising the first stage of the June 2013 demonstrations, have grown increasingly critical of the corporate nature of the Internet. In response, they have gradually curtailed their online activities and prioritised face-to-face forms of organisation and communication[19].

'THE DEMONSTRATIONS WERE VIEWED AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF AN ALLEGED GLOBAL TREND IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, APPARENTLY WITHOUT CLEAR LEADERSHIP'

[13] Porto and Brant, 2015, 190.
[14] Gomes, H.S. (2013). Brasil é o 2o país com mais usuários que entram diariamente no Facebook. *G1 - O Portal de Notícias Da Globo*. São Paulo.
[15] Morgans, 2018.
[16] Amaral, F. (2016). 'It's not just 20 cents': How social networks helped mobilise Brazilians against injustice. In S. Price and R. Sanz Sabido (eds.), *Sites of Protest: Protest, Media and Culture* (195–210). London: Rowman and Littlefield; d'Andrea, C., and Ziller, J. (2015). 'Violent scenes in Brazil's 2013 protests: The diversity of ordinary people's narratives'. *Television & New Media*, 17(4).
[17] Conde and Jazeel, 2013; d'Andrea and Ziller, 2015.
[18] Cammaerts, B. (2018). *The Circulation of Anti-austerity Protest*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
[19] Morgans, 2018.

Secondly, such clear-cut divisions portray the media as constituted by fragmentary camps, rather than as an interrelated whole[20]. People construct, project, contest and re-appropriate news through various connected media platforms and organisations, such as newspapers, television, radio, Twitter, YouTube or Facebook. These different kinds of media do not always oppose each other and may actually perform 'in tandem', re-appropriating and amplifying the contents that they construct and show[21]. At the peak of the June 2013 demonstrations, *Mídia NINJA* had an average of 150,000 daily viewers online[22]. Although this constituted a significant number of viewers, it was a far cry from the almost five million spectators who watched newscast *Jornal Nacional* every day[23]. As members of *Mídia NINJA* told me, they stopped 'preaching to the converted' only when they were interviewed on popular television talk shows and when their footage was also shown by *Jornal Nacional* as part of a story about a demonstrator who had been unlawfully arrested[24]. Examples of the media working in tandem were not limited to Brazil's national boundaries: a sympathetic report about *Mídia NINJA* published by *The Guardian*[25] helped the media collective to gain validation within Brazil. Hence, accounts of a struggle between different kinds of media risks failing to acknowledge that the media are actually a hybrid, with content circulating through interconnected technologies and organisations[26].

2) DIGITAL MEDIA REMAIN VULNERABLE TO 'OLD' PRESSURES

It is true that the use of digital technologies challenged traditional media during the protests in Brazil, not only in terms of producing opposing content, but also in altering the ways in which established journalists covered the demonstrations. Brazilian and foreign reporters noted that they had to pay attention both to the streets and to social media. As one of them told me:

> 'Social media were like a thermometer. It was really important to monitor what people were saying, what was happening, what was being planned, because there was no central leadership; there wasn't a group that you could talk to, to know what would be the next step, what is being planned after this big protest. We always had to resort to Facebook because that's where the events were created, and people started responding, accepting or declining them'.

However, the notion that digital media were a game-changer seems unrealistic given that many of the same 'old' commercial, organisational and institutional pressures are still prevalent. A few months after the protests had lessened, *Mídia NINJA* was severely criticised by the Brazilian media and other bloggers after sharing a live streamed interview with the mayor of Rio de Janeiro, in which they were felt to have been too sympathetic toward the politician[27]. As Rafael Vilela, a member of *Mídia NINJA*, told me, their mistake was to use the format of a print interview to conduct what was more akin to a televised discussion. The more conciliatory style apparently did not fit with the conventions of live streaming, which call for drama and confrontation[28].

Similarly, digital platforms are apparently less constrained, in terms of time and space, than newspapers, television or radio. Indeed, many of the Brazilian and foreign reporters that I spoke with complained about the difficulty of narrating nuanced accounts of the demonstrations because of those limitations. New technologies might be thought of as facilitating more detailed coverage. In fact, some analyses praised the live streaming and lack of editing carried out by alternative media collectives precisely for those reasons[29]. That impression is deceptive. Members of these collectives held that online live streaming contributed to simplifying accounts about the demonstrations. As Rui Harayama, anthropologist and collaborator of *Coletivo Carranca*, admitted:

> 'I don't like doing streaming, because there is a moment when you have nothing else to say. You keep on talking about what is happening right at the moment, but you are incapable of doing any analysis.'

Rui's observations about the shortcomings of live coverage are telling, as it prompts the question of how much 'new' technologies have actually altered the nature of reporting protests. His experience was strikingly similar to an episode recalled by a television journalist who had taken part in a live broadcast of a protest outside a football stadium in late June 2013: despite being a kilometre away from the venue, in an area under police surveillance, she reported being 'just outside the stadium', giving the impression that the demonstrations were right next to the venue. In hindsight, she admitted that the technological limitations of live reporting prevented her from giving a more nuanced account:

[20] Cammaerts, B., Mattoni, A., and McCurdy, P. (2013). Introduction: Mediation and protest movements. *In Mediation and protest movements* (3–19). Bristol: Intellect Books.

[21] Cottle, S. (2011). 'Media and the Arab uprisings of 2011: Research notes'. *Journalism*, 12(5).

[22] Cardoso, G., Lapa, T., and Fátima, B. Di. (2016). 'People are the Message? Social Mobilization and Social Media in Brazil'. *International Journal of Communication*, 10(0).

[23] Becker, V., and Alves, K. (2015). 'Análise da queda da audiência do Jornal Nacional e os impactos no telejornalismo'. *Comunicação & Inovação,* 16(32).

[24] Spuldar, R. (2013). Brazil's Mídia Ninja covers demonstrations from the inside. *Index on Censorship.*

[25] Watts, J. (2013). Brazil's ninja reporters spread stories from the streets. *The Guardian.*

[26] Chadwick, A. (2013). *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[27] Mazotte, N. (2013). *Mídia NINJA: an alternative journalism phenomenon that emerged from the protests in Brazil.* Retrieved from https://knightcenter.utexas.edu/blog/00-14204-midia-ninja-alternative-journalism-phenomenon-emerged-protests-brazil

[28] Taylor, P. (1997). *Global Communications, International Affairs and the Media Since 1945.* London: Routledge

[29] Conde and Jazeel, 2013.

'If I'm in the middle of tear gas I'm not going to explain, oh, you know, this started in the city square and there were thousands of people. You're just explaining what's happening and you're trying not to get hurt.'

Hence, despite techno-optimistic views that praise digital media for apparently empowering citizens, broadening the spectrum of accounts shown in the media and even introducing different practices to those followed by 'traditional' or 'mainstream' media, 'new' technologies may sometimes replicate or amplify some of the same drawbacks of 'old' technologies like newspapers, radio and television.

3) DIGITAL MEDIA MAY DISRUPT THOSE DISRUPTING

Earlier analyses have stressed how new communication technologies may contest and disrupt those in power. In part, this is said to be due to an increase in the number of voices and images circulating in the media sphere, the critical mass of which can serve to undermine, parody or erase the authoritative monopoly once enjoyed by governments and media organisations in the production of content[30]. More recently, however, various studies have observed that governments, corporations and other groups are just as able to strike back and use digital media against activists or radical movements[31].

' 'NEW' MEDIA REMAINS VULNERABLE TO 'OLD' ORGANISATIONAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES '

A good example is the experience of Carla Dauden, a Brazilian filmmaker based in the United States, whose video '*No, I'm not going to the World Cup*' went viral during the protests. In the video, she criticised the decision to host the event at the expense of investing in public education and healthcare. Although the video reached 2.5 million views in less than a week and influenced discussions among activists and the mainstream media[32], it soon became the target of criticism. Discussions in other blogs and forums accused the video of being fraudulent and some even personally attacked its creator. As Carla later told me, she

reacted with a mixture of surprise and fear, and ended up deleting all personal information from her website and social media accounts. In addition, she sent a note to a Brazilian magazine dismissing conservative or right-wing interpretations of her video, stating that she was only a filmmaker voicing her opinion, and that she did not support either an impeachment of then-President Dilma Rousseff or calls to alter the rule of law[33].

This episode illustrates one of the dilemmas inherent in digital media. On the one hand, communications technologies represent a source of opportunity for people like Carla or the members of *Mídia NINJA*, who, with limited resources, were able to share content with wide audiences, as well as challenging (to some extent) the accounts of established media organisations. On the other hand, the very same technologies facilitated a state of *fragility*[34], in which content could be twisted or manipulated, and those producing them could be attacked. As Carla summarised:

> 'Once [content] is on the Internet, it is like a black hole and you cannot control it anymore […] Once it is out there, you are so vulnerable, so exposed. It is a good thing, but it is also scary'.

Carla's ambivalence reflects a broader shift in attitudes towards digital media. In the wake of Brexit, the election of Donald Trump, and the rise of populism in different settings, techno-optimistic views towards digital media have been replaced by scepticism and even fear. However, as some have noted[35], fear is not the most appropriate answer. Instead, a more measured perspective is preferable, one that questions ideas of 'mainstream' and 'alternative' media, and which acknowledges that new technologies have effectively altered the manner in which protest and disruption are communicated, while at the same time recognising that 'new' media remains vulnerable to 'old' organisational, institutional and economic pressures. ■

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[30] Dayan, D. (2013). 'Conquering visibility, conferring visibility: Visibility seekers and media performance'. *International Journal of Communication*, 7; Taylor, 1997; Thompson, J. (2005). 'The new visibility'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22(6).

[31] Uldam, J. (2018). 'Social media visibility: Challenges to activism'. *Media, Culture and Society*, 40(1).

[32] Tognozzi, M. (2014). A força das redes sociais. In R. Figueiredo (Ed.), *Junho de 2013: A sociedade enfrenta o Estado* (73–86). São Paulo: Summus Editorial.

[33] De Aquino, R. (2013). Carla Dauden: 'Tem gente dizendo que eu trabalho para a CIA!'. *Época*.

[34] Cammaerts, et al., 2013; Thompson, 2005.

[35] Elkus, A. (2016). '2015: The Year That Techno-Optimism Broke'. *Medium*.

unmediated

[82]

TOM HATTON + ADNAN AL SAYEGH

عدنان الصائغ + توم هاتون

مقاطع من نشيد أوروك + الآن هنا

NOW HERE + URUK'S ANTHEM (extracts)

[84]

رأيتُ دمي في الرقيمِ
إلى جنبهِ كاتمُ الصوتِ
يلمعُ مبتسماً
ويصافحُني بحياءٍ

رأيتُ جهازَ التنصّتِ،
ملتصقاً بصدورِ الصبياتِ،
يردحنَ في الحفلاتِ
رأيتُ الحدائقَ مهجورةً
في غيابكِ
والدودَ أصفرَ يدبي إليَّ

رأيتُ دماءَ العبيدِ
على حجرِ المعبدِ السومريِّ
يطنُّ عليها ذبابُ العصور
رأيتُ إلى العصرِ يسقطُ
من ناطحاتِ السحاب
رأيتُ " الخيامَ "
– بحانةِ شيراز –
يحسو كؤوسَ الوجودِ،
وينسى الحساب

رأيتُ الكتاب
– بأسواقِ اسبارطة –
بحَّ:
مَنْ يشتريني؟

رأيتُ أبي نائماً
– فوق محراثِه –
ولصوص الحكومةِ ينتهبون سنابلَهُ والأغاني
رأيتُ البروقَ الطروقَ تشقُّ بحربتها بطنَ قنطور حتى تدلّتْ مع الكرْمِ أمعاؤهُ
وبعوض إيزوبوس يحملُ جثتنا
ويطيرُ..
زززز

رأيتُ المعري يقدّمُ أشعارَهُ علفاً للجوامِ
يسِ

في خطئي فكرةٌ أنتَ أخطأتَها في التفقهِ حتى استطالتْ حبالاً لشنقي.
....
....

I see my blood etched on a clay tablet
and next to it, a silenced revolver
shakes my hand shyly
with a gleaming smile

I saw bugging devices
slipped into the cleavage of girls
dancing at parties
I saw gardens made empty
by your absence
and yellow worms crawling towards me

I saw the blood of slaves
on a Sumerian stone altar
and the flies of ages buzzing round it
I saw time fall
from the high rises
I saw 'Khayyam'
- In Shiraz's bar -
sipping cups of existence
and forgetting to keep score

I saw books piled high
in the markets of Sparta
Who will buy me?

I saw my father sleeping
- on his plough –
and government thieves looting his stalks and songs
I saw lightning strike, splitting open with its blade the
belly of the centaur until its guts dangled in the vineyard
and Eusebius' mosquitoes carrying our corpses
and flying
zzzzzzz

I saw Al Mu'ari feed his poems to the buff -
a-lo -

Inside my mistake there's an idea you twisted until it
lengthened into a rope to hang me.
....
....

[86]

[88]

فتحشّاً ثغرُ المذيعةِ حين رأتنا نوّجَّجُ ثوراتنا بالكلام،

فقامتْ

لتولعَ

سيجارها المالبيورو..

ووووووووو

فالتهبَ القشُّ تحتَ الارائكِ ...،

ثم أضافتْ: [وصرّحَ في الاجتماع المدارِ

– وزيرُ الحصارِ: (لقد نفدَ الزيتُ – يا سادتي

في مخازنِ دولتنا،

فليقلِ المواطنُ بيضتَهُ

بالضراطِ ..).....)

The presenter vomited when she saw us light our
revolution with words
     and rose
to light
a Marlboro
     and and and and
the straw caught fire under the sofas
then she added: [a declaration from the meeting chaired
by the Minister of Siege: (Gentlemen, our stocks of oil
have run out so now citizens fry their eggs
     with farts...)

وقام ليشرحَ

فامتعضَ الجنرالُ

وقالَ لسيّافهِ

أن يعدّلَ ميلَ الوزيرِ

– على شاشةِ العرضِ –

قبلَ انتهاءِ المذيعةِ من طيِّ نشرتَها

As he got up to explain,
the general was angry
and told his executioner
to correct his Minister's attitude
     - on screen -
before the presenter finished folding her papers

ثم إطوِ المذيعةَ

تحتكَ

أو انشرِ الأرضَ شاهدةً

بين قبرِ الوزيرِ

وبين الجماهيرِ...]..... دوزنَها الخوفُ فارتفعتْ كالمآذنِ آذانُها، تتقرى

خطى الجزَماتِ

أمام السلالمِ

....

....

then fold her
under you
or scatter the earth as an epitaph
     between the grave of the Minister
and the masses...]...and fear fine-tuned them so they pricked
up their ears like minarets, listening furtively for the
tramp of boots
     up ladders
....
....

أبعدَ ما يبسطُ الشعراءُ الخيولَ

على السهلِ

والكتبِ المدرسيةِ

Beyond, poets spread horses over the fields and school books

لي أن أديرَ رحى الكلماتِ

وأطحن روحي لتشربَ قهوتَها في الصباحِ فتاةٌ ترى غيرَ زرقةِ هذي السماء سماءً

لعينيكِ لامعتين

وراءَ حديدِ السجونِ – الأغاني الشجيةِ.

نشقى لأنَّ القصائدَ أبقى..

....

....

It's for me to turn the grindstone of words
and grind my soul for a girl drinking her coffee in the morning
to see other than the blue of this sky, a sky for your shining eyes
     behind the iron of prisons – are melancholy songs.
We suffer because poems last forever.
....
....

I'm afraid of the dark

    I'm afraid of tight black walls surrounding my tender age.
Do you remember? How the jailor hosted us so I slept on
your thigh and the ground sprayed with urine until dawn.
Do you remember? How we used to dream of the sun behind
bars, picking lice from the hair of our thick nights and the
smell of farts. Do you remember? This is the sun of God
looking down on your squares every morning.
This

    is it

    swarms of students continue a modern flirt in
front of you, uniforms of employees going to work, the
street lights have not been switched off yet, the songs of
Al-Gubunchi on the radio, the pigeons of the 'Freedom
Monument', the swaying of the trees spread out along the
boulevard…

But the sniper hiding under my eyelashes does not leave me
to dream…
This smooth, narrow rifle of his
besieges my supple neck (why doesn't the tip of the rifle
leave me
to continue my dreams
in this dawn soaked in Eucalyptus…)

………………

أنا اخشى الظلمةَ,

أخشى الجدرانَ الضيقةَ السوداءَ تحاصر عمري البضَّ.

أتذكرُ؟ كمْ ضيّفنا السجّانُ فنمتُ على فخذك

والأرضِ المرشوشةِ بالبول إلى الفجرِ.

أتذكرُ؟ كمْ كنّا نحلمُ بالشمسِ وراءَ القضبانِ، تفلي شَعَرَ ليالينا

الكثَّ من القملِ ورائحةِ الفسوِ.

أتذكرُ؟ ها هي شمسُ اللهِ تطلُّ على ساحاتكَ كلَّ صباحٍ.

ها

هي

أسرابُ التلميذاتِ يواصلن الغنجَ العصريَّ أمامك, بذلاتُ
العمالِ الماضين إلى الشغلِ، مصابيحُ الشارعِ لم تُطفأْ بعدُ, أغاني الگبنجي من
المذياعِ، حمائمُ نصبِ الحريةِ، زقزقةُ الأشجارِ الممتدة طول الكورنيشِ
ولكنَّ القناصَ القابعَ تحت جفوني لايتركني أحلمُ ..

ذي ماسورتُهُ الضيقةُ الملساءُ

تحاصرُ عنقي البضَّ.. (لماذا لا تتركني فوّهةُ القناصِ

أواصلُ أحلامي

في هذا الفجرِ المتشرّبِ باليوكالبتوز...)

………………

'POST-9/11 METROPOLITAN OBEAH':

TECHNO-MAGIC AS AGENT AND DISRUPTOR OF 'CULTURAL LYNCHING' IN KAMAU BRATHWAITE'S RECENT POETRY

WORDS

MATT MARTIN

At a time when all manner of institutions increasingly surveil their employees and service users, extending techniques of policing throughout the public sphere (often to discriminatory effect), how might creative artists resist or disrupt control measures and recover their personal agency? Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite's recent writing illustrates one approach. His collection *Strange Fruit* (2016) tells the story of how, while teaching at New York University, he experienced thefts from his university apartment. Thousands of books and documents were stolen over many years (*c*.2004-11), but each time with no break-in. The perpetrator(s) had institutional access to Brathwaite's home. The university failed to investigate the crimes and protect Brathwaite. When the resulting stress made him ill, Brathwaite was forcibly retired. Presumably, NYU would dispute Brathwaite's account; indeed, the poet recounts how they did just this in offensive terms, '**that i was/am in fact suffering from a MENTAL PROBLEM** – DEMENTIA'.[1] Brathwaite was 81 in 2011, but his writing's incisiveness demonstrates a mind still keen. This essay will explore how *Strange Fruit* and Brathwaite's subsequent *The Lazarus Poems* (2017) expose and disrupt the institution's malfeasance, making innovative use of book form to resist institutional ageism and racism.

Brathwaite's poetics are crucial to this strategy of resistance. He writes in 'nation language', his preferred term for 'language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage', in contrast to 'dialect', a word with 'a long history coming from the plantation where people's dignity is distorted'.[2] Nation language, he argues, emerged on Caribbean slave plantations as 'a strategy' in which, responding to the imposition of English speech, 'the slave is forced to use a certain kind of language in order to disguise himself, to disguise his personality and to retain his culture.'[3] Nation language hence challenges structures of authority encoded in standard English. Also notable is Brathwaite's Sycorax Video Style – a radical use of word processing software to register performance upon the page, deploying font and layout to convey nuances in tone, volume and emphasis. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the witch Sycorax is the late mother of Caliban, an Indigenous man whose island has been captured by the wizard Prospero. For Brathwaite, Sycorax represents the submerged heritage of Caribbean peoples, including traditions of magic that might counter Prospero, who subordinates Caliban by sending the spirit Ariel to spy on him. Prospero, Caliban and Sycorax are recurrent figures throughout Brathwaite's written work. In this Shakespearean framework, Brathwaite's Sycorax computer

compositions become techno-magic pitted against the surveillance devices that he suspects NYU has deployed against him: '**such AWEsome & All-seeing SURVEILLANCE – phone-tap & micro-camera – that if we left the apartment by itself for just 10 mins. you cd. be SURE that if they wish or need it SOMETHING GONE**'.[4]

Brathwaite links harassment by NYU to wider patterns of racist persecution in the US: '**I call this "CL" – CULTURAL LYNCHING – a psycho-physical cultural slipknot assassination**'.[5] Further, the title *Strange Fruit* references Billie Holiday's eponymous, 1939 song about lynchings in the American South. Brathwaite elaborates on the university's methods:

> – a (successful) neurological & technological xperiment in post-9/11 metropolitan **obeah** - design not only to destroy my personal ACHIEVEMENT CONTRIBUTION but to mek me a BAD XAMPLE in the eyes of my own people who until this lynching wd have 'looked up to me' as a GOOD NEIGBOURLY XAMPLE of how we cd 'get along' w/Prospero – GOOD RODNEY KING & CALIBAN - now suddenly & unXplainably the OPPOSITE –

[6]

'Obeah' denotes the religious and magical practices brought to the Americas by enslaved ancestors of today's Afro-Caribbean population. Jerome S. Handler and Kenneth M. Bilby describe how 'the term was first used in an all-embracing, totally negative sense by whites/Europeans, probably in an early English colony...where it started being applied to a very wide range of African spiritual practices and ideas.'[7] Brathwaite himself has worked to rehabilitate obeah, emphasising how 'this "magic" was (is) based on a scientific knowledge and use of herbs, drugs, foods and symbolic/associational procedures' to pursue 'like medical principles everywhere, the process of healing/protection through seeking out the source or explanation...of the disease or fear'.[8] There is also a history of obeah accusations levelled not only at marginalised practitioners, but against holders of power – Diana Patton describes how political leaders like Forbes Burnham (Guyana's first Prime Minister) and Eric Gairy (Grenada's first Prime Minister) were labelled as obeah-men by some opponents.[9] Brathwaite employs this tradition, turning the colonial apparatus (with its negative characterisation of obeah) against his own oppressor. Since he understands obeah as a form of 'scientific knowledge', it makes sense that these competing magics manifest technologically – elsewhere he refers to his own computer as 'dis obeah blox'.[10] However, his own resources are dwarfed by those of NYU's high-tech obeah-men, whom he ventriloquises:

[1] Brathwaite, K. (2016), *Strange Fruit*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press. 21. Note that all bolding and capitalisation are Brathwaite's own.
[2] Brathwaite, K. (1984). *History of the Voice*. London: New Beacon Books. 13.
[3] Brathwaite, 1984, 16.
[4] Brathwaite, 2016, 20. Brathwaite's bolding and capitalisation.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Handler, J.S., and Bilby, K.M. (2012). *Enacting Power: The Criminalisation of Obeah in the Anglophone Caribbean 1760-2011*. Mona: University of the West Indies Press. 4.
[8] Brathwaite, K. (1993). *Roots*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 195.
[9] Patton, D. (2015). *The Cultural Politics of Obeah: Religion, Colonialism and Modernity in the Caribbean World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 282-98.
[10] Brathwaite, K. (1987). *X/Self*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 81.

