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Radical Online Video

YouTube, video activism and social movement media practices

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Abstract

This thesis explores contemporary modes of video activism for a radical politics of the Left. It offers an analytical contribution to media and communication that promotes an understanding of radical online video as modes of political engagement in contemporary online environments.

By focusing on YouTube as one of the most prevalent spaces in which radical video is screened and experienced today, the platform is considered emblematic of an ongoing reorganisation of political space and mediated modes of political engagement in contemporary liberal democracies. As an empirical entry point, YouTube provides a window onto examining the radical video practices emerging in relation to three recent political mobilisations in Europe:

1. The European Social Forum in Malmoe in 2008

2. The alternative COP15 climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009

3. The G20 counter-summit in London in 2009

As three distinct, yet related protest events, these cases provide significant examples of the broad social movement mobilisations that over the past decade have sought to render the consequences of neoliberal politics and governance a visible social problem, and put Left alternatives on the political and public agenda. Through six articles based on the three case studies, this compilation thesis examines the dualities and tensions that characterise video activism on this political vector today. It describes and highlights the texts and contexts of video activism, in a time when the longstanding tradition of working with the power of the image in political portrayal and argument is increasingly reallocated to the mechanisms of