'how dare yu challenge w/yr NATION-LANGUAGE > de top-notch status of the Prospero Plantation and ijs agent/agency THE BASILISK'.[11] Brathwaite's poem 'The Basilisk' further details this mythical creature that kills with its gaze – in other words, by surveillance

i plant a tree/you dig a hole a well . i gather up the plural fragrance
and you consume the whole . one horn emblazon ribbon'd w/CP
the other mark CL which mek me sick and let me loose my job
. is how my latter life begin & end

…

Sometime ago i don't kno when or how or why –
it born - probably in 9/11 –
in scorm & fear & hatred dread & terror racism –

[12]

'CL' refers to 'cultural lynching' while 'CP' is 'Cow Pasture', the name of Brathwaite's home in Barbados – a place meant for refuge and healing, yet unable to reach such potential. His allusion to 9/11 is relevant because, as Hina Shamsi and Alex Abdo summarise, the attacks of September 11th 2001 on New York and Washington DC precipitated 'the government's creation of a post-9/11 surveillance society in which the long-standing "wall" between surveillance for law enforcement purposes and for intelligence gathering has been dismantled.'[13] In this light, Brathwaite's fears seem justified.

Boria Sax describes how the basilisk 'was hatched from an egg laid by an old cock and incubated by a toad'; the creature is sometimes portrayed with 'the comb, wattle and claws of a rooster'.[14] In origins and appearance, then, the beast is a horrid inversion of Legba, the Dahomeyan deity and Haitian *loa* (Vodou spirit) whose animal attribute is a cockerel. Brathwaite's writings frequently feature Legba as 'the crucial link between man and the other gods'.[15] Furthermore, Brathwaite views Toussaint Louverture (*c.* 1743-1803), the Haitian revolutionary leader whose surname literally means 'the opening', as incarnating this god: 'he was Legba … *loa* of thresholds and beginnings.'[16] Legba, like Louverture, opens his followers to alternative ways of thinking and living, while the basilisk locks victims into restricted patterns of existence. Brathwaite sickens under its stare, but the primary threat is spiritual, not corporeal. The basilisk's gaze of 'cultural lynching' leads to 'social death', a category deployed by Orlando

Patterson to describe exclusions involved in enslavement: 'the slave was ritually incorporated as the permanent enemy on the inside…He did not and could not belong because he was the product of a hostile, alien culture. He stood…as a living affront to the local gods, an intruder in the sacred space'.[17] This status as internal enemy is forced upon Brathwaite by the university; considering Patterson's description, it is understandable that Brathwaite connects his own experiences to enslavement and lynching.

How to defeat a basilisk? The medieval *Gesta Romanorum* describes how Alexander the Great slew this monster by following philosophers' guidance: 'Place a glass in an elevated situation between the army and the wall under which the basilisk cowers; and no sooner shall he behold it, than his own figure, reflected in the mirror, shall return the poison upon himself, and kill him.' Alexander took their advice, and thus saved his followers.'[18] The fable concludes allegorically: 'My beloved, look into the glass of reflection, and by remembrance of human frailty, destroy the vices which time elicits.'[19]

Strange Fruit mirrors back the basilisk's stare, aiming to 'destroy the vices' of NYU. The effort succeeds as poetry – the book persuasively condemns the institutional malice that beset Brathwaite; it movingly depicts his sorrows and his search for solace. However, it has clearly not destroyed New York University, and proves an ineffective means of therapy. Brathwaite realises that the comforts he has sought in Barbados do not protect him from trauma.

And yet this lynch pass all these wonders by

no matter how i try to write-them-way like when the night sea
draw an leave mwe here still hangin from the swingin tree

…

deVil Basilisk destroying all that i had an cudda be
Where Billie sing my bones can barely lissen
The grass below my feet is blood not dew-drop glissen

[20]

[11] Brathwaite, 2016, 21.
[12] Brathwaite, 2016, 33-34.
[13] Shamsi, H. and Abdo, A. (2011). 'Privacy and Surveillance Post-9/11'. *Human Rights Magazine*, 38(1).
[14] Sax, B. (2013). *Imaginary Animals: The Monstrous, the Wondrous and the Human*. London: Reaktion Books. 121.
[15] Brathwaite, K. (1973). *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 273.
[16] Brathwaite, 1987, 114.
[17] Patterson, O. (1982). *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 39.
[18] Anon. (1824). *Gesta Romanorum: Or, Entertaining Moral Stories*. Trans. by Swan, Rev. C. London: C. and J. Rivington. Volume 2, 205-206.
[19] Anon, 1824, 206.
[20] Brathwaite, 2016, 119.

He enters a 'silence that contains no birthmark now . no life . no prophecy'.[21] There follows a page in the book's most heavily disrupted typeface. Brathwaite encounters his double, his 'astonish avatar', during out-of-body contemplation. As the *Gesta* recommends, he experiences 'remembrance of human frailty'. Each line appears in double vision, conveying the simultaneous, identical thoughts of Brathwaite and his doppelganger:

On the reverse of a sheet where a poem is printed upon a photographic image of the moon, the final page presents a colossal full stop equalling the moon's image in size – a typographical eclipse and another reflection into negative. Darkness falls.

This 'remembrance of human frailty', though, offers beginnings of actual reflection, destroying not NYU but the basilisk inside Brathwaite, the condemnatory gaze that he has internalised through cultural lynching. *The Lazarus Poems* portrays the successful reflection of this gaze back onto the inner beast, and the poet's consequent return from nullity. In his 'Introduction', Brathwaite depicts his own recovery as representing wider efforts by Afro-Caribbean culture to escape social death:

Lazarus recurs in the poems, his Biblical resurrection presaging Brathwaite's own, but should not be understood in a purely Christian sense. Brathwaite also invokes neo-African religious practices from the Caribbean – systems in which the boundaries between life and death are more porous than in Abrahamic creeds. In 'reBurial', Brathwaite depicts funeral rites in Kumina, a Jamaican faith practiced among descendants of the Kongo people from Central Africa: the deceased is buried after nine nights and 'begins a journey of unMemory into **kalunga**, where the Person and the Persona [two aspects of a worshipper's 'soul'] part company at the CARREFOUR – at the crossroads of Time'.[24] Forty days after the burial, 'there is an eventual reunification of Person < & Persona on the xtreme dark side of **kalunga**.'[25] At this point the body is exhumed for ceremonial reburial:

These mirrors confound spiritual basilisks. Within our extended metaphor, the monster's gaze would be returned to it, while the 'MIRROWS' allow proliferation of self-hoods – the reflective meeting with oneself, experienced by Brathwaite at *Strange Fruit*'s conclusion, no longer duplicates pain, but offers alternative directions for growth. Again, Legba oversees the process; in Vodou, this *loa* is concerned with crossroads in his role as opener of ways.[27] Maya Deren, the filmmaker and ethnographer who documented Vodou practices in Haiti, presages Brathwaite's mirror imagery in portraying Legba as an intermediary between life and death: 'Since he stands at the cross-roads, he has access to the worlds on either side, as if he were on both sides of the mirror surface which separates them.'[28] *The Lazarus Poems* charts Brathwaite's journey through the 'MIRROWS' and his reconciliation to becoming a 'Spirit ANCESTOR'; inhabiting his Lazarus persona to imagine annihilation and revival, he confronts old age and physical death, thereby overcoming death's social equivalent. Late in the collection, the poem 'Revelation' ends: 'closing my eyes in the darkness | to open the grave of this world' – and is accompanied by photography of underwater sculptures off the coast of Grenada, depicting faces with eyes closed as though resting.[29] The sculptor of this installation, Jason deCaires Taylor, has said his work represents 'how human intervention or interaction with nature can be positive and sustainable, an icon of how we can live in a symbiotic relationship with nature'.[30] However,

[21] Brathwaite, 2016, 120. Brathwaite's spacing.

[22] Brathwaite, 2016, 121.

[23] Brathwaite, K. (2017). *The Lazarus Poems*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press. xi.

[24] Brathwaite, 2017, 5. Brathwaite's bolding.

[25] Brathwaite, 2017, 5. Brathwaite's bolding.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Deren, M. (1953). *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*. Kingston NY: Documentext. 99-100.

[28] Deren, 1953, 98.

[29] Brathwaite, 2017, 110.

[30] Taylor, J.dC. (2013). 'Untitled biographical statement'. *Issues in Science and Technology*. 29(3):6.

Brathwaite captions the image as portraying 'drowned slaves', reading the statuary as memorialising Africans killed by European slavers on the Middle Passage.[31] The poem thereby imagines the resurrection of these dead. Since Brathwaite envisions present-day persecution of Black people in the Americas as a continuation of slavery, this revival applies spiritually to all descendants of the enslaved.

Sycorax Video Style's intense visuality, combined with incorporation of photographs and the networked interrelations between poems, means each volume resembles an online presentation in hard copy format. Unlike websites, though, these books resist disruption by enemy techno-magic, while Brathwaite's own textual obeah tackles repressive institutions and resurrects him from 'cultural lynching'. Brathwaite's long-term thinking about Caribbean culture clarifies his methodology. He has written extensively about creolisation, exploring how cultural influences from many sources have interacted in the Caribbean, and suggesting possible directions in which the region's nations could develop. He identifies different forces at work within creolisation: '**ac/culturation**, which is the yoking... of one culture to another (in this case the slave/African to the European); and **inter/culturation**, which is an unplanned, unstructured but osmotic relationship proceeding from this yoke.'[32] Acculturation is what NYU wanted from Brathwaite – that he become '**GOOD RODNEY KING & CALIBAN**' – but it received interculturation instead, as he challenged with '**nation-language > de top-notch status of the Prospero Plantation**'. To expedite interculturation while avoiding acculturation to hegemony, Brathwaite encourages '**a folk/maroon interpretation** which holds/assumes that a specific cultural root or vision could come to be recognised as the norm and model for the whole'.[33] This involves emulating Maroons, Afro-Caribbean people who escaped slavery and founded free communities where African traditions (including those labelled as obeah) could be more readily practiced. Maroon resistance to colonial hegemony, combined with interculturation from non-hegemonic sources, emerges as a positive approach for developing distinctive, open and creative cultures within the Caribbean.

In this model, online texts are left vulnerable to acculturation, relying on global institutions to provide infrastructure and access for the World-Wide Web. Literary critic, N. Katherine Hayles, argues that reception of digital text is conditioned by being electronically produced anew each time it is read. Consequently, 'digital text is more processual than print; it is performative by its very nature, independent of whatever imaginations and processes the user brings to it.'[34] Hayles views this as enabling new possibilities. However, it restricts writers in other ways as glitches, software variations and user settings corrode poets' control of their texts' appearance. For Brathwaite, passionate about precise management of visual formats, this is anathema – especially since, while some variations of digital presentation result from chance factors, others stem from corporate imperatives and represent acculturation. Indeed, Henry Jenkins identifies how software, despite its vaunted interactivity, enforces corporate dicta more strictly than societal norms could accomplish: 'Code is technical data: the programming makes it impossible to violate its restrictions on use (even if those restrictions in practice exceed any reasonable demand).'[35] Brathwaite's books, in contrast, benefit from word-processing software's digital potential, while protecting his exact vision of its appearance in the public sphere. Each collection is a Maroon entity, an island of text off the online continent's shores. In his poetic archipelago, Brathwaite's obeah develops, preserving the folk roots of nation language as manifested through his Sycorax text. The 'MIRROWS', those 'mirrors of soft light you can walk through in both directions', lap like waves on the book's shores, letting us pass but repelling the basilisk's gaze. Brathwaite's digital aesthetics thus remain free to offer a decolonising voice that disrupts linguistic and institutional hegemony. ∎

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[31] Brathwaite, 2017, 110.

[32] Brathwaite, K. (1974). *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean.* Mona: Savacou Publications. 6. Brathwaite's bolding.

[33] Brathwaite, 1974, 58. Brathwaite's bolding.

[34] Hayles, N.K. (2006). The Time of Digital Poetry: From Object to Event. In: Morris, A., and Swiss, T.)eds.), *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts and Theories.* Cambridge: MIT Press.185.
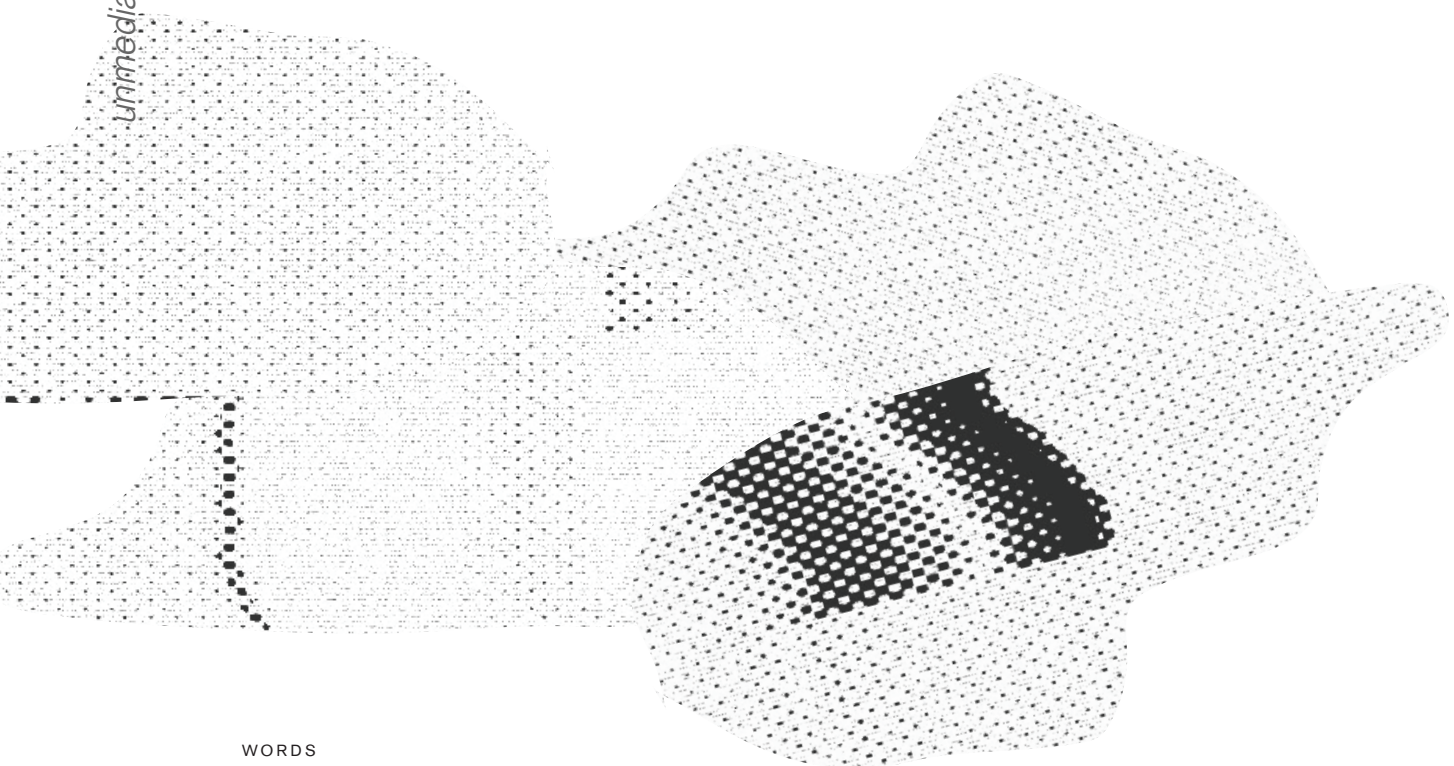
[35] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.* New York: New York University Press. 163.
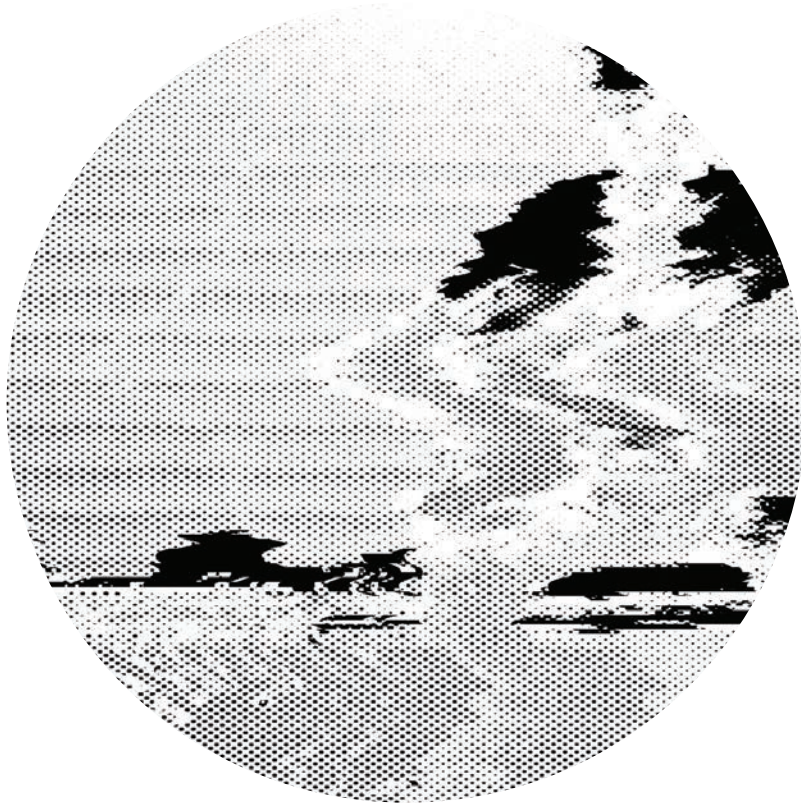
FACING THE DIGITAL READING DISRUPTION:

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF MEXICAN POETRY MOBILE APPLICATIONS

unmediated

WORDS

CONSUELO SÁIZAR[1]

'I WAS CONVINCED THAT THE DIGITAL REVOLUTION COULD ALSO REVOLUTIONISE OUR WAYS OF READING'

In 2002, I became head of the Mexican state publishing house *Fondo de Cultura Económica*, which has retained its status as a leading Spanish-language publisher for several decades. I was aware that the digital revolution was ushering in new developments in the way we relate to books, and that the experience of reading was undergoing a profound transformation. Certainly, among the biggest challenges to the physical library and book to emerge over the last several decades was the ability to read on screens. I found myself at the centre of this liminal moment and was quick to recognise the possibilities being opened-up by these technologies. When I then took over as head of Mexico's national ministry of cultural affairs in 2009, one of the issues I was tasked with addressing was the apparent tension between the medium of print and the affordances of emergent digital technologies. It was my duty to take stock of and synthesise the best of both worlds, to find that which would best serve our cultural interests. In time, our desire to leverage technological innovations in the service of novel reading experiences led to the development of a series of specialised poetry applications, the details of which I set out and analyse in this article.

THE CULTURAL PROJECT FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Early on in my career, I became convinced that, aside from the broader changes it was bringing about in relation to consumer habits and human interaction, the digital revolution had the potential to revolutionise our ways of reading. Three central aims informed the ministry's overall approach to establishing what I labelled the *Cultural Project for the Twenty-first Century*: to turn Mexico into an intellectual hub of the Spanish language; to face the new horizons opened-up by digital technologies head-on; and to link artistic and cultural activities back to the needs of civil society[2].

That e-books represented something of a cultural revolution in their own right was taken for granted within the ministry. (One must remember that this was around the time that there was earnest speculation that printed books might soon disappear altogether)[3]. In his seminal work *Merchants of Culture*, Thompson (2012) notes that within a few years of hitting the market, e-book sales were far lower than initial projections had suggested[4]. He goes on to identify three distinct reactions to e-books: those of the 'digital advocates' (convinced that an e-book revolution would take place at some point), 'digital sceptics' (who remained attached to the book in its traditional form), and 'digital agnostics' (indifferent but open to the changes underway)[5]. On reflection, my stance was probably best described as somewhere between digital scepticism and agnosticism.

Indeed, to my mind, the experience of digitally-enabled reading seemed to differ from previous forms of textuality mostly in terms of the length and availability of sources. Neither of these, to my mind, implied any real innovation in the experience of reading. In any case, my responsibility as a public servant was to explore and exploit new technological resources to the benefit of the Mexican public. My aim was therefore to decide how

[2] Sáizar, C. (2012). 'Presentación' in La Ciudadela: La Ciudad de los libros y la imagen, Proyecto Cultural del Siglo XXI Mexicano. Mexico: CONACULTA. 9.
[3] Coover, R. (1992). 'The End of Books'. *The New York Times*.
[4] Thompson, J.B. (2012). *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*. New York: Plume Books. 314.
[5] Thompson, 2012, 315.

the ministry would respond given that we were facing a changing bibliographic reality. We agreed to prioritise the preservation of physical libraries, and, simultaneously, we began to explore the ways in which we could consolidate digital cultures in Mexico.

Formally launched in 2010, one of our projects involved purchasing the personal libraries of key intellectual figures across the country, each consisting of tens of thousands of items. The project was titled La Ciudad de los Libros y la Imagen (The City of Books and Image) and was hosted at La Ciudadela, a historic building in central Mexico City. The project began with the ministry's purchase of the library of literary critic and bibliophile José Luis Martínez in 2007. In time, we added the collections of literary critic and academic Antonio Castro Leal, poet and public servant Jaime García Terrés, poet and editor Alí Chumacero, and author and leading public intellectual Carlos Monsiváis. Crucially, we felt it was important that the books be exhibited in the exact manner that their original owners had arranged them. The project was met with praise, as Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa mused that it had 'turned Mexico City into the site of the most beautiful, original and creative library of the twenty-first century'[6].

The debates concerning the displacement of physical books by e-books were based on the idea, as Gómez stated, that 'content' was the key element of a text. It followed that such content was abstract and could be reproduced in any number of 'containers'[7]. Compounding this was the expectation that the publishing industry would experience the same degree of disruption as the commercial music industry had, whereby downloads (and more recently, streaming platforms) had usurped physical media within a few short years[8]. Weisberg, a proponent of this view, put it plainly by arguing that 'the book is the text's container, not its essence'[9].

What these approaches did not account for was the specificity of reading experiences. Perhaps poetry is the genre that best illustrates this point. As Concheiro argues, a poem's message is not independent of its physical form on the page; that is, even though poetry is composed of many different rhetorical elements, it is its organisation into verses which provides the distinctive experience[10]. Concheiro also notes that as late as 2015, neither e-books nor tablets had adequately considered the visual specificity of poetry, since they instinctively arranged text as prose.

The result was that technical considerations – such as the size of the tablet screen – overwrote and distorted more nuanced structural considerations, such as the line breaks of a poem.

One of the more productive possibilities opened up to poetry by e-books was noted by poet laureate Billy Collins, who argued that the typical length of a poem made it a medium well-suited to listening on headphones. As he jokingly notes, 'poetry has been waiting for people to be afflicted with short attention spans'[11]. This is precisely the field in which we aimed to intervene and which we intended to address with the development of specialised poetry applications.

MUERTE SIN FIN

Among José Gorostiza's many poems is *Muerte sin fin (Endless Death)*, considered by many to be one of the most important poems of twentieth century Mexican literature[12]. Given its significance, bringing this poem to the public seemed a natural first step. Luis Alberto Ayala Blanco and Ernesto Miranda Trigueros led production of the app, with Mexican poet David Huerta curating the contents.

The app includes a timeline providing information on three distinct spheres: Gorostiza's life; an overview of the history and politics of the period in which he worked; and information on art and culture, year by year[13]. Within the 'contents' section of the app, the user has access to a gallery of pictures and images related to the author, a handful of silent family movies, and music inspired by Gorostiza's work. In the 'Gorostiza Library' section of the app, the reader can access poems, essays, and correspondences by the author. These, and related poems by other authors of different epochs, are available in facsimile views, precisely to avoid the aforementioned distortions common to e-books. There is also a selection of critical essays, including one by Octavio Paz, the only Mexican recipient (to date) of the Nobel Prize in Literature. Among the two elements that more directly take advantage of the possibilities of the digital medium, the 'Commentaries' section includes videos by characters such as Mexican writer Salvador Elizondo and Anthony Stanton, an influential academic and authority on Mexican poetry. The library is rounded out with translations of *Muerte sin fin* in Basque, German, French and English.

'**B**LANCO FINALLY BECAME **P**AZ'S **B**LANCO'

[6] Vargas Llosa, M. (2012). 'La ciudadela de los libros'. *El País.*

[7] Gómez, J. (2008). *Print is dead: books in our digital age.* London: Macmillan. 191.

[8] Gómez, 2008, 75.

[9] Weisberg, J. (2000). 'The Good E-Book'. *The New York Times.*

[10] Concheiro, L. (2015). *La edición de libros de poesía en la era digital.* Red de Humanidades Digitales de México.

[11] Radke, B. 2010. Kindle isn't kind to poetry: Interview with Billy Collins. Marketplace.

[12] Sheridan, G. (2003). *Los Contemporáneos ayer.* Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

[13] As a point of comparison, one could, for example, learn which significant literary works were being published elsewhere around the world at the time.

And then there is the poem itself. Among the seven recordings available, one can choose from Gorostiza himself, Mexico's leading actor Gael García Bernal, award-winning author-playwright Sabina Berman, or pop singer and actress Sasha Sokol.

When the poem is opened, it appears as a scrolling image. As with many dictionary e-books, pressing upon a specific word allows one to highlight and display its meaning. Beyond that, a double tap of the text offers explanatory notes, interaction with other readers and the option to share content on social networks. This is an especially important feature to consider in relation to Jenkins' (2006) reflections on media convergence and hybridisation. As Jenkins notes, interactivity and participation cannot be confused with each other; where interaction involves two-way communication between the user and the object/activity, participation requires little input from the object/activity. In this instance, the app's use of scrolling, undistorted text involves an element of interactivity, inasmuch as the interface was 'designed to be more responsive to consumer feedback'[14] and involves features which go beyond the sum of the parts of both the e-book and the traditional book.

BLANCO

Poet and essayist Octavo Paz is widely considered to be one of the most influential twentieth-century authors worldwide. Even more so than Gorostiza's *Muerte sin fin*, his poem *Blanco* lent itself to our purposes as it had defied the conventions of the printed format from its original publication. Rather than being printed on traditional pages, the first edition of *Blanco* (printed in 1967) consisted of a single page 522 centimetres in length. Intended to be read by gradually unfolding the page, the poem was further divided into three columns, each printed in a different font (one of which was printed in red ink)[15].

As with *Muerte sin fin*, the app was developed by Miranda Trigueros and Ayala Blanco, while the curation of its contents was left to French artist Marie-José Paz (Paz's widow) and Cuban writer-academic Enrico Mario Santí, one of the leading international experts on Paz's work. Much like the Gorostiza app, the timeline of the *Blanco* app offers an overview of personal events, history and politics, and arts and culture. The '*Blanco* Library' includes essays by Paz, an assortment of critical essays about *Blanco*, and Paz's own writings regarding the poem. The library section also includes translations of *Blanco*, with the English version composed by writer and translator Eliot Weinberger and the Portuguese version by Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos. The library is completed by facsimiles of Paz's handwritten annotations produced over the course of the poem's creation.

The core of the app is, of course, the poem itself. Indeed, Paz had specifically intended the poem to be form-bending, presenting the reader with several reading options. As he outlined, it could be read as a single text; as three independent poems (one for each of the three columns it comprised); as four independent poems in the case of the four *Blanco* fragments in which there are only two columns; or as twenty-two independent poems, with the middle column representing six poems and the two columns on either side as eight separate poems each.

It goes without saying that *Blanco* is a complex poem. Thankfully, the app managed to successfully work through such complexity, and the interface was in many ways an improvement on previous attempts to reproduce Paz's intent. The technology of the app and the devices in which it runs also enable a latent potentiality of the poem. The *Blanco* app included recordings of Paz, Mexican poet Eduardo Lizalde, and Mexican academic Guillermo Sheridan. The listening options were numerous: one could listen to a single column in a single voice but could just as easily listen to the entire poem in all three voices simultaneously. For the first time, one could listen to the poem read in a variety of different voices, in the performance of a single piece of literary work. The implications of this were significant. My contention is that, in this way, the app made it possible to realise Paz's aspirations to present his text in a novel format, which simply wasn't possible in its original edition as an artefact book, nor in reprints in conventional pages. For the first time, the poem could be enacted either as a whole or in distinct sections through distinct voices. *Blanco* finally became Paz's *Blanco*. Thankfully, this was a perspective shared by others: in his review, Daniel Saldaña París reflected on the fact that not all texts are suited for digital reading, but that *Blanco* had proven to be a good match[16], while Heim commented that 'it gives an idea of the future of publishing'[17].

CONSOLIDATING THE DISRUPTION

In terms of public engagement, both the *Blanco* and *Muerte sin fin* apps were well received, with *Blanco* having been downloaded 11,071 times within a few weeks of its launch[18]. Outside of Mexico, it was reported that 'the most popular free iPad app in Mexico's app store' was *Blanco*[19]. The *Blanco* app even received the Startup Awards Mexico for Best Design in the year of its launch[20]. Nevertheless, I noticed that literary critics were slow to respond, and that there was – and still is – a lack of specific and informed literary criticism focused on such reading options. As mentioned, both apps were arguably a success, in that they were widely downloaded. But media coverage was mostly in the form of factual news, consisting of reports of their launch and download metrics. This, I think, points towards one of the bigger

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[14] Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide.* New York: NYU Press. 133.

[15] Cardosa Pedraza, O.A. (2008). 'Poesía digital: Blanco'. *Revista UNAM.mx*.

[16] Saldaña París, D. (2012). La nueva página en Blanco. *Letras Libres*.

[17] Heim, A. (2011). 'Top Mexican iPad app showcases poems by Nobel Prize for Literature Octavio Paz'. *The Next Web*.

[18] Redacción (2011). App de Octavio Paz es el primer lugar en descargas de iTunes. *Excélsior*.

[19] Heim, 2011.

[20] Notimex. (2012). Premian app de poema Blanco de Octavio Paz. *El Economista*.

'TODAY, THE REACTIONARY NOTION THAT E-BOOKS AND DIGITALLY-ENABLED READING REPRESENTED SOME FORM OF EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO PHYSICAL BOOKS IS SUBSIDING'

terms of their social relevance. Therefore, the work of charting this path is still to be done.

Today, the reactionary notion that e-books and digitally-enabled reading represented some form of existential threat to physical books is subsiding, and we are beginning to see an openness to more diverse textual mediums on the part of readers. As Price writes, 'In hindsight, we can see how rarely one technology supersedes another'[23]. The insights that can be drawn from development of the *Muerte sin fin* and *Blanco* apps can help to illustrate that e-reading is not confined to the e-book, and that it is not merely 'equivalent' to traditional reading. I would like to think that the digital reading disruption will continue to give us unforeseen and novel ways of experiencing text. ■

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challenges posed by the digital reading disruption. While years have passed since the launch of *Muerte sin fin* and *Blanco* (and similar apps worldwide), beyond the confines of academia there is scant literary criticism that engages the specificities of digital reading, and where there is, such criticism does not seem to have been acknowledged as a legitimate mainstream cultural practice. The way in which journalists reported on the launch of the Blanco app, for example, was criticised by Saldaña París as 'clumsy', and revealing of their lack of understanding of information technologies[21].

Perhaps one of the reasons for this lack of literary criticism is that we are still in the process of discovering what can be done and how to experience the new formats. As Habermas puts it in his analysis of the development of the public sphere[22], literary works and criticism go hand in hand, as they enhance each other in

[21] Saldaña París, 2012.
[22] Habermas, J. (1991). *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society.* Cambridge: MIT Press.
[23] Price, L. (2012). Dead Again. *The New York Times*.
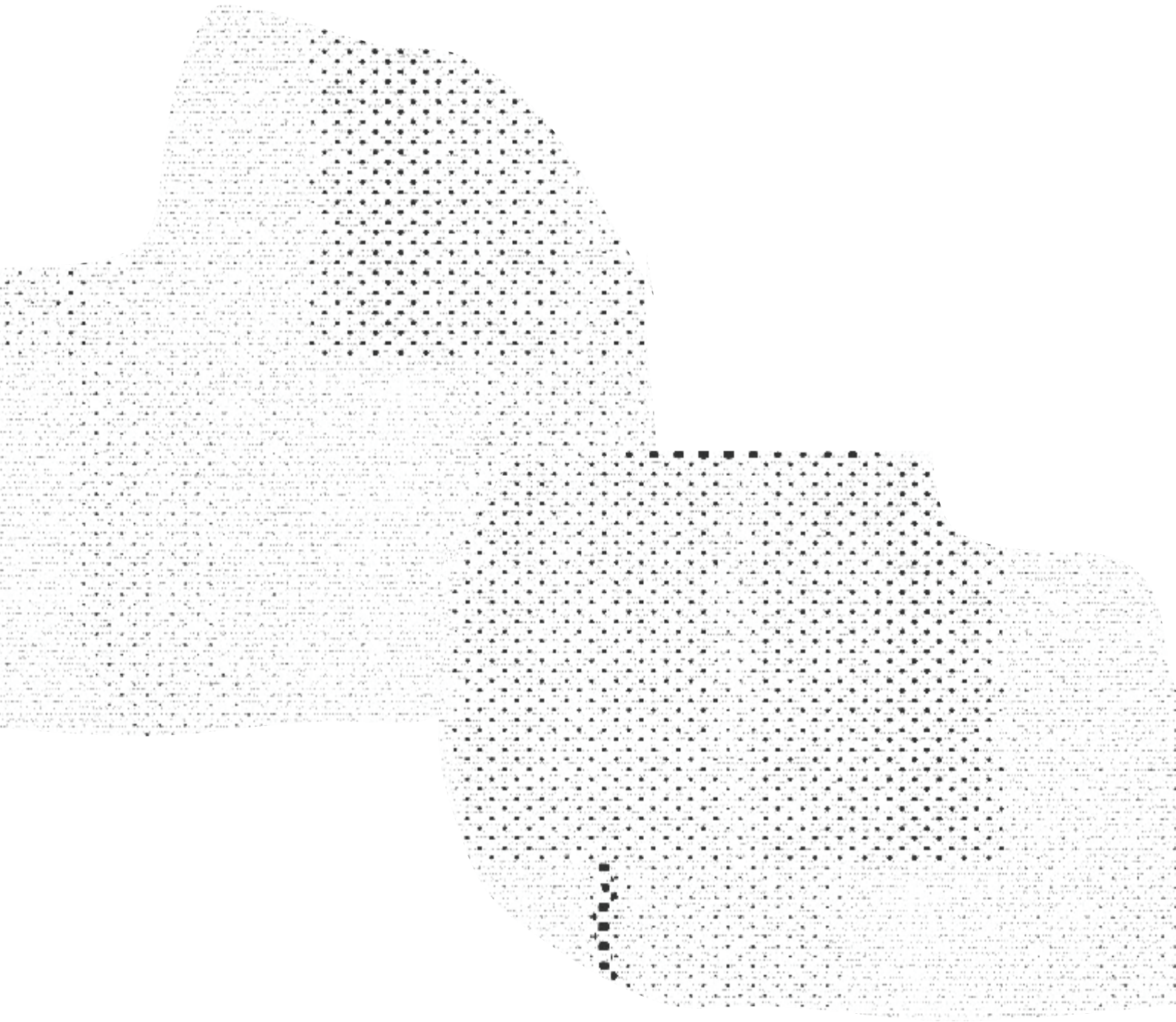
DISRUPTIVE VALORISATION:

THE ETHICS OF SIGHTSEEING IN FAVELA TOURISM

WORDS

JENNIFER CHISHOLM

unmediated

Figure 1. Providência. Photo by Bruno Itan/Coletivo Alemão.

How does one tour poor and working-class communities in a remotely ethical way? It was a question that I obsessed over before embarking on my twelve-month-long fieldwork trip to Rio de Janeiro to research land and housing rights in the city. In some ways, the answer could be seen as self-evident: don't gawk, don't be condescending. Still, I had reservations about the ethics of such tours, known within tourism studies variously as 'ghetto tourism' or 'slum tourism' and, in the case of Brazil, 'favela tourism'. I wondered if these kinds of tours benefit from the exploitation of the lower classes as a version of poverty porn. At the same time, I wanted to be open to the possibility of going on such a tour, if one was offered. Like many who engage in favela tourism, I was looking for something more authentic than a typical 'sun-surf-sand' tour of Rio1; I wanted to see a more complete portrait of the city. Though my intentions were purely based in academic curiosity and driven by a desire to use tourism as an ethnographic method, I was aware that despite my differing objectives, the act of sightseeing would make me as much of a tourist as anyone else. So when the opportunity arose to visit Providência, I prepared myself for my first foray into research-tourism.

Providência is regarded as Rio's first favela and was formed after the Canudos War in Northeastern Brazil in 1897. Enlisted to quell a millenarian uprising under the auspice of being granted property for their participation, soldiers from Rio returned home to discover that the government had no intention of honouring their agreement. In response, the soldiers appropriated a portion of land on Providência Hill and began constructing their own houses, nicknaming the area 'Favela Hill' in a nod to the plant *favela* (Cnidoscolus quercifolius), encountered during their campaign in the Northeast. Later, people who had formerly lived in *cortiços* (illegal sub-developments) and were evicted came to live on Favela Hill. These days, Providência is home to a vibrant tourism industry driven by its distinction as a local heritage site.

As a recently-arrived research collaborator with the NGO Catalytic Communities, I was encouraged to attend a well-respected, independently-run tour of Providência. The tour, called *Rolé dos Favelados*2 ('Stroll of the Favelas'), was different from how I imagine most favela tours operate. The tour guides were Gisele, a journalist born in a favela and Cosme, *O Favelado* (the favela resident), whose moniker is an attempt to inject pride into a term that has taken on a pejorative connotation over the years. Neither were from Providência but neither were they outsiders, since Gisele and Cosme are former and current favela residents, respectively.

Quite unexpectedly, the guides (Cosme in particular) asked the mostly Brazilian tourists in our group to confront their own prejudices about favelas before entering Providência. As we stood at the base of a solitary tree on a pedestrian island at the base of the community, Cosme asked us to describe what we felt to be the defining characteristics of a favela. Are the towering mini-houses made of red brick *tijolos* what define the landscape of a favela? Or is it something more abstract? A definition Brazilians know, but one which is ineffable, for the sake of political correctness?

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1 For more on this, see: https://theconversation.com/why-tourists-thirst-for-authenticity-and-how-they-can-find-it-68108.
2 See: http://www.rioonwatch.org/?p=34983.

Figure 2. 'Favelas of Rio de Janeiro' by Skypher. Source: Deviant Art.

Some in the group think they know the definition but stay quiet, eager to not offend. The conversation and teaching exercises that follow have the effect of priming us: self-conscious, asked to face our own biases, and ready to be appreciative, well-behaved tourists. We're no longer quite as certain that we know precisely what a favela *is*, and the group is bristling with sympathetic anger after hearing Cosme's stories of injustice. Our group – self-selected and no doubt self-described as 'open-minded' – has now become certifiably committed to demonstrating to one another the depths of our compassion. We set off on the long ascent to Providência, which sits atop one of the more famous hills in the city. We smile brightly, go out of our way to greet passersby, and comment on the ingenuity of the homegrown sewage system. Two toddlers in diapers waddle past, one with a pacifier in her mouth, and a fellow tourist defensively cries, 'how cute!'. Before long someone in our group has started taking pictures. Unbeknownst to her, another soon commits a grave error by photographing a man without his consent. She's told off by the man and is scolded by Cosme, who warns us not to take pictures of residents without consent.

As Urry famously noted in *The Tourist Gaze*[3] and expanded on in the *Tourist Gaze 3.0*[4], tourists arrive at a tourist site with ideas of what they expect to see and plans for how they intend to interact with the environment. These tourist gazes aren't just about the projection of expectation; they also include an element of the performative. A tourist, hoping to capture a pre-formed, romantic image in real-time will photograph scenes that capture that particular tourist gaze. Perhaps this is why we see so many of the same clichéd images of a given place – proof, mostly self-serving,

that we are indeed having an enjoyable, if altogether conventional, experience.

As lay photographers, tourists maintain the symbolic importance of these tourist sites and reproduce tourist gazes. The same principle holds true for favela tourism. Romanticism, in this case, can take the form of admiring the ingenuity of the poor, or create the demand for souvenir-artwork that idealizes favela life: a dose of vibrant colors and a freeze-frame of residents enjoying themselves is all that's needed to subvert the image of a miserable, ostracised favela.

Problems arise when some favela tourists, in their quest to commit their gaze to film, transgress the boundaries of the tourist stage set by the community by taking unsolicited photographs which are perceived as objectifying. Transgressions like these seem inevitable when the rules for appropriate behavior are oftentimes unspoken and vary among cultures. As the gatekeepers to such experiences, favela communities control access while simultaneously providing tourists with the sights and sounds they expect by virtue of a 'staged authenticity'[5].

Both before and after the uncomfortable incident in Providência, I wondered whether an ethics of tourism could prevent a faux pas like the one I witnessed. I thought I would find answers in MacCannell's *The Ethics of Sightseeing*[6], despite being warned by the author that what he is proposing in the book is *not* a how-to for behaving ethically as a tourist, but rather a meditation on the evils of mass tourism and consumerist culture.

[3] Urry, J. (1998). *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*. London: Sage.
[4] Urry, J. and Larsen, J. (2011). *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*. London: Sage.
[5] MacCannell, D. (1976). *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. New York: Schocken Books.
[6] MacCannell, D. (2011). *The Ethics of Sightseeing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

'THERE ARE LIMITS TO OUR WELCOME'

MacCannell proposes that tourists have the power to reverse the trend of neoliberal tourism by forsaking the easy pleasures of mass tourism for challenging and potentially enlightening 'dark tourism' locations, such as Holocaust sites and war memorials[7]. In that sense, many tourists are already behaving ethically by visiting the favelas of Brazil's cities, where class and racial inequalities in Brazilian society are the starkest. Frenzel makes this very argument in *Slumming It: The Tourist Valorization of Urban Poverty*[8]. For Frenzel, favela tourism (and related tourisms in urban peripheries) has the capacity to challenge established norms that dictate which areas are deserving of being deemed tourist sites in the first instance. In this sense, the favela tourist becomes a subversive agent who has chosen to valorize communities that have long been stigmatized and ignored by municipal governments. Normally, tourist valorization of lower-class communities brings with it the risk of gentrification if tourist flows increase. However, Frenzel imagines what he calls 'disruptive valorization' as the remedy, wherein ethically-minded tourists consume tourist experiences in ways that maintain a community's self-sufficiency and prevent gentrification.

When I first grappled with the possibility of tourism ethics – that is, whether an ethics of favela tourism was possible, or if it was inherently Othering or objectifying – it was before I had set out on my first tour of Providência. Having spent more time in favelas and having gone on multiple community tours, all led by residents, I now realize that to focus on the role of the tourist in developing an ethics of tourism (as MacCannell, Frenzel, and I have all done) is misguided. By placing emphasis on the tourists' ability or duty to proactively initiate a code of ethics would be to remove agency from the community. Instead, any ethics of tourism or sightseeing must be developed by or at least in close collaboration with the community living in the tourist site. After all, shouldn't the community be trusted to know how they would like to interact with tourists in ways that respect their autonomy, their subjecthood, while striving to mitigate the ill-effects of capitalist-driven tourism valorizations that lead to gentrification?

Naturally, such an ethics of sightseeing will be site-specific and informed by local customs, and the appropriate tourist practices in one favela may not carry to another. The onus, then, will be on communities to collectively decide on how they expect tourists to comport themselves and for tour guides to communicate these rules of conduct for visitors. While a project of developing an ethics of favela tourism places the burden of responsibility on favela residents to articulate what they believe constitutes ethical behavior from tourists, it also has the potential to disrupt the power hierarchy implicit in deciding from the outside what an ethics of favela sightseeing should look like.

Of course, this is not to say that a tourist contemplating a trip to the favelas of Brazil (or to any informal urban settlement) cannot first begin to think of how to behave ethically during a favela tour. It's important to realise that once a tourist enters a favela community, she is on the tourist stage – and while some residents may consent to setting aside a portion of their community to serve as the tourist stage, not everyone will agree to this performance. Nor will everyone consent to being gazed upon or having their likeness immortalised in a photograph to commemorate the gazer's sightseeing experience.

As tourists, we must recognise that the purchase of a guided tour of a favela does not guarantee open access. There are limits to our welcome. When in doubt about best practices on favela tours – say, about the appropriateness of photographing residents – tourists should be able to find useful advice from tour guides. As the most ethical option, however, tourists should consider community-based favela tourism, to be sure that it is controlled by and directly benefits the favela community. ■

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[7] MacCannell, 2011; see also: Wrobel, D.M. (2013). 'The Ethics of Sightseeing by Dean MacCannell (review).' *American Studies*, 52(3).
[8] Frenzel, F. (2016). *Slumming It: The Tourist Valorization of Urban Poverty*. London: Zed Books.

REVISITING 'THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE' IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

unmediated
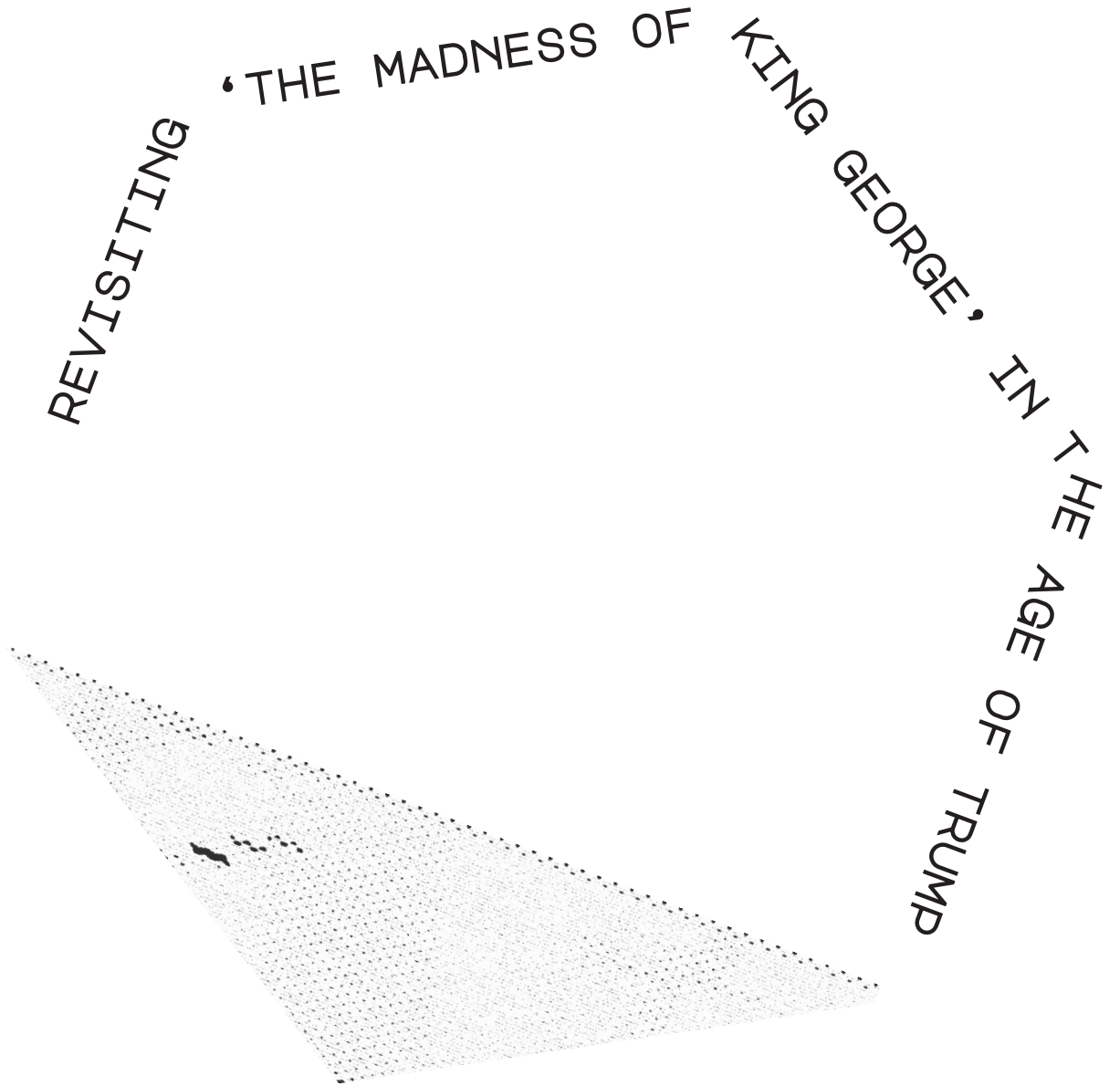
WORDS

GEORGE SEVERS

Throughout and prior to Donald Trump's presidency, questions have been raised concerning his mental health, notably by psychiatrists contravening their profession's 'Goldwater Rule'[1]. In 1964, the publication of an article in which a group of psychiatrists deemed Republican Senator Barry Goldwater 'psychologically unfit' to be president led to a successful libel suit and the recommendation of the American Psychiatric Association's Medical Ethics guidelines that it is:

'unethical for a psychiatrist to offer a professional opinion unless he or she has conducted [a personal] examination'[2].

Depending on one's political bent, the flouting of this rule in the context of Trump is indicative either of the seriousness of professional concern or of a partisan attempt to discredit the great leader. Much has been made in the press of the 25th Amendment and its ability to remove a President mentally lacking it, but – like impeachment – it is a process dependent on political, not legal (or in this case medical) initiative. To that end, in 2017 Democratic Congressman Ted Lieu openly discussed filing a bill to add a psychiatrist to the White House staff in an attempt to depoliticise the process. The bill was never filed, and Trump's mental health remains a complex and contentious issue.

But what if Trump's decline was to become patently obvious, and further, if the Republican Party obfuscated this fact for political gain? Nicholas Hytner's 1994 film *The Madness of King George* – itself an adaptation of Alan Bennett's 1991 play *The Madness of George III* – dramatises this potentially inchoate Constitutional crisis by examining the power struggles and chaos which engulfed the reign of King George III as a result of his rapid cognitive downturn.

Nearing the end of the 18th century, the King's dramatic deterioration presented an opportunity for Whig Charles Fox to declare the King's son, the Prince of Wales, as Regent, and in so doing unseat his political rival, Tory Prime Minister William Pitt. Conveniently for both Pitt and a theatrical telling, however, the King suddenly recovered and returned to Parliament in time to stop the bill's passage. The film has many joys. For one, Ian Holm's portrayal of the fierce clergyman turned 'mad-doctor' Thomas Willis – the efficacy of whose moralistic and barbaric treatment of the King remains undefined – and his battle of wills with King George is captivating. This conflict is charged by the true heart of the film, Nigel Hawthorne's masterful portrayal of the King himself. Initially a bombastic figure whose blunt opinions are tolerated by court and Parliament alike in

deference to his divine right, Hawthorne moves through mania and physical suffering into a genuinely stirring recovery, ironically displayed via his measured, touching reading of a scene from *King Lear*[3].

'TRUMP HAS NOT BECOME ILL WHILST IN OFFICE; IF HE IS INDEED MENTALLY INCAPACITATED, THEN IT PREDATES HIS PRESIDENCY'

But what does the film have to say about Trump and the current political climate? Firstly, it is important to stress that, even if Trump is in some clinical sense 'mad', then it is in a vastly different sense. The King's mental decline is clear and rapid, and in short order leads to his incarceration under the care of a team of doctors. The precise aetiology of the illness remains disputed – some argue for acute porphyria, indicated by his purple urine and the high levels of arsenic since detected in his hair, others for some form of bipolar disorder – but regardless of this, both the onset and resolution of his affliction are starkly apparent to all around him.

Some have pointed to Trump's regressing vocabulary and decline in semantic structure in interviews, alongside Michael Wolff's depiction of a president incapable of sustained focus, as supportive of cognitive decline[4]. Others argue that Trump's behaviour fulfils the requirements for a personality disorder diagnosis, based on his rampant narcissism and apparent inability to tell all but the most politically expedient truths. Regardless, Trump has not become ill whilst in office; if he is indeed mentally incapacitated, then it predates his presidency. This throws up another significant difference between Trump and the King.

[1] See: Lee, B.X. (2017). *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 27 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President.* New York: Thomas Dunne Books.
[2] Section 7, APA. (2001). *The principles of medical ethics: With annotations especially applicable to psychiatry.* Washington: APA Publishing.
[3] This scene also has one of the film's best jokes: Dr Willis protests when questioned about allowing the King to read lines from *King Lear*, arguing that as a clergyman, he'd had 'no idea what it was about, Sir!'.
[4] See: Wolff, M. (2018). *Fire and Fury.* New York: Henry Holt and Co. The combination of putative dementia, personality change and rumoured Russian liaisons leads to the most salacious suggested diagnosis for Trump: tertiary syphilis.

The King's popularity with the citizenry was rooted in his pious, Christian lifestyle and faithful relationship with his wife; his illness was marked by what might now be termed 'pressure of speech' (that is, an incessant need to talk associated with racing thoughts), irritability with those around him, disinhibited, sexually aggressive behaviour and paranoid delusions.

By contrast, Trump's pathological behaviours are far more long-standing, and in many cases appear difficult to separate from the characteristics which have made him the uniquely divisive but successful politician he is. His aggressive and narcissistic oration drove the notoriety which proved fundamental to his improbable campaign. Whether in celebration or condemnation, Trump made himself the centre of the American news cycle and came to dominate and manipulate it in a way that his challengers could not. The superlative-strewn image he has relentlessly promoted in interviews and books of the masterful CEO, entrepreneurial genius and titan of industry lies in stark contrast to the facts of his various bankruptcies, bank-funded bailout loans and settled lawsuits. This misrepresentation of personal success can be parsed as a criterion for diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder; and yet, the reputation and image he has curated inarguably legitimises the central promise of his campaign to 'drain the swamp' and run an efficient and responsible government. In short, Trump's mental make-up defines his presidency, rather than interrupting it. In this respect, there is a limit to the

‘ A PRESIDENT IS OF COURSE NOT A KING, HOWEVER OFTEN TRUMP PUBLICLY LAMENTS IT ’

direct comparisons which can be drawn between the two men's respective symptoms.

But where *The Madness of King George* truly lends itself to contemporary analysis is in the way it depicts the political chaos induced by the presence of an unstable authoritarian. Prior to his illness, King George bemoans the loss and apparent abandonment of efforts to regain America, describing the loss in personal rather than geopolitical terms as he rhapsodises on the beauty of the lost land, of a 'nature unknown to Art'. Those around him squirm and avoid telling him the political reality – that to retake America would be impossible. To base international relations on the emotional whims and illogical opinions of a single man is clearly foolish, and attempts are being made to curb Trump's excesses; in a particularly tragicomic moment in Bob Woodward's recent *Fear,* Trump's impulsive order to 'fucking kill' Bashar Al-Assad following his use of chemical weapons is followed by former Defence Secretary James Mattis reassuring the startled committee that 'we're not going to do that' once Trump had left the room[5].

The state apparatus cannot always brush their wayward leader under the carpet, though; Trump's appearance with Putin in Helsinki, in which he deferred to the Russian leader even as his state department charged Russians for spying and election interference pushed the boundaries of plausibility. Trump's habit of contradicting his officials on the international stage has on several occasions prompted actual policy change, as with erstwhile former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and UN ambassador Nikki Haley. Most harrowingly of all, one cancelled tweet would have been tantamount to a declaration of war with North Korea[6]. Pitt's complaint that despite Britain's claims to a democracy envied the world over they remain as subservient to their leader's 'health and wellbeing … as much as any vizier does the sultan'[7] is truer of Trump than the constitutionally envisaged figure of President was ever meant to be, while Charles Fox's wish to do away with their monarch, following the 'wisdom of America', now rings distinctly hollow[8].

A President is of course not a King, however often Trump publicly laments it, and is theoretically constrained by a system of checks and balances between the three branches of government. Nevertheless, one might note that Trump's pre-presidential business career followed a regal pattern of command, with absolute control centred around Trump and a trusted cabal of family members and advisers surrounding him as a court does its king. As Dr Willis observes, 'the state of monarchy and the state of lunacy share a frontier', seeing the king's breakdown as the result of a lifetime of being 'deferred to, agreed with, acquiesced in'[9]. It is fair to say that Trump has lived just such a life, and has failed to emotionally transition from one conception of power to

[5] Woodward, B. (2018). *Fear: Trump in the White House*. London: Simon and Schuster.
[6] Woodward provides an account of a Trump tweet hastily blocked on the grounds that North Korea would take it as a sign of 'imminent' aggression.
[7] Bennett, A. (1995). *The Madness of King George*. London: Random House.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.

the other. Trump's White House thus operates in a similarly royal dynamic, not least in the carousel-like flow of appointments and firings that marks those entering and leaving Trump's favour[10]. This creates a subset of individuals, both inside and outside the Republican Party, whose position and power are directly dependent upon the preservation of the President's reputation. In such a situation, personal loyalties and desires can supersede the duty of elected officials to their country which underlies the system of checks and balances[11].

According to ex-Senator Al Franken, many Republican officials will privately say that Trump is 'not right mentally', or even be 'harsher' than that[12]. But although not all Republicans are as personally beholden to Trump as his inner cabal, he remains vitally important to the power and viability of the Republican Party. If he was a protest vote against the political system, as many suggest, he nonetheless ran on the Republican ticket and has consistently allied himself with the party's interests. The removal of Trump – whether through impeachment or the 25th Amendment – would simply lead to President Pence, but the prospect of subsequent re-election would surely be diminished without their attention-grabbing iconoclast figurehead. The continuance of the Republican Party's success is thus contingent on their alliance with Trump, making any concession to concerns of mental instability or unsuitability, however accurate, political suicide. Unlike Trump's selfishly loyal inner circle, however, the Republican Party's protection of the President's reputation will only continue as long as he is beneficial to upcoming elections. There is presumably some point at which Trump's behaviour becomes dangerous to their interests, and decisions about where that point lies will become increasingly pressured with a general election looming.

As King George remarks early in his recovery, the problem was that he had forgotten 'how to seem'[13]. The deluge of opinion pieces and news coverage surrounding Trump's mental health quite clearly demonstrates that to many, Trump simply does not 'seem' well. When and if this translates into a loss of trust with Republican voters, the Republican Party may be forced into action. But for now, despite the clear effects of Trump's erratic behaviour on domestic and foreign policy, it has not deeply impacted upon his popularity, and thus does not threaten to impinge to too great a degree on Republican governmental power.

In *The Madness of King George*, we see the Lord Chancellor asked by Fox what he wants in return for burying incriminating information, as he mulls over a switch in allegiances from Pitt to Fox. His initial reply – 'The good of the country' – is met with confusion until he explains himself further – 'To remain Lord Chancellor!'. This myopic self-concern masquerading as

patriotic duty will surely be recognised by anyone who read the anonymous *New York Times* op-ed published in early September 2018. How long can the Republican Party leadership convince themselves that their continued control of the ship outweighs the cost of an ever more obviously erratic and irresponsible captain? Soon enough, the window of opportunity to act and redeem their names, if only for posterity, may be closed. ■

George Severs is a medical doctor based in Newcastle, where he studied for both his medical degree and an MA in the History of Medicine at Newcastle University. His research interests include autism, epilepsy, psychosis and (not coincidentally) the Trump presidency. During his MA, he had both the time and misguided sense of curiosity to watch every single press briefing delivered by Sean Spicer.

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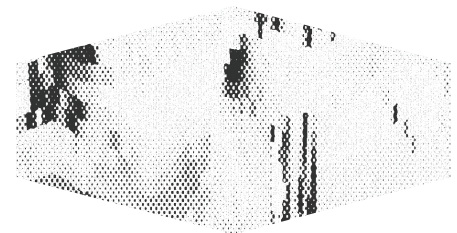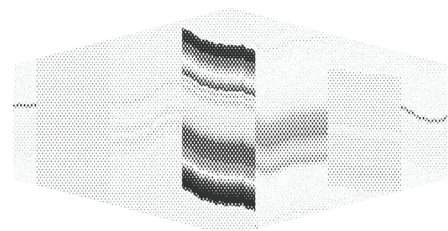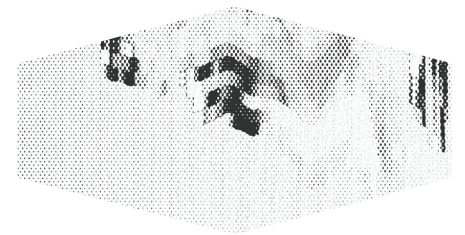
[10] Elsewhere, MSNBC's Chris Matthews regularly enjoys comparing the Trumps to the Romanov dynasty of Russian Tsars.
[11] The 'Campaign to Re-elect the President' group that the Watergate investigations came to focus on were comparably loyal to Nixon over the wider interests of the Republican Party and the country itself.
[12] Interview with Bill Maher, *Real Time with Bill Maher,* 10th February, 2017.
[13] Bennett, 1995.

SANCTUM EPHEMERAL

unmediated

WORDS & IMAGES

MARK AITKEN

SANCTUM EPHEMERAL

outdoor photo installation

Cressingham Gardens Estate, London, SW2 2QG

Concluded October 2018.

These pictures are about seeking sanctuary in the ephemeral. The context is also ephemeral. Property developers have cast a shadow over the homes in these photographs. I have pressing conversations with neighbours. We shed frustration. The impositions are beyond our control. Proposals beyond comprehension.

There's nothing wrong with my house. Why do they want to knock it down? Words fail us. We feel impotent and angry. People let me into their homes. I hear stories; gather evidence. Some of it makes sense. Some of it troubling. The rooms, the memories and the inhabitants reflect each other. Empty rooms as full as those overflowing. We talk about making pictures. We shape inanimate tableaus. Trust develops. An old Jamaican man tells me...*When you wake you should knock three times on your pillow to remember your dreams*. I ask people about their dreams...I speak with children. The world is their dream. Others know their dreams are behind them and are more concerned about being awake. I speak with adults. Some want to know what happened. I learn that everything is ephemeral and that if there is such a thing as sanctuary, it lies within this understanding. ■

Mark Aitken is an award-winning filmmaker, radio host, and head of a non-profit company that's produced over 40 films. Previously, Mark lectured in film practice at Goldsmiths for 11 years. His most recent film *Dead When I Got Here*, about a mental asylum run by its own patients in Juárez, Mexico is accompanied by a book and a photo series. His acclaimed photo installation *Sanctum Ephemeral* will also be published in 2019 by Bluecoat Press. Mark holds a PhD by Publication from Goldsmiths and is active as a jury member for film festivals in Estonia, Germany, Poland and the UK. Further information about Cressingham Gardens Estate can be found here: https://savecressingham.wordpress.com/.
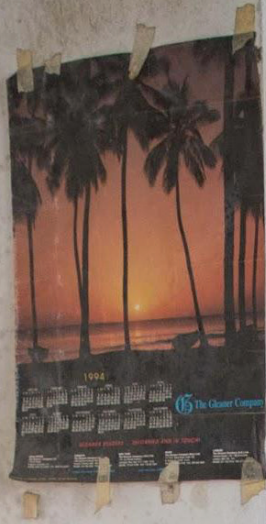
THE
IMPOSSIBLE
PHOTOGRAPH:

Figure 1. York Road (Disorientation) 1909-2017.

REPHOTOGRAPHY, SLUM CLEARANCE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF ABSENCE

WORDS

MICK SCHOFIELD

A landscape ceases to exist if there is no one to look upon it[1]

The East End of Leeds has seen several waves of slum clearance since the mid-19th century, and was once home to the largest social housing complex in the country – the infamous Quarry Hill flats, demolished in 1978[2]. A certain level of disruption is expected in such liminal urban spaces; this district is no different, and embodies the perennial change and upheaval we routinely ignore as background noise. As construction work begins again in the area, it seems apposite to look back at a landscape which has undergone routine effacement, the map wiped-clean time and again, its residents displaced.

Quarry Hill's chequered past is signified by the new developers' decision to rebrand the area SOYO[3] – a move that has lead to some Leeds residents decrying an act of gentrification and an attempt to whitewash history. But Quarry Hill was always a place in flux, a contested site, and by enduring repeated top-down interference, historically a site of class antagonism too. However you view the politics, it is difficult not to see a substantial power discrepancy between the citizens involved and their city bureaucracy[4].

Any sense of that place has now been lost. On the ground there are few clues as to what came before. Much of Quarry Hill has 'lain fallow' since the flats were destroyed; the primary use of the space at present is as a vast car park. The buildings and even the streets themselves have long disappeared. The only traces left intact are photographic. It is with these spectral fragments that I have attempted a certain form of time travel, projecting the lost streets into the space as it exists today. This rephotography project uses an archive of images made in the early 20th century, photographs commissioned by Leeds Corporation to make the original case for mass clearance. Quarry Hill was to be demolished in its entirety on the grounds that the area had become 'unhealthy', and the slum was now a threat to the city as a whole.

John Tagg used these same images of Quarry Hill in his seminal essay *God's Sanitary Law,* in which he rejected the evidential nature of the photographic image, revealing its rhetorical use by institutional power[5]. For Tagg, these were deliberately selective views which often omitted residents and underexposed shots to produce a particularly gloomy feel, which only stood to further demonise the area in the eyes of 'middle-class commentators'

already appalled by 'its utter otherness, its intransigence and its unruliness.' The vilification of this 'nether world' was motivated at least in part by issues of class and race, as Irish and Jewish immigrants made up the bulk of the population. Twenty thousand migrants had settled there by 1909, and were 'almost entirely destitute', according to reports at the time.

In these views of Quarry Hill we can see how 'place' is culturally constructed[6], a social abstraction of physical space which can only ever be a contested political entity. In these representations and subsequent acts of effacement there is a terminal act of violence, aimed not only at the built environment, but at memory itself. Place is thus space in which the process of remembrance continues to activate the past as something which, to quote Henri Bergson, is 'lived and acted, rather than represented'.[7]

The process of remembrance is no longer lived and acted here. This rephotographic project became marred in a series of problematic voids – the absence of the very streets, the actual place I had tasked myself with rephotographing, and the troubling absence of *people* in these historic representations. Aside from a few fleeting glimpses of the residents peering from windows and doorways in historic photographs, the only evidence

Figure 2. Unhealthy Area, Quarry Hill, 1905-2018.

[1] Dean, T. and Millar, J. (2005). *Place.* London: Thames and Hudson. 13.

[2] This part of Quarry Hill's history is documented beautifully by photographer Peter Mitchell, whose work has been a big influence on my own. In the book we see the demolition of Quarry Hill flats juxtaposed with archive images of their construction and gradual decline. See: Mitchell, P. (2016). *Memento Mori: The Flats at Quarry Hill, Leeds.* Bristol: RRB Photobooks.

[3] 'SOYO' refers to the area south of York Road, which has been designated Leeds' cultural quarter. See: https://soyoleeds.com/

[4] English, J. et al. (2017). *Slum Clearance: the Social and Administrative Context in England and Wales.* London: Routledge. 10.

[5] Tagg, J. (1988). *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories.* Basingstoke: Macmillan Education. 117-152.

[6] Dean and Millar, 2005, 47.

[7] Ibid. 14. Dean's work concerning place, as exemplified in this book with Millar, reveals the political power that naming or claiming (or indeed representing or destroying) a place can have.

Figure 3. East End no longer exists, 1901-2017.

we have of the original slum residents are their names, which appear in a 'Book of Reference' held at the University of Leeds archives (see Fig. 4).

The impossibility of making rephotographs in the usual way here (perfectly registering a view of then, with a view of now), seemed telling of the inability to reconcile the place's past with the present – the impossibility of truly bridging the time-gap and recovering this lost working-class history, these missing persons. The dislocation in time mirrored their displacement in space, and it's unknowable-ness from this receding vantage point. In the resulting rephotographic montages, the past haunts the present precisely because it cannot be fully known. The archival image floats like a ghost that is unable to find its way home. It seems that too much has changed, and yet we continue to be haunted by that change. In this sense, the failed rephotography can be seen as a haunting intervention[8] in the space depicted – a Derridean[9] *re*-haunting of it, in-keeping with the various mobilisations of a 'spectropolitics.'[10]

Somehow I should represent the ghosts of those former

residents through their conspicuous absence, the eerie emptiness of the image indicative of the disruption that had taken place. But I couldn't help but begin to think my re-use of these images might unwittingly perpetuate a damaging narrative about this area and its inhabitants that started nearly 150 years ago, and continues to this day. Was I repeating this demonisation?

For her part, Marianne Hirsch is critical of a certain postmodern 'archival turn' in the arts[11]. These archival artists seek to criticise the archive, decontextualise its media artefacts, communicate an underlying 'radical disconnection' and possibly a failure of cultural memory itself. Hirsch examines work which takes a different approach, in which artists are similarly critical of the archive, but attempt to correct and add to it with their work, heal the disruption rather than counter the very archival act. Could this work play a similarly reparative role, and how might this change how we view the place today?

While Quarry Hill hasn't been a 'slum' for many years, a short walk away we find a place that fulfils a similar social function. Neighbouring Burmantofts houses many of the city's asylum

[8] See: Heholt, R. and Downing, N. (2016). (eds.) *Haunted Landscapes (Place, Memory, Affect)*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield International. 6.

[9] Derrida, J. (2006). *Specters of Marx: the state of the debt, the work of mourning and the new international*. London: Routledge. 176.

[10] Blanco, M. and Peeren, E. (2013). *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 93.

[11] Hirsch, M. (2012). *The Generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press. 227.

[124]

Figure 4. Cornhill no longer exists, 1908-2018

seekers in very cheap accommodation[12], and is differentiated by large high-rise building blocks, few amenities and high unemployment. Looking across the bridge from one to the other (Fig. 5) there lies a possible answer to the question which closes Tagg's formative essay: 'We might look at the photographs and ask again, where have the working-class slum dwellers gone?'[13] As Engels warned in 1872: 'The breeding places of disease, the infamous holes and cellars in which the capitalist mode of production confines our workers night after night, are not abolished; they are merely *shifted elsewhere!* The same economic necessity which produced them in the first place, produces them in the next place also'[14]. This quote may seem similarly demonising and hyperbolic, particularly in the context of contemporary Leeds, but to deny these connections, or that Burmantofts is not somehow haunted by the failure of Quarry Hill, is to forget this social history, and to overlook history's propensity to repeat.

Certainly, in making work like this it pays to be mindful of how

mediation, *re*-presentation or *re*-remembering of the archive is totally transformative – it is unavoidably a *re*-imagining of a fixed moment in time, and of the community which surrounds it (to paraphrase Anderson[15]). This will inevitably alter our cultural memory of whatever is being appropriated. For my part, in re-purposing these artefacts, I am certainly changing their meaning, involving them in a new narrative of urban transformation and loss which extends to the present day – but this is less distorting than their other after-life, 'as tourist promotions and forgetful evocations of the quaintness of 'Old Leeds''.[16] At least in this context there is some gesture towards reappropriation, or remediation of that historical misrepresentation, even if there is no one left from that time who might reclaim their identity.

It is worth restating that all cultural memory is constituted through mediation and remediation, anyway[17]. As with Dean's imagined places, and Anderson's imagined communities[18], cultural memory is largely imaginary; It is necessarily selective, and it is constantly changing, as much a response to the present as it is any real

[12] Burmantofts became a dispersal centre following the passage of the 1999 *Asylum and Immigration Act*.
[13] Tagg, 1988, 152.
[14] Engels, F. (1935). *The Housing Question.* New York: International Publishers. 77.
[15] Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.* London: Verso.
[16] Tagg, 1988, 152.
[17] Erll, A. and Rigney, A. (2009). *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
[18] As Anderson argues, 'all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined'. See: Anderson, 1983, 6.

retention of the past, which is always-already lost. As memory is practiced collectively, we can see it 'as the reiterated impulse to remember the past from changing perspectives in the present'.[19]

This is amplified when we are talking about what Hirsch dubbed 'postmemory' – traces of a past that begin to fall outside of lived-memory and become part of the forgotten. Cultural memory can then only work through 'indirection and multiple mediation'. As Hirsch writes: 'photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost world. They enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch the past, but also to try to reanimate it'[20].

What's really attempted in my own deconstructive move is not a reanimation or effective reparation of what has been lost, which to my mind is no longer possible, nor is it an attempt to 'reclaim historical specificity'[21]. It is a visual exploration of loss itself, and how photographs can represent and communicate such haunting absence like no other medium. How this particular intervention in the digital archive will affect it, and the cultural postmemory of Leeds, is yet to be known. But when so little remains of this erased world, a representation of absence must be better than nothing. ■

Mick Schofield is a photographer and PhD candidate in Media and Communication at the University of Leeds. His research uses archival images and rephotography to examine the hauntology of digital media. Michael holds a BA in Visual Communication and an MA in Cinema and Photography from the University of Leeds. He works as an artist under the name Michael C Coldwell.

Figure 5. Searching for Allison's Buildings (Trace III), 2017 and Burmantofts, 2014.

[19] Rigney, A. (2018). Remembrance as remaking: memories of the nation revisited. *Nations and Nationalism.* 24(2).

[20] Hirsch, M. (2012). *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust.* New York: Columbia University Press. 83; 36.

[21] ibid. 228.

Figure 6. Searching for Allison's Buildings (Trace II), 2017.

Figure 7. Cross Templar Street no longer exists (Projection I), 1901-2017.

ACCEPTING THE JOURNEY OF TRANSFORMATION:

A REVIEW OF ADRIENNE MAREE BROWN'S
EMERGENT STRATEGY: SHAPING CHANGE, CHANGING WORLDS
(AK PRESS, 2017)

WORDS

ERHARDT GRAEFF

'In 2012 I took a sabbatical and I realized that I wasn't upholding my end of the sacred bargain: My life is a miracle that cannot be recreated. I can never get these hours, weeks, years back. In a fractal conception, I am a cell-sized unit of the human organism, and I have to use my life to leverage a shift in the system by how I am, as much as with the things I do. This means actually being in my life, and it means bringing my values into my daily decision making. Each day should be lived on purpose' (p. 54)

In *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown often returns to the words of her mentor, the activist and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs: 'Transform yourself to transform the world'. Like learning, transformation is not something you do once, but is a continual process that unfolds over a lifetime. brown's writing puts you in dialog with her continually evolving journey, a path that seems to have already spanned several lifetimes worth of living at the vanguard of contemporary social change. She has earned a lot of wisdom through tough trials, a world of mentors, deep reflection, and practice. Part call-to-action, part self-help book, part memoir, part transformative justice toolkit, *Emergent Strategy* is hard to categorise; it is as intersectional in its genre and dimensions as it is in its social analysis.

Pulling together brown's overlapping threads is her interpretation of 'emergence'. She starts with leadership guru Nick Obolensky's definition, that 'emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions'. She combines this concept and the underlying examples of emergence and chaos theory from nature – e.g. mycelium growth and the movements of starling flocks – with stories of movement building as well as her own deep study of Octavia Butler's science fiction (particularly the *Earthseed* series, named for the eponymous religion it introduces built on the principle that 'God is change'). For brown, Butler demonstrates a way to use 'visionary fiction' to articulate a vision for the world in which we practice a strategy for survival that is radically inclusive, democratic, and cooperative, counter to the hierarchical, competitive, and militaristic articulations of post-apocalyptic societies that generally dominate such literature. Butler, and brown's reading of her, anticipates the efforts to 'imagine a better world' at the heart of social and cultural change projects like the Harry Potter Alliance – what the Civic Paths Team at the University of Southern California has termed 'civic imagination'[1].

Through stories of her work as Executive Director of Ruckus Society, a facilitator and organisational change strategist, a doula, and a dear friend and sister, brown illustrates the principles and protocols of Emergent Strategy: fractals (the relationship between small and large), intentional adaption (how we change), interdependence and decentralisation (who we are and how we share), nonlinear and iterative (the pace and pathways of change), resilience (how we recover and transform), and creating more possibilities (how we move towards life). Having shared

an early version of the book with colleagues, mentors, and friends, brown incorporates their wisdom and selected stories offered in response, which serves to strengthen and underline her arguments for how the personal and community capacities for Emergent Strategy can make the difference between growing movements and stifling them.

While there are several 'how-to' sections to the book that offer specific 'spells' (poetic meditations or prayers) for personal growth, a self-assessment protocol, and tools for facilitation, *Emergent Strategy* is much more than a how-to guide and deserves to be read as a series of broader meditations. brown's writing follows the wisdom she quotes from Black feminist writer-organiser Toni Cade Bambara: 'the role of the artist is to make the revolution irresistible' and 'writing is one of the ways I participate in transformation'. Ultimately, this is a book about developing the visionary orientation she finds in Butler's work and among her activist mentors: How can you change how you see the world and help those around you to change how they see it? How can you build the relationships that make it possible for us to live and work together toward a better future? How can you be honest, humble, and willing to keep learning and practicing?

Too often activists and organisers are looking for *tactics*, when they need to be developing *strategy*. At the heart of organising is the use of relationship-building to develop the capacity of individuals and communities to find a common ground strategy and make change when the moment demands it. The dynamic, interpersonal processes that birth a social movement *are* Emergent Strategy. While there has been a lot of terrific scholarship on social movements (especially the civil rights movement), it's still hard to put a finger on what makes something like that work because of the inherent complexity and chaos of these processes. But our capacity to respond and to iterate through complex landscapes and handle the chaos of real humans working at massive scales, brown argues, are skills we can develop intentionally. Following brown's applied theory of fractals, the starting point is our personal journeys of transformation, microcosms of the movements we envision. Fortunately, each of us can start with brown's book – a must read for students of civic and political engagement. ■

Erhardt Graeff is Assistant Professor of Social and Computer Science at Olin College of Engineering and a faculty associate at the Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard University. Erhardt studies the design and use of technology for civic and political engagement. Erhardt holds a BS in International Studies and a BS in Information Technology, both from Rochester Institute of Technology, an MPhil in Modern Society and Global Transformations from the University of Cambridge, and an SM and PhD in Media Arts and Sciences from MIT, where he was a member of the Center for Civic Media.

[1] See: www.civicimaginationproject.org.

RUPTURING INVISIBILITY IN SCREEN CULTURE:

IN CONVERSATION WITH ROSEANNE LIANG ON THE REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN IDENTITY IN NEW ZEALAND

unmediated

WORDS

ALLY McCROW-YOUNG

'I feel like the best screen culture opens up possibilities in real life. But conversely, it can also shut them down.' – Roseanne Liang

In an alternate timeline, Roseanne Liang is a computer programmer. Or maybe a doctor, following in the footsteps of her father and sisters. Were it not for a few pieces falling into place at university, she would never have found filmmaking. As we fiddle with our internet settings over video chat between New Zealand and Sweden, I explain to her – abashed – that I'm a big fan of hers. Growing up as a Chinese woman in predominantly white New Zealand, the paucity of Asian representation on broadcast television and in local cinema was poignant.

Like other people of colour, I searched for role models and others like me in my favourite television shows and films, but came up empty-handed. Watching Liang's documentary film *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005) was the first time I had ever seen someone like myself on screen: a young New Zealand woman of Chinese descent, struggling with her identity. Thirteen years later I can still recall that moment of relatability and how incredibly unusual, but genuinely comforting it felt.

Luckily for me and so many others, Liang chose not to be a computer programmer. Encouraged by lecturers at university, she pursued film literacy and quickly began creating her own scripts and short films. Today, Liang is a leading voice among Asian New Zealanders, making critical interventions into popular representations through her work in film and television, and pushing the limits of the country's 'underdeveloped multiculturalism'[1].

Despite New Zealand's demographic cultural diversity, popular representations on screen remain overwhelmingly homogenous.[2] The Asian community is the third largest ethnic group in New Zealand (roughly 11 percent of the population), and is comprised predominantly of people of Chinese and Indian descent[3]. This percentage is even larger in the major cities like Auckland, where 40% of inhabitants are born elsewhere and Asians account for 23% of all residents[4].

The eclipsing of Asian – and particularly Chinese – voices on screen is a vestige of New Zealand's thorny history of intolerance towards early Chinese immigrants. Although Chinese were among the earliest settlers to New Zealand in 1865, their arrival was met with fervent public outcry from European settlers, resulting in the implementation of several anti-Chinese laws and organisations such as the Anti-Chinese League.[5] The introduction of the Chinese Immigrants Act of 1881 was a particularly telling and discriminatory law, and required all Chinese migrants to pay a 'poll tax' – equivalent to roughly NZ$20,000 in today's currency – in order to gain entry to New Zealand.[6]

Today, the effects of this historic anti-Asian sentiment linger systemically and discursively in New Zealand. Asians remain heavily underrepresented in both Parliament and legislative offices, and a string of xenophobic incidents[7], including a schoolteacher's racially-motivated attack on Chinese students, have recently plagued the country[8]. A rise in the number of immigrants from Hong Kong, Korea and Taiwan since the 1990s has further stoked anti-Asian political rhetoric, culminating in the creation of political parties with the avowed goal of undoing 'Asianisation'.[9]

Liang's work has always tugged at the experiences of being Asian in New Zealand, and has worked to tease out the subtleties of who qualifies as a 'real' New Zealander. Through diverse and autonomous storylines, Liang's characters reclaim the 'right to look'[10] on their own terms, while disrupting prevailing images of everyday New Zealanders. Liang's breakout documentary film *Banana in a Nutshell* (2005) was based on her cross-cultural relationship with her husband, and premiered to critical praise. The documentary achieved such success that Liang adapted it into her feature romantic comedy *My Wedding and Other*

[1] Fresno-Calleja, P. (2011). 'Reel New Zealanders: Contesting tokenism and ethnic stereotyping in Roseanne Liang's Take 3'. *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, 5(1).

[2] Gray, S. (2016). Where are the Asian faces on our TV screens? *The Spinoff*.

[3] Statistics New Zealand (2013). 2013 Census. Full report at: http://archive.stats.govt.nz/Census/2013-census.aspx.

[4] Spoonley, P. (2014). Rising Asian immigration highlights New Zealand's changing demographics. *The Conversation*, 11 February.

[5] Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, organisations like the White New Zealand League and the Anti-Chinese Association protested the arrival of Chinese in New Zealand, and worked to abolish Chinese immigration altogether. For a more detailed account, see Harnett, W. (2013). 'Chinese New Zealanders: An Inventory of Records Held by Archives New Zealand'. *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies*, 6.

[6] Ng, E. (2017). *Old Asian, New Asian*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.

[7] See also: Tait, M. (2016). Brutal assaults scaring Auckland's Asian students. *The New Zealand Herald*, 30 March. See also Mortimer, J. (2018). 'Ho Lee Kok': Christchurch eatery Bamboozle's menu slammed as 'racist'. *The New Zealand Herald*, 11 January.

[8] See: NZ Herald (2017). Teacher reprimanded over calling Chinese students 'idiots'. The New Zealand Herald, 12 September.

[9] The populist New Zealand First party, for example, was established in 1993 and has been built around strict anti-immigration policies.

[10] Mirzoeff, N. (2011). *The right to look, a counterhistory of visuality*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Secrets (2011)[11]. Since 2013, Liang has collaborated on the cult YouTube comedy webseries *Flat3* and *Friday Night Bites* with creators Ally Xue, Perlina Lau and JJ Fong. The series follows three New Zealand Asian flatmates navigating daily moments of joy, idiocy and self-doubt. Eloquent and impactful, the series succeeds at conveying the experience of being Asian in Auckland – but its real strength lies in the ability to capture the universal anxiety of life as a 20-something woman.

Prizewinning has long been a feature of Liang's life: as high school valedictorian, academic awards were commonplace. Liang credits her conscientious nature to being a child of Hong Kong immigrants who always encouraged her to strive for the best because, as they argued, torturous hard work created a world of possibilities. Liang's recent action thriller *Do No Harm* (2017)[12] continued this trend, premiering at the Sundance Film Festival, and attracting a string of prestigious honours, including qualifying for Oscar consideration.

Despite her first-class history and Hollywood acclaim following *Do No Harm*, Liang remains humble. Referencing her well-earned recent accolades, Liang says in her trademark modest tone, 'I joke that before, I was nothing. I was no one, and now I'm still no one but there's a potential that I might be someone. There's a tiny, *tiny* chance that I might make it.' Hollywood executives have been much less reserved about Liang's potential, with global talent giant WME Agency quickly signing Liang to their ranks, and the Alice Initiative having named Liang among the top emerging female directors worldwide[13].

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

'Screen culture is a mirror and feeds into actual culture. Representation matters because when we see ourselves on screen or see people like ourselves on screen, then certain things are open to us.' – Roseanne Liang

A common thread across Liang's work is a focus on authentic stories with unique Asian women at the core. The motley characters resist tokenism; they are original, flawed and funny. Yet any attempt to redress minority representation necessarily carries a weight that cis-white stories do not have to consider. Speaking about her work on *Flat3*, Liang is easy going but aware of the responsibilities that come with representing minorities on screen, and muses: 'I feel that it's a privilege that we exercise […] We're kind of duty-bound to have fun but also to push boundaries as well. But pushing boundaries is where the most fun is had, I reckon'. By contrast, the few Asian characters who regularly grace mainstream New Zealand screens draw heavily on

exotic tropes, such as the arranged marriage storylines[14] between Asian characters in New Zealand's longest running soap opera *Shortland Street*. The mythologising of onscreen Asian characters is partly what led to the creation of Flat3 Productions[15], the creative team behind the web series *Flat3* and *Friday Night Bites*, and their strong desire to answer the question 'But what about our day-to-day lives?'

Far from mystical Oriental guides or exotic call girls, *Flat3* bucks against Asian stereotypes through the mundane. 'We talk about sex and we swear at each other', Liang explains about the creative process behind *Flat3*; 'It's not radical but it seems radical, because no one else seemed to have done it before.' The team discovered how sorely their audience yearned to see Asian women at the helm of their own stories after releasing an episode of *Flat3* titled 'The White Album' where the main characters Lee, Perlina and Jess are replaced with white actors:[16] 'That episode got the most hate comments that we'd ever had. Not that [the audience] hated us, they just hated the white girls. They were like, 'I didn't come here to see them. We're here for Lee, Perlina and Jess, not these interlopers…''. While the protests over this episode highlight a hunger for Asian protagonists, Liang also argues that one reason for swapping the ethnicity of the

'THE ECLIPSING OF ASIAN VOICES ON SCREEN IS A VESTIGE OF NEW ZEALAND'S THORNY HISTORY OF INTOLERANCE TOWARDS EARLY CHINESE IMMIGRANTS'

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[11] See: www.roseanneliang.com/mwaos/.

[12] Set in fictional Hongjing, Do No Harm (2017) is an action thriller that features a showdown between a surgeon and a group of violent thugs. See: https://www. donoharm-film.com/.

[13] The *Alice Initiative* aims to promote the work of women filmmakers and is run by a collective of studio executives and producers. See: www.thealiceinitiative.com.

[14] Harvey, K. (2016). 'Shortland Street's Grace Palmer talks about a possible wedding for Lucy and Ali'. *Stuff*, 22 July.

[15] See: www.flat3webseries.com.

[16] *Flat3*, Ep. 17, The White Album. Full episode at www.youtu.be/lNdtrKKOxvE.

characters was to highlight the universality of women's experiences. 'That's just girls,' Liang opines. 'You know, it crosses culture, it crosses ethnicity.'

WHOSE FACE IS 'OUR FACE'?

Buoyed by the fan following and praise surrounding *Flat3*, Liang initially thought this might signal the start of a wider increase in Asian stories on screen. Frustratingly, that particular wave of progress has been slow to develop. While the continued production of a series like *Flat3* is a positive sign for New Zealand Asian content, Liang notes that there are still significant obstacles to be overcome. Since its debut, the series has struggled to gain a larger following on YouTube, despite the loyalty of their existing fanbase. One of the more persistent barriers to gaining a wider audience arises from the very representation they are seeking to change. As Liang explains: 'When [white New Zealanders] look at a poster of *Flat3* and they see three Asian women, most New Zealanders are not going to click on that, because they'll be like 'well that's not for me, that's for *them*.'

Conversely, Liang points out that New Zealanders are more willing to engage with a predominantly brown cast, consistently supporting Maori and Pacifica content; films such as *Sione's Wedding* (2006) and *Boy* (2010), each of which feature all-brown casts, have seen tremendous commercial and critical success. This constraint on the kinds of minority groups New Zealanders appear willing to accept is, in Liang's view, influenced by the fixity of the archetypal image of New Zealand: 'They'll take on board Maori and Pacifica casts as their own. Like 'this is New Zealand.''

At the heart of this struggle is the problem of whose face is generalisable, and it would seem that New Zealanders have trouble accepting Asian faces as New Zealand faces. Liang puts this down to the othering of Chinese due to the significant increase of Chinese immigrants to New Zealand in recent years. Unfortunately, she says, 'it's racism, it's prejudice' which is feeding into New Zealanders' disengagement with an all-Asian cast. Liang and her collaborators feel the impact of this prejudice, influencing the kinds of characters and stories they develop for future projects:

> We're now starting a new show and we told ourselves that we have to have white and brown representation on the poster. So we have to give core cast roles to white and brown people, and then maybe we'll prove our hypothesis: that if it's all Asian, then New Zealanders don't really want to engage.

The irony of scaling back on lead Asian cast members and strategising over visibility in promotional material is not lost on Liang, who shuffles between frustration and a resolute pragmatism to effect real change:

> When people look at our poster I wonder whether they go 'oh no, why should I have to watch Asian women who have nothing to do with me?' It's like, well, we've been doing this all our lives: we've been watching white people and finding the humanity in white people who don't look like us all our lives. So if I can do it, you can do it.

GETTING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Improving Asian representation on screen is certainly a productive means of shifting intolerance in New Zealand, but in order for its impact to be lasting, diversity must be improved behind the scenes as well. A recent report by NZ On Air, the national funding body for broadcast television, revealed that a mere 1% of producers and 2% of directors identified as Asian.[17] Although NZ On Air acknowledge the problems inherent in such statistics, they have taken little action to rectify the problem.[18] This sense of complacency and apathy towards inequality in the New Zealand television industry runs deep, and extends right up to the way that showrunners imagine new characters. As a senior writer for a national television show told Liang, 'I would dearly love to write more roles for Asian actors, but the reality is I know who's out there, and they aren't good enough. So I'm not going to write them in.'

Liang's approach to improving these statistics is much more concrete, and involves advocating for tangible solutions to the country's on- and off-screen representational problems:

> We [the Asian community] also have a responsibility to step up our game. We need to be training up our people and then applying for the funding, getting writers and directors to be applying. It's our responsibility as well as theirs. So we can't just go and complain; we need to have the goods to back ourselves. And I think there's going to be a wobbly period, if you truly believe in diversity.

Part of the problem is a lack of demand and backing from New Zealand Asian communities themselves. Lamenting the modest number of subscribers to *Flat3,* Liang says, 'The problem is that the Asian community doesn't – this pains me to say this – but they don't support us'. She speculates that one reason why Asian communities have not rallied around *Flat3* could be to do with the availability of overseas Asian content for diaspora communities[19]. Additionally, the historical position of Chinese immigrants in New

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[17] See: www.nzonair.govt.nz/document-library/nz-on-air-diversity-report-2016.

[18] Responding to the poor statistics in their diversity report, NZ On Air's CEO Jane Wrightson noted, 'We will be encouraging the professional guilds to help drive conversations. Creative teams are complicated to pull together and good interpersonal dynamics are crucial. This is why we'd never insist on a particular team make up'. See: Gray, S. (2016). 'Diversify or die: What New Zealand television can learn from our film industry'. *The Spinoff.*

[19] Similarly, Liang notes that the competition and availability of Asian American shows such as *Fresh off the Boat*, which speak to a similar audience, could be impacting on the demand for local Asian content.

Zealand plays a role in Asian audiences' response to a show like *Flat3*, and equally their silence towards the current lack of representation: 'The fight isn't so keen,' Liang remarks about the historic submissiveness of Asian audiences in New Zealand. 'We don't want to rock the boat, we're the model minority, we put our head down and we work hard, we don't want to make a fuss.'

THE ROAD AHEAD: BEING THAT LITTLE YAPPY DOG

Yet making a fuss is essential in the quest for inclusion and equal representation going forward. Liang's view is that the New Zealand Asian community finally needs to raise its voice and act together to achieve progress. This year, Liang plans to establish a grassroots advocacy group dedicated to advancing Asian representation in film, television and theatre through collaboration:

> The only way we're going to be united is if we put the time in to talk to each other and listen to each other […] Right now, I think what we all want is better representation on screen, and behind the screen. And the way that we do that is by spearheading it from those two angles, which is basically being a nuisance to the white people who I'm sure think that we're so irritating.

Pursuing the goal of inclusivity also requires making some compromises, Liang admits, even if that means taking miniscule steps such as casting peripheral Asian characters in primetime shows. Part of the work of her new advocacy group will be to target popular broadcast television shows like *Shortland Street*, and raise awareness about the need for such shows to reflect the true diversity of the country. Liang points to the recent funding of an upcoming drama *Fresh Eggs* by NZ On Air, which includes an Asian couple in the ensemble cast, as an example of a positive 'small step'.[20]

The road to improving Asian representation in New Zealand is far from smooth, and is peppered with historical and contemporary hurdles to overcome. But despite the arduous work ahead, Liang remains doggedly optimistic: 'We just have to be a tenacious little yappy dog going '*hey, hey, hey,* wouldn't it be nice if 10% of your casts were Asian? Because that's what it's like on the streets […] We're here guys, so please don't exclude us.'' Perhaps channelling that resilient attitude of hard work characteristic of the Chinese immigrant experience in New Zealand is the key to furthering the cause.

'Basically, we want to take over the world,' Liang states. 'We want to extend our influence. We want to be in the halls of power, we want to be in the funding rooms, we want Asian people making the decisions, setting the budgets. We want – we *need* – Asian people everywhere. Not just in the trenches. We need people in the higher up places as well.' While these changes can be tedious and demand thankless persistence, Liang's interventions

'LIANG'S INTERVENTIONS CONTINUE TO DISRUPT CULTURAL TROPES BY CELEBRATING WOMEN'S STORIES AND EXPERIENCES'

continue to disrupt cultural tropes by celebrating women's stories and experiences. Her representations of Asian New Zealanders act as countervisualities[21] confronting the history of deliberate exclusion, imagining and asserting its alternative. 'Deep down there's things that bind us,' Liang says. 'There's more of that than the things that divide us.' ∎

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All photos courtesy of **Roseanne Liang**.

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[20] Actors Xana Tang and Yoson An have been cast as a married couple in *Fresh Eggs*. Yoson An also featured in *Flat3*.
[21] Mirzoeff, 2011.
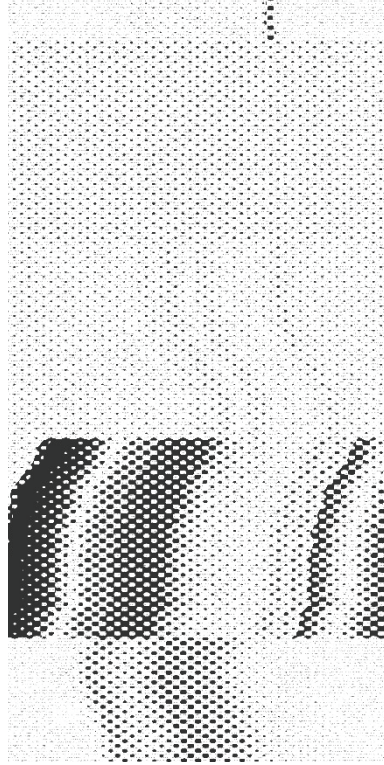
REIMAGINING FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER GAMES THROUGH SOCIOPOIESIS

WORDS

SANDRA DANILOVIC

INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I contemplate possibilities for social transformation inside multiplayer, combat-centric games, grounding my discussion in a unique game-making event, the Autopathographical Game Jam (AGJ), that I organized in order to study how game developers author autopathographical games – that is, personal games about mental illness, emotional trauma, and disability. The AGJ enabled me to study how various processes of poiesis (creative making) and sociality integrate into sociopoiesis, a form of collective making constituting a healing community for game jammers[1]. I harness the Autopathographical Game Jam as a springboard for discussing empathetic and antagonistic player relationships in two team-based first-person shooter (FPS) games – *Counter-Strike* and *Overwatch*, informed by Jewish existential philosopher Martin Buber's dialogic theory of *I and Thou* (1923). My objective is to contemplate the ways in which we can rehumanize player relationships in multiplayer, combat-centric games through the poetic and divine – namely, through the implementation of shared storytelling activities.

FOUNDATIONS: THE AUTOPATHOGRAPHICAL GAME JAM

As an artist-researcher who has previously made a semi-autobiographical machinima filmed inside *Second Life*[2], I was attracted to the idea of studying the experiences of neurodivergent game designers rendering their first-person narratives with illness, trauma, and disability through the expressive medium of computer games. In September 2014, while a Doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto, I organized the Autopathographical Game Jam (AGJ), a two-day game-making event, recruiting thirteen professional game designer-developers to author autopathographical games. The autopathography is an autobiographical narrative of illness or disability[3] that I harnessed from literary theory in order to study its rendition through computer games. The thirteen participants – 10 male and 3 female, ranging in age from 20 to 33 years old – created games informed by their first-person experiences with bipolar disorder, anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), attention/deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), colour-blindness, grief, shyness, memories of being bullied, and insomnia. I interviewed the participants during and after the AGJ, and collected their sketches and doodles in order to access experiential dimensions not verbalized in testimony. I also made video recordings of the AGJ in order to document the AGJ space as a creative platform for shared storytelling.

'I WAS ATTRACTED TO THE IDEA OF STUDYING THE EXPERIENCES OF NEURODIVERGENT GAME DESIGNERS RENDERING THEIR FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVES WITH ILLNESS, TRAUMA, AND DISABILITY THROUGH THE EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM OF COMPUTER GAMES.'

The game jam is a cultural phenomenon closely tied to the emergence of 'maker' cultures and DIY (Do-It-Yourself) spaces which reinvents game authorship as a social experience. I modelled the AGJ after another 'maker' space in Toronto, the feminist game development collective, Dames Making Games (DMG). DMG orients its membership to marginalized game developers who otherwise would not get the opportunity to make games. I thus designed the AGJ as an inclusive and welcoming space for the game jam participants. For example, I curated a fun and energetic experience for participants intended to be inspiring and motivating, inviting them to either draw on the autopathography genre as the basis for their games or exclude this genre altogether, as one participant did. I stocked each workstation with materials necessary for game ideation such as chocolate power bars, notebooks, colored markers, and whimsical toys (see Figure 1).

[1] Danilovic, S. (2018). Game design therapoetics: Autopathographical game authorship as self-care, self-understanding, and therapy. PhD Thesis, TSpace, University of Toronto. https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/handle/1807/89836.

[2] Danilovic, S. (2009). Second Bodies. [docu-machinima]. See: https://vimeo.com/29069086.

[3] Couser, G.T. (1997). *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life-writing*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

I hired three research assistants to help me with space facilitation, data collection (informal interviewing of participants), and video recording of the game jam event. One research assistant was trained in 'active listening' and 'safe space facilitation', which helped our research team ensure that the game jam was conducive to the creative process of autopathographical game design. I organized specific activities during Day One of the AGJ; for example, I invited game jam participants to introduce themselves to the group where they told their autopathographical narratives. Other activities included jamming (making games), breaks/lunch, and group discussions. Day Two was divided into more jamming, prototype completion, and game playtesting, as well as a brief group discussion of takeaways and insights from the designers' overall AGJ experience.

Similar to DMG, one of my social justice-driven commitments in organizing the AGJ was community outreach – to give a platform to game designers whose first-person narratives have been excluded from mainstream computer game production. John[4], a participating AGJ game developer, affirmed that he once wanted to make 'an emotional, dark game' that may have alluded to his experiences of living with bipolar disorder, but was stopped by his game development team: 'They were all like, 'no that sounds way too weird, I don't think people would like it'.

Pioneering games such as Anna Anthropy's (2012) *dys4ia*, Zoë Quinn's (2013) *Depression Quest*, and Green, Green, and Larson's (2016) *That Dragon, Cancer* show the increasing importance of paying attention to first-person narratives in games, not only because they give voice to experiences not often represented in Triple-A games authorship, but also because they push the creative boundaries of existing game design vocabularies. As visionary trans game designer Anna Anthropy (2012) states, these types of narratives help games grow into a more mature and meaningful art form:

What videogames need right now is to grow up. The videogame industry has spentmillions upon millions of dollars to develop more visually impressive ways for a space marine to kill a monster. What they've invested almost nothing in is finding better ways to tell a story, and in exploring different stories to tell. That's for us to do: the people who don't have to sell thousands of copies of a game to break even, who aren't obliged to fill their games with eighty hours of content, who are beholden to no one, who are free to be silly and weird and creative and personal.[5]

The freedom to explore the autobiographical illness and disability narrative, as the AGJ invited designers to do, would not have been possible at a large-scale, impersonal game jam. For example, Nathan, a game designer who made a game called *ADHD Hero* that delves into his childhood experiences undergoing the ADHD diagnostic test, said that the AGJ was a generative space that allowed him to make a game that diverges from more mainstream game expressions and from the expectations of typical game jams:

(Typical) game jams are often not welcoming spaces for lots of people…and so the game jam you made was not that at all. Everyone was making personal games, everyone was talking about their experiences, and I don't think I would have seen almost any of those games at a normal game jam.

BUBER'S DIALOGIC THEORY AS A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE AGJ

The AGJ was not only a platform for academic research and community outreach; it became a social venue that fostered

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[4] All names of AGJ participants-game designers (study subjects) have been anonymized.

[5] Anthropy, A. (2012). *Rise of the videogame zinesters: How freaks, normals, amateurs, artists, dreamers, dropouts, queers, housewives, and people like you are taking back an art form.* New York: Seven Stories Press. 160.

empathetic connections between game designers through their shared experiences. Here is where Buber's dialogic theory of *I and Thou*[6] is a constructive hermeneutic for understanding the AGJ phenomenon. Buber conceptualized human relations as an oscillation between two existential modes – a mutual encounter between subjects (*I-Thou*) and subject-object relations (*I-It*). Buber's existentialism is founded in archaic Hasidic folklore and storytelling[7]. The AGJ game designers emphasized the importance of sharing their stories and connecting with each other in person, which speaks to Buber's idea of conversation in lived, concrete relations. Martin, who made a game called *Broken Lens* about his experience with colour-blindness, confirms the power of the AGJ in bringing designers together through forms of personal storytelling, adding that 'I think the thing about making a game about personal stuff is sharing'. According to Buber, the intersubjective relationship of I-Thou is a direct and unmediated encounter between two persons who reciprocally subjectify each other through presence and dialogue: 'I become through my relation to the Thou; as I become I, I say Thou'[8]. In this respect, AGJ designers willingly shared their personal experiences with illness, trauma, and disability and were moved listening to each other's autopathographical narratives. Yasmine, who co-authored a game with her collaborator Cole called *City Explorer*, which explores the category of disability in an able-bodied world, explained, 'Just hearing (participant) stories, I just felt so touched at what people were sharing'.

Buber's work drew on the principles of community and communion in order to recover certain humanistic values, such as care and responsibility for the Other, active engagement with the Other, and acknowledging the Other's presence through both language and gesture – all qualities which engendered healing during the AGJ. It is precisely this quality of I-Thou that explains how some of the game designers experienced the social dimensions of the AGJ phenomenon as therapeutic; they showed care for others despite being strangers to one another. They also risked discomfort while disclosing their intimate experiences during the AGJ. As such, autopathographical game design during the AGJ became structured by the nourishing social interactions among designers, which they experienced as collectively healing. Designers shared their autopathographical narratives and they made friends with strangers, bonded, and creatively motivated each other during the AGJ, which built a strong sense of belonging.

Buber also sanctified the social dimension[9], infusing the I-Thou relationship with the ineffable, poetic, and divine. For example, game designer Marco, who made a game called *Connections*, about his past experiences of being bullied, evoked the ineffable quality of the AGJ by alluding to the presence of a 'spark of magic' that is generally absent from commercially-oriented, large-scale game jams. Another anonymous AGJ doodler hinted at their experience of creative joy while making their autopathographical game, which in this doodle manifests as flying sparks (see Fig. 2).
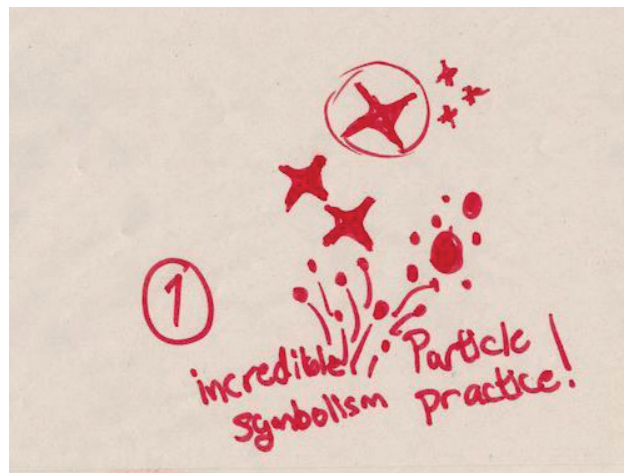
▲ *Figure 2.* AGJ study doodle: 'Incredible symbolism. Particle practice!'.

It is important to note that Buber did not romanticize the I-Thou relationship. He offered the relationship of I-It as a foil to I-Thou, which designates the realm of study, judgment, and experience: 'I-It is the primary word of experiencing and using'[10]. I-It is an instrumental relationship based on transaction, exchange, and when in excess, asymmetry. Examples of asymmetrical I-It relationships are those rooted in a power dynamic: employer-employee, doctor-patient, and teacher-student. In this vein, Buber's theory has been used in studies of education and social medicine to theorize on how to re-balance common interactions between doctor-patient and teacher-student, and equalize those relationships. Nonetheless, Buber suggests that I-Thou and I-It are in constant interplay in order to preserve a sense of equilibrium in the relationship. For example, Ellie, whose game *This Is My Awesome Sleep Machine* explored her experiences with insomnia, suggested that the spatial configuration of the AGJ engendered an alternation between active, immersive participation with others (I- Thou) and retreating from others (I-It) as a form of self-care:

> The environment was very well set up so that you could work alongside people that you had never met before and collaborate but also have your own space as well, which was great.

Thus, the modes of I-Thou and I-It productively intersect, as when the AGJ participants drew boundaries in their relationships, ensuring their ongoing agency and autonomy as individuals practicing self-responsibility and persons actively engaging with others.

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[6] Buber, M. (1923/1958). I and thou. (R. Gregor Smith, Trans.). Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.

[7] Buber, M. (1958). *Hasidism and modern man.* (M. Friedman, Ed./Trans.). New York: Horizon Press.

[8] Buber, 1923, 11.

[9] Buber, M. (1923/1996). *I and thou.* (W. Kaufmann, Trans.). NY: Simon & Schuster.

[10] Friedman, M.S. (2002). *Martin Buber: The life of dialogue.* (4th ed.). London: Routledge. 65.

REIMAGINING COMBAT-CENTRIC GAMING COMMUNITIES THROUGH BUBERIAN SOCIOPOETICS.

I would like to discuss the potential for reimagining combat-centric gaming communities through Buberian sociopoiesis, which I now reframe as sociopoetic play rooted in a variety of social activities augmenting combat, such as storytelling and e-socializing. As a direct and unmediated encounter, Buber assumes that the relationship of I-Thou is practiced face-to-face in the physical realm, which poses a challenge for studying digital play environments. In online spaces, encounters are digitally-mediated and 'users' invoke the I-It mode of transaction; that is, from the perspective of 'user experience design', users communicate through their avatars, voice chat, text, and/or emoticons, but they do not necessarily relate to one other in sincere ways as Buber would have it.

Buber's dialogic theory, however, proves fruitful for thinking about the ways in which player relationships in combat-centric games do, in fact, engage both the I-Thou and I-It modes. The following brief comparative analysis of two popular multiplayer FPS games – *Counter-Strike* and *Overwatch* – demonstrates how their player-to-player interaction models differ in this regard. *Counter-Strike* is a military-style FPS game where players join a terrorist or counter-terrorist team whose sole objective is 'shoot-to-kill'. Similarly, *Overwatch* is a team-based shooter where players collaborate in teams to win combat missions. In contrast to *Counter-Strike*, *Overwatch* is a character-centric, narrative-driven game with significant social features for players, analogous to the AGJ's social benefits for its participants. In other words, game battle may result in additional outcomes for players that amplify the gameplay experience, such as 'e-socializing' and 'hanging out'[11], which translates to sharing stories, making friends, and building meaningful player relationships (I-Thou).

As its developers Blizzard Entertainment claim, the design of *Overwatch* 'encourag(es) a better community'[12]. Despite its structural similarities to *Counter-Strike* and some emerging claims that player hostility is also a problem[13], *Overwatch* differs by implementing a play mechanic that 'endorses players who did a particularly good job and (who) promoted a healthy interaction'[14]. Additionally, the *Overwatch* developers have created ancillary products such as comics to reveal the backstories

of game characters[15], encouraging players to share them. It appears that in *Counter-Strike,* gameplay offers no potential for building the type of quality player interactions that are characteristic of *Overwatch* (although more research is needed on this front). *Counter-Strike* offers what games scholars Linderoth and Mortensen (2015) would call, 'dark play' – games designed to manipulate and provoke the player through transgressive forms of gameplay[16].

The issue of gendered harassment is just one example of online FPS players engaging in highly antagonistic and abusive behavior, inviting so-called 'dark play'. Feminist game scholars[17] have raised important awareness of gendered harassment in multiplayer, combat-centric games. As Vossen states: 'women are routinely subjected to gendered harassment while playing games'. It may be, however, that gendered harassment manifests most markedly in shooter games, due to the fact that Vossen (and others) claim that they are culturally-coded by masculinist gamer culture as 'real games' and the 'right games', while non-combat games such as 'casual' games are coded as 'girl' games[18]. As Vossen affirms, masculinist gamer culture celebrates what Kline et al. (2003) call 'military masculinity' which are 'gender coded scenarios of war, conquest, and combat'[19]. It may be said that combat-centric games such as FPSs are prized in a cultural game hierarchy that privileges certain transgressive game mechanics over others.

The use of transgressive play mechanics in game design may foster abusive player behaviours in multiplayer, combat-centric games. The primary focus on a shoot-to-kill objective, while subversively pleasurable for players and a meaningful artistic decision for game developers, may hinder meaningful player interactions. There is also players' ability to hide behind an anonymous identity in online games and enjoy safety from the consequences to their actions, which may embolden bad behaviour. From a Buberian perspective, abusive players carry no sense of responsibility to the Other or for maintaining a harmonious player community. In *Overwatch*, developers are actively de-centering the potential primacy of instrumental gameplay (I-It), by promoting meaningful player participation (I-Thou) through the implementation of social features, such as shared storytelling activities and e-socializing. They are changing the playscape of FPS games by fostering care between players that may extend into building communion among disparate subjectivities. The adoption of these attitudes

[11] Kim, M. (2017). Overwatch players are hosting custom dance parties. *Usgamer*, May 24.

[12] Khan, I. (2018). Overwatch social features like group play and endorsements now live. Gameinformer. *Game Informer*, June 26.

[13] Marshall, C. (2017). The debate over harassment in Overwatch rages on. *Heroes Never Die: An Overwatch Community*, October 24.

[14] Khan, 2018.

[15] Chu, M. (2017). New co-op brawl Overwatch Uprising explores the backstory of Blizzard's team shooter. *PlayStation* blogs, April 11.

[16] Linderoth, J. and Mortensen, T. E. (2015). Dark play: The aesthetics of controversial playfulness. In T. E. Mortensen, J. Linderoth, and A. M. Brown (Eds.), *The dark side of game play: Controversial issues in playful environments*. 3-12. New York: Routledge.

[17] Consalvo, M. (2012). Confronting toxic gamer culture: A challenge for feminist game studies scholars. *ADA: A Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology*, 1; Jenson, J. and de Castell, S. (2013). Tipping points: Marginality, misogyny and videogames. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 29(2); Vossen, E. (2018). *On the cultural inaccessibility of gaming: Invading, creating, and reclaiming the cultural clubhouse*. PhD Thesis, University of Waterloo. Forthcoming on ProQuest.

[18] Vossen, forthcoming, 21.

[19] Kline, S., Dyer-Witheford, N., and Peuter, G. (2003). *Digital play: The interaction of technology, culture and marketing*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press. 247.

▲ *Figure 3*. Still from *Overwatch* (left) and screen shot from *Counter-Strike* (right).

may engender, as Buber says, 'genuine dialogue…from one open-hearted person to another open-hearted person'[20]. In these ways, Buberian sociopoetics allows us to reimagine multiplayer, combat-centric games as spaces where combat, war, and conquest are supplemented with rich and meaningful interactions among players that build healthy gaming communities.

CONCLUSION

A Buberian analysis of the AGJ – an example of sociopoiesis – can be extended to other research domains, such as studying player relationships and communities in multiplayer, combat-centric games. Buber's work is productive for media and communication scholars in numerous ways. First, his dialogic theory and communitarian ethics can be generative for studying human interaction in digital and virtual environments. He is a prescient scholar for theorizing the effects of information and communication technologies on human relationships, especially in volatile online spaces where polarization, verbal abuse, and trolling are the norm. Unlike his contemporaries – among them, Heidegger[21], and McLuhan[22] – who had been concerned with the technological sphere, Buber's work remained committed to embodiment, and nevertheless foreshadowed the changing nature of modern relationships in 'the development of a new sense of community'[23]. Finally, in my view, Buber is a progressive philosopher that recuperates a certain contemporary longing for sacred values *sans* religion's institutional and dogmatic baggage. Buber de-politicized human relationships in order to amplify their existential concerns and infused religious and poetic values into human communication processes, a philosophical strategy that can be perceived as a limitation. Buber may have de-emphasized the political dimension in order to see human relationships in a new light and focus on the existential qualities that arouse our longing for meaningful connection. In moments of hardship, chaos, and despair, in life, death, and the grind of daily existence,

we can consciously gravitate to what binds us instead of what separates us. Through Buber's existential phenomenological perspective, radical liberation may be achieved through non-radical acts of human goodwill – sincere words and inviting gestures that sanctify ordinary human encounters – in creative making, play, and community engagement. ■

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[20] Buber, M. (2002). *Between man and man.* (R. Gregor Smith, Trans.). London & New York: Routledge Classics. (Original work published 1947). 9.

[21] See Heidegger's seminal essay 'The Question Concerning Technology'.

[22] Marshall McLuhan's famous metaphor of 'the global village' invoked the effects of modern technologies such as television on culture which give the appearance of 'shrinking' the globe into a village. See: McLuhan, M. (1967). *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of typographic man.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

[23] Buber, 1923/1996, 38.

VOLUME:

VOLUMETRIC CINEMATOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF LEARNING MACHINES

unmediated

WORDS

OR FLEISHER & SHIRIN ANLEN

Computational advancements have radically changed the way we think, create, and engage with stories. Rapid increases in computing power and parallelism ability as contributed by Graphical Processing Units have become a game-changing innovation in the field of filmmaking. The desire to feel like we are actually there, entering the story and interacting with it, has become more attainable thanks to virtual, augmented and mixed reality platforms. One of the devices most associated with this revolution is Microsoft's Kinect, which first debuted in 2010. Its depth sensing capabilities and consumer availability launched a new era of interactive gaming, 3D scanning, and robotic vision with an enthusiastic and growing DIY community. The Kinect became the symbol of a new cinematic genre – volumetric cinematography – rendering real people in virtual environments. It's a genre that aims to preserve the dramatic engine established over a period of 100 cinematic years, a human-centric approach where the audience is caught between the documentation of real humans within photorealistic 3D-rendered worlds. The challenge of capturing high-resolution live action 3D humans is a task that has been occupying both big companies and content studios for decades – 'the race to holograms' as aesthetically predicted by many science fiction films. Microsoft, Google and Apple, along with smaller technology start-ups, are all working on ways to capture and integrate live 3D representations of reality.

One of the outcomes of this which has inspired us is DepthKit[1], an accessible volumetric capturing system dedicated to advancing the art of volumetric filmmaking. DepthKit is a product by Smile, a startup founded by James George and Alexander Porter that successfully developed a 3D recording and rendering tool for non-coders, aimed predominantly at storytellers. From the beginning, this tool had a profound impact on volumetric filmmaking and its visual aesthetics became the hallmark of the entire field. Dense point-clouds and strips of rendered contour wires compose poetic 3D human representations. The project Clouds[2] – an interactive documentary that explores the art of creative coding, filmed using DepthKit's capturing software and developed entirely using open-source software – was a game changer on our creative path.

As creative technologists and interactive artists, the concept of depth is an important component in our work. Within its laws and mathematics, we find the entire complexity of the relation between physical and virtual worlds, which helps provide richer representations of a social fabric. When we started developing *Tzina: symphony of longing*[3], an interactive room scale webVR documentary, we explored various scanning techniques for developing a volumetric storytelling experience. This project was developed out of our desire to experiment with how emerging technologies can augment human perception, while exploring the concept of getting lost in memory and connecting to the other through curious wanderings.

This was the beginning to the shaping of our own creative volumetric language. We were fascinated by the raw aesthetic qualities of volumetric videogrammetry. Using DepthKit and state-of-the-art technologies, we started developing our entire pipeline, composed of capturing solutions, shader programs and web platform, all while deepening our volumetric storytelling skills. Capturing live-action 3D documentary subjects in open field conditions was difficult and bordered on creative

Figure 1. Screenshot from Tzina: symphony of longing.

[1] See: http://www.depthkit.tv.
[2] See: George, S. and Minard, J. (2014). 'Clouds', link: http://scatter.nyc/clouds.
[3] See: Anlen, S. (2017). 'Tzina: symphony of longing', link: http://tzina.space.
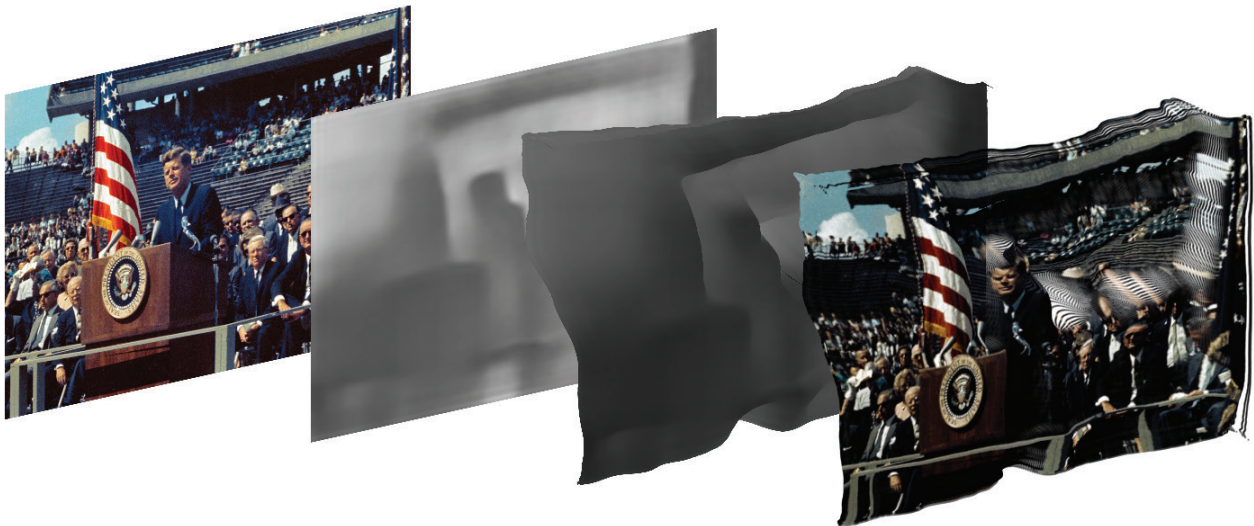
Figure 2. Volume process. For an interactive demo, see: https://juniorxsound.github.io/Volume-WebGL-Viewer/demo.

and logistical sadism. Furthermore, we couldn't implement archive and research materials, as they existed in 2D format. After launching the project we ended up asking ourselves simple questions that would shape our future work: How can we use 200 years of 2D documentation in the 3D era? Is it possible to mimic Kinect's results without the struggles associated with shooting in an uncontrolled environment? Can we develop intelligent computer software that will make the creative process much easier and accessible? And more recently, following Microsoft's announcement of Kinect's discontinuation, should we keep counting on hardware manufacturers to provide a stable ground for storytellers?

VOLUMETRIC CINEMATOGRAPHY IN THE AGE OF LEARNING MACHINES

How do you infer the 3D properties of the world from a 2D image? This question has intrigued researchers in psychology and computer science for decades, with the goal of understanding how the human brain makes sense of the world[4], hoping to bridge the differences between machine and biology. Granting a machine the ability of creative expression in predicting volumetric data reveals a unique perspective on the worldly referents of its internal symbolic logic.

Inspired by earlier research at New York University[5] which used supervised machine learning to predict depth from single RGB

images, we would like to establish this as a unique period of convergence between machine knowledge and narrative expression, using the power of Convolutional Neural Networks (CNN) in image-based learning. We believe that by stepping away from hardware dependencies and producing a creative tool based on machine learning algorithms (i.e. software), we can develop and sustain a long-term solution that will support a full production process. Our goal is to use state-of-the-art research in order to teach a computer to recreate depth from any input image. Although digitally reconstructing accurate 3D geometry from a single RGB image is a big challenge, its development could have an enormous impact on cinematic language and immersive storytelling techniques. There are already massive efforts underway to develop machine-learning algorithms for uses like self-driving cars and facial recognition software, but recreating the 3D structure of the world within the machine remains unattainable. The restrictions are fairly apparent, and usually arise when objects must be observed from a multitude of viewpoints[6]. We are interested in the possibility of machine-learning driven models to boost the creative uses of modern filmmaking. We are experimenting with ways we can take a single RGB and convert it in real time to a 3D model.

Volume[7] is a response to the growing interest in investigating and exploring reality through immersive digital platforms. It aims to experiment with new ways to reconstruct archival and historical materials as volumetric renderings, to be viewed from virtual,

[4] Fouhey, D.F., Gupta, A. and Hebert, M. (2013). 'Data-Driven 3D Primitives for Single Image'Understanding', *International Conference on Computer Vision*.

[5] Eigen, D., Puhrsch, C., and Fergus, R. (2014). 'Depth Map Prediction from a Single Image using a Multi-Scale Deep Network', *NIPS*.

[6] Choy, C.B., Xu, D., Gwak, J., Chen, K. and Savarese, S. (2016). '3D-R2N2: A Unified Approach for Single and Multi-view 3D Object Reconstruction', Stanford University.

[7] See: Volume website at www.volume.GL.

[146]

augmented and mixed reality experiences. Volume adopts innovations in machine learning, computer vision and interactive storytelling to enable content creators, journalists, and filmmakers to create 3D environments and subjects, from pre-existing 2D footage. This will allow more users to explore this realm and tell stories that would not have been possible otherwise. Volume uses CNNs, which learn through 'observing' RGBD images and build a comprehensive understanding of how to reconstruct 2D pixels in a 3D space.

VOLUME'S LEARNING MODEL

While we perceive the world in 3D, the images we receive are intrinsically 2D. We must build our representations with this in mind. This approach goes back to the very beginning of vision[8]. Previous efforts have used human interaction and computer vision to allow assisted modelling from single view 2D images. Volume uses a supervised machine learning approach – in particular CNNs, training an RGB input against a Kinect depth map output – to produce a comprehensive understanding of the positioning of 2D pixels in 3D space.

We implement two CNNs; one is responsible for estimating per-pixel depth values, and the second runs segmentation and classification based on Mask R-CNN[9] pre-trained weights. The first network is inspired by the architecture and dataset proposed in NYU Depth[10] which is able to adapt naturally to each task with only small modifications, moving from the input image to the output map directly. It is composed of two complementary learning operations to minimise the error range: one that estimates the global depth structure and another that refines it locally at better resolution.

1. Convolution and pooling operations for converting the pixel intensities in order to reveal and expand the essence of the single image into high-dimensional filters. CNNs have been used with great success for object classification and detection to analyse visual imagery. This is the core building block of Volume. CNNs are the most common approach in the image recognition and 3D geometry prediction fields. They can make predictions from very little input data such as a single colour image, depth map or partial 3D volume, by connecting each neuron to a small chunk of the input image. Our method builds upon the approach described by NYU Depth and Make3D, with complementary datasets from KITTI and Cityscapes[11]. All these methods use multiple images as input data and deep CNNs to

'**O**UR MACHINES DON'T HAVE ENOUGH COMMON SENSE TO CHANGE A SINGLE PIXEL WITHOUT LOSING THE ESSENCE OF ITS ARCHITECTURE, BECAUSE THE LEARNING MODEL IS FAR FROM PREDICTING AUTONOMOUSLY'

map observations from a large collection of training items. The max pooling process progressively reduces the spatial size of the representation to the amount of parameters in the network before the next step, keeping the essence of recurring patterns.

2. Up-projection operation for transposing the high-dimensional tensors into a flat depth map prediction. We can refer to this mechanism as a reverse mathematical logic of the convolution; We are using Backpropagation[12] logic to minimize errors. This is a mechanism to teach the system to find and predict patterns by itself by tuning the weights (filters, in our case), since the starting point of the neural network connection might be random. We start by changing the weights manually to show the system how it works, rearranging the strength of every connection in the network from the last fully connected layer all the way to the very beginning of the network, calibrating each weight with the overall error to the desired output. After repeating this procedure over and over again, the magic begins as the network starts to tune itself and even predict the output in a similar way to our own visual system, organising itself into hierarchical layers that seem to be able to represent ideas[13] and to adapt its filters.

[8] Girdhar, R. Fouhey, D.F., Rodriguez, M., and Gupta, A. (2016). 'Learning a Predictable and Generative Vector Representation for Objects', *CoRR*.

[9] He, K., Gkioxari, G., Dollar, P., and Gitshick, R. (2018). 'Mask R-CNN', Facebook AI Research.

[10] Eigen, D. and Fergus, R. (2015). 'Predicting Depth, Surface Normals and Semantic Labels with a Common Multi-Scale Convolutional Architecture', *IEEE International Conference onComputer Vision.*

[11] Saxena, A., Sun, M., and Ng, A.Y. (2009). 'Make3d: Learning 3d scene structure from a single still 'Image', *IEEE Trans, Pattern Anal, Mach*, 31(5) 824–840; See also Zhou, T., Brown, M., Snavely, N. and Lowe, D. (2017). 'Unsupervised Learning of Depth and Ego-Motion from Video', *CVPR*.

[12] Rumelhart, D.E., Hinton, G.E., and Williams, R.J. (1986). 'Learning representations by back-propagating errors', *Nature*, 323, 533-536.

[13] Somers, J. (2017). 'Is AI Riding a One-Trick Pony?', *MIT Technology Review.*

Figure 3. A screenshot from the Pulp Fiction augmented reality experiment. See released demo: https://goo.gl/1483YJ.

Our general framework is adapted from research out of Stanford[14] and implements a joint architecture. The second network, the segmentation, allows the user to pick only the desired subjects from the image, to be reconstructed as volumetric assets. Our model is a multi-scale deep network that first predicts a global output based on the entire image area, then refines it into a grayscale depth map. We started with RGB mapping but soon revised our approach to using a grey-map, which allows us to save the depth data into the alpha channel of a regular PNG image.

Data-driven approaches have been recently proposed as a solution to the daunting problem of recovering the shape of an object from just a single image for a given number of object categories. Our approach is more modular and not dependent on a specific input classification type. In our experiments, we show results for geometric prediction from colour images and moving images, from indoors to humans.

FORMULATION

We are building Volume through experimentation in order to explore different uses, platforms, and aesthetics that could drive new stories that we have not been able to tell before. As storytellers, our motivation is to challenge the proposed technique by applying it to human-centred content. This is on display in one of our experiments, using footage from *Pulp Fiction*'s iconic dance contest scene. The experience allows viewers to walk around holograms of John Travolta and Uma Thurman as they play out the scene using an augmented reality application. This experiment reconfirmed our assumptions about the impact of using archival and cultural materials to create new immersive experiences. That being said, it also highlighted some of the challenges in training diverse machine learning models to handle a wide range of cultural visual features: although the model offered by NYU Depth always works, it does not always work *well*. Its limitations are a reflection of the Neural Network concept in general. Our machines don't have enough common

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[14] Arora, Y., Patil, I., and Nguyen, T. (2016). 'Fully Convolutional Network for Depth Estimation and Semantic Segmentation', Stanford University.

[148]

sense to change a single pixel without losing the essence of its architecture, because the learning model is far from predicting autonomously[15]. When the model 'sees' unfamiliar shapes, it simply doesn't know how to analyse and predict their depth correctly.

Real drama occurs in human-centric stories. If we want to develop a creative tool for storytellers we need to create a way for machines to predict and understand human faces and movements. We started working on our own model, ready to be trained on human figures. At the same time, we understood the value of working with supervised machine learning models, and we are encouraged and motivated by the ability to ensure that the data is representative, diverse and accounts for bias and other social constructs. We are looking for ways to expand our model and train it on a diverse amount of inputs. We are currently developing our own synthetic, human-centric dataset that would provide the diversity we strive for. This is set to be released as an open-source resource for researchers to use. We are also looking into the ways that human interaction could assist in the 3D reconstruction process. By building simple tools for a human to correct the predictions made by the model, we can evaluate feedback and improve the machine learning model beyond what the data has to offer. Working with supervised models allows us to train with less data than if we were attempting to train one general unsupervised model familiar with all shapes and elements. As storytellers and volumetric cinematographers, we want to know which data is being used to be able to control the desired results. We want to augment the essence of the story, so we won't need the machine to 'imagine' what it sees in order to produce a depth representation of the creative 2D input.

In our approach, we aim, in a mere end-to-end fashion, to recover approximated 3D object reconstructions from as little as one image with minimal supervision. It is important to note that we are looking at un-supervised models and considering those models to predict un-classified and complex elements. Monodepth, led by researchers at University College London[16], provides some of the most intriguing research on this matter. Their results are impressive when predicting complex outdoor landscapes, but less so when predicting humans. Their network is built upon the logic of stereoscopic vision and tries to reconstruct a 3D space by exploiting perspective cues between pairs of rectified stereo images which share a known camera baseline.

'OUR APPROACH IS MOTIVATED MORE BY CINEMATIC AND VISUAL STORYTELLING THAN THE MATHEMATICAL LOGIC OF RECONSTRUCTING 3D WORLDS'
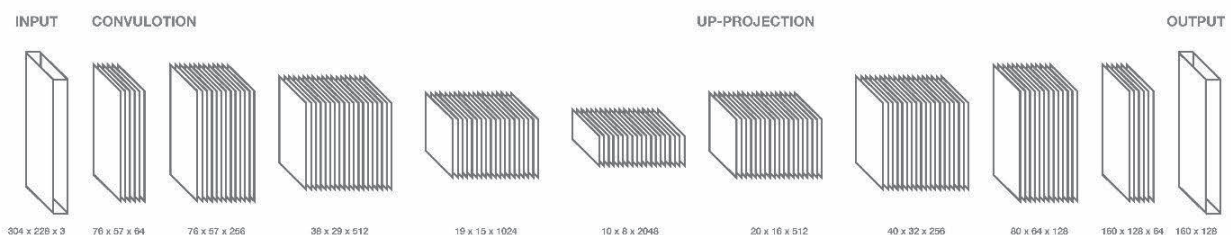

INPUT   CONVULOTION   UP-PROJECTION   OUTPUT

304 x 228 x 3   76 x 57 x 64   76 x 57 x 256   38 x 29 x 512   19 x 15 x 1024   10 x 8 x 2048   20 x 16 x 512   40 x 32 x 256   80 x 64 x 128   160 x 128 x 64   160 x 128

Figure 4. Illustration of Volume's architecture.

[15] LeCun, Y. (2017). *Future of Work*, MIT.
[16] Godard, C., Aodha, O.M., and Brostow, G.J. (2017). 'Unsupervised Monocular Depth Estimation with Left-Right Consistency', University College London.

Instead of using depth as data, their model is trained to synthesise depth.

CONCLUSIONS

We are implementing extraneous considerations into the hardwired and complex field of machine learning. Our approach is motivated more by cinematic and visual storytelling than the mathematical logic of reconstructing 3D worlds. We feel that this approach will benefit this tool and lead to a new and creative way of understanding the field's challenges.

Our experiments demonstrate that: (1) our representation is generative in 3D and (2) our representation is predictable from 2D, allowing us to predict the full 3D voxels of an object from an image (still or moving). We validated the capability of our approach with several experiments using the datasets described above. Our approach is not dependent on a specific input type. We show results for geometric prediction from colour images, depth images and shape completion from partial voxel grids.

Depth prediction is only the second stage for our software, after recording. Alongside machine learning research and development, we are also building forms to experiment with our technology. Through the website, anyone can upload a 2D image and view a volumetric reconstruction in real-time. The website is a first step in our ongoing mission to develop an easy-to-use interface that allows content creators to easily view, edit and export customised volumetric assets. Volume will adjust to the creative platform in use (e.g. Unity, webGL) with a standard output format. Our next task is to improve our human prediction. To do so we are currently running multiple experiments in order to test the system's blind spots. ∎

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Or Fleisher is a director, developer and creative technologist combining computer graphics, machine learning and immersive experience design. Or earned his BFA from Tel Aviv University and MPS from New York University. Or's work has been featured in festivals including *Cannes NEXT*, *SXSW*, *International Documentary Film Festival*, and *Seattle Transmedia*, and has won numerous international awards.
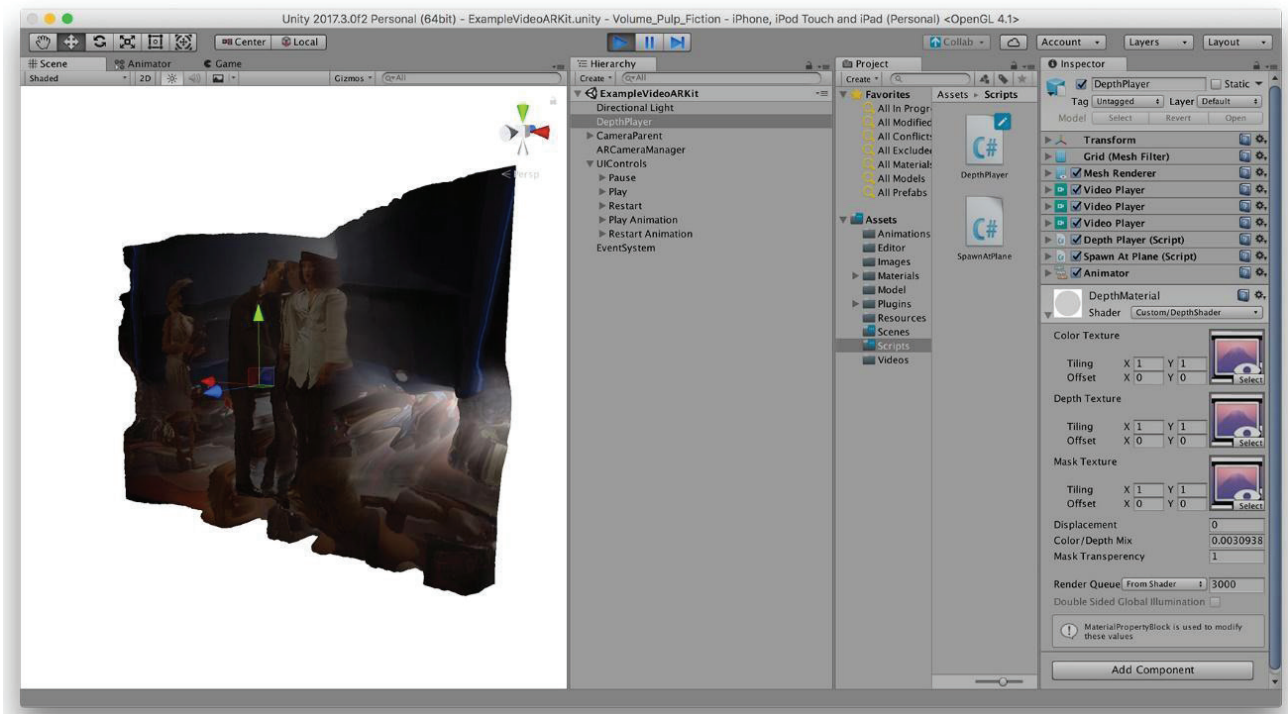
Figure 5. Unity screenshot of Volume's plugin for AR.

ROBOT

JOURNALISM:

THE DAMAGE DONE BY A METAPHOR

WORDS

CARL-GUSTAV LINDÉN
& LAURENCE DIERICKX

unmediated

'NEWS AUTOMATION, FAR FROM BEING A ROBOT, IS IN FACT MORE LIKE A WASHING MACHINE'

Here we go again: 'The introduction of AI and robots […] poses a serious threat to the professional future of human journalism'. So opines renowned Israeli scholar Noam Lemelshtrich in his fresh new book (in name, if not in content) *Robot Journalism: Can Human Journalism Survive?,* in which we are told that humans stand to be replaced by automatic processes and robots on a massive scale[1].

In early June 2018, the European Federation of Journalists organised a meeting in Lisbon with the title 'Robot journalism – should we be afraid?'. One of us was a member of the panel. The discussion followed a similar trajectory, with the main argument being that journalists faced an existential threat.

'Can human journalism survive?' Is that really the right question to be asking? As researchers in the field of news automation, we feel that the discussion has gone off track. We are particularly upset with the sloppy and detrimental use of the metaphor of 'robot journalism', both in the media and, as these examples show, among serious researchers and organisations representing journalists. To start with, there are no mechanical parts involved in news automation (a field sometimes labelled automated, algorithmic or programmatic journalism) that would justify using the word 'robot'. There is only software. At the same time, we see that the development of news automation has stagnated in a template-based, non-intelligent mode. There is no radical innovation taking place in what should be a path towards the future of smart augmented journalism. What we see is a continuation of the same kind of software use in the newsroom that has been in place for decades. That is the very thing we worry about.

The empirical foundation of our paper is a quantitative survey of the occurrence of the term 'robot journalism' in a corpus of 300 news articles in French and English over the period between 2010-2017. In those seven years, the metaphor saw massive use among journalists. In more than three out of four analysed headlines, the term 'robot journalism' was employed, which was a rate far higher than similar – and more specific – terms like 'artificial intelligence', 'algorithm' or 'software' (around ten percent).

Indeed, the analysis shows that journalists remain mostly neutral when they report on news automation (an average of 63%), while in slightly less than twenty percent of the cases the same journalists positioned themselves against 'the machine'. By contrast, an overall positive tone was found in slightly less than twenty percent of the cases. Interestingly, we also noted differences between French journalists, who appeared more frightened by the future of the profession, and English journalists, who appeared more steadfast and confident about the future of journalism. Still, these journalists clearly do share common concerns, such as how to figure out the relationship – or competition – between man and machine, the fear of losing their job, or the fear of losing their professional identity.

Buttressing our view that 'robot journalism' is an inaccurate and damaging metaphor, we have also turned to discussions with providers of Natural Language Generation (NLG) services in Europe and the United States. Claude de Loupy, CEO of French company Syllabs, for one, says he does not like the metaphor because it does not represent his software: '(It) is inappropriate. This is not 'journalism'. Those systems are not doing investigative and they don't interview people'[2]. De Loupy further notes that Syllabs' software performs functions that were simply not possible before, and that he therefore prefers to talk of *automated writing*. Similarly, our discussions with journalists on the topic of news automation at meetings such as the one in Lisbon, or in training sessions we have conducted, only strengthen our conviction.

[1] Lemelshtrich, L.N. (2018). *Robot Journalism: Can Human Journalism Survive?* Singapore: World Scientific.

[2] See: Didier, I. and Raynaud, P. (2018). 'Production automatique de textes: l'IA au service des journalistes', INA Global: Full text at www.inaglobal.fr/numerique/article/production-automatique-de-textes-l-ia-au-service-des-journalistes-10092.

The metaphor of 'robot journalism' is reinforced by a strong visual component. On the cover of Lemelshtrich's new book, a reporter at the fictional *Robot Times* works on a story using a typewriter, while smoking his pipe. Everywhere we see similar pictures depicting robots writing on keyboards, sometimes wearing a hat with the word 'Press' plastered on the front. Illustrators, together with journalists, editors, and researchers have by now established a basic heuristic, a mental picture of an evolving field as radical disruption. By framing news automation as a process by which robots are coming to take the jobs of everyday journalists, people have managed to destroy, or at least delay, a move towards a future of augmented journalism, where smart machines play a supportive role and allow reporters to do their jobs *better*.

'CONTENT ALGORITHMS MUST BE CAREFULLY CONTROLLED AND REGULATED: NOT BY GOVERNMENTS BUT BY TRAINED JOURNALISTS'

For a start, it would be of great help if we could talk about augmented intelligence instead of artificial intelligence. News automation is an emergent trend in ICT development that carries transformative potential in and of itself, but even more so as a complement to solid journalistic work. Our collective understanding is not helped by the use of a damaging metaphor. We have heard otherwise smart people admit to knowing this is the case, while others claim to tag their articles with 'robot journalism' just to make sure they turn up in searches on, for instance, Google Scholar or Scopus. To us, this is a cynical approach to addressing issues of importance to the future of journalism.

Our talks with representatives from service providers of news automation tools, who have in turn played lead roles in negotiations with media companies, paint a depressing picture of the state of innovation at some media companies. They are unable to make decisions, have no financial resources, are not prepared to invest in new technology, are always looking for the low-hanging fruit, but are content in the knowledge that their peers are not able to make investments either. Few media companies have invested in NLG technologies simply because it can come with considerable development, training and implementation costs. On the whole, media companies are way behind in the race towards augmented intelligence. In a time when they need desperately to invest resources, they are holding back.

It is no wonder that software companies are happy with the free media attention surrounding 'robot journalism', as they are principally looking to customers in the e-commerce or financial sectors. With media coverage comes free publicity, all of which is beneficial for marketing towards other potential customers.

Still, the benefits and affordances of augmented intelligence for journalists are self-evident, at least for publishers at-scale. In the case of French newspaper Le Monde, Luc Bronner has underlined that the automation of election results has permitted their teams to grow the number of pages on the website, which in turn is good for SEO and advertising revenues (meaning more page views): 'Let's also admit that these texts are more easily identifiable by search engines: they give more chance to distant readers of Le Monde to find us – a key stake for all the media in France and in the world'.[3]

For press agencies, where NLG is more widely used, the incentive is to provide more content and better media coverage. The opportunity to give journalists new tools in a world full of data is not the main motivation but there are exceptions; at Belgian company Mediafin, for example, work is underway to develop software designed specifically for financial journalists, as well as to reinforce paid services to readers.

As for journalists, many are more than happy to dismiss the potential of news automation. The metaphor of the robot feeds into a fragile context in which journalists already feel threatened. At the same time, many functions in the newsroom have long been automated, beginning with word processing and photo editing. Walk in to a television studio and be amazed by the level of automation. In reality, the latest development should be regarded as just another step in the newsroom's advancement of human-computer interaction. There are no signs that automation has taken away any journalists' jobs; instead, journalists are performing tasks that previously were assigned to non-editorial specialists, such as typesetters, telephone operators, and darkroom assistants, which have all but disappeared from the editorial offices.

Should we worry about the future of human journalism? We could start by discussing what makes journalism human. Anxieties around automation or computation more generally are nothing new: Aristotle, Queen Elizabeth I, the Luddites, James Joyce and John Maynard Keynes were all concerned with the impact of technology on employment.

[3] Bronner, L. (2015). 'Des robots au « Monde » pendant les élections départementales ? Oui… et non', Le Monde Blogs. Full text at www.makingof.blog.lemonde.fr/2015/03/23/des-robots-au-monde-pendant-les-elections-departementales-oui-et-non/.

Automation anxiety which manifests as worry over the surveillance capacities of smart machines, or their ability to be used as a tool of coercion and control we certainly understand. These concerns are justified as the potential threats are real. However, these should be kept separate from the 'jobs lost' debate.

Our response is to counter with another metaphor, perhaps equally bad, but at least with more relevance for the future of human journalism: News automation, far from being a robot, is in fact more like a washing machine. Journalists are in charge of sorting the dirty laundry (i.e. data), of choosing the right washing programme (i.e. what is the narrative) and pushing the button (i.e. deciding on the medium and timing of the story). The washing machine metaphor is useful because it highlights that one of the weakest parts of news automation is the accessibility and quality of the data that feeds the algorithms.

The most important task is to make sure that journalists are in charge of the algorithms producing news. They have expertise in their domain, they know how to deal with it. As the co-founder and CEO of Flipboard underlines: 'Content algorithms must be carefully controlled and regulated: Not by governments but by trained journalists'. We believe that in alienating journalists from NLG tools for producing automated news we risk going in the opposite direction, as other professionals will create systems without inbuilt journalistic ethics and judgement. News automation can and will help media companies to accomplish things that journalists cannot or do not want to do. While the use of the metaphor might partially be explained by broader societal illiteracies toward science, math and technology, this is no excuse. The damage done by the metaphor of 'robot journalism' cannot be overstated. Please stop using it. ■

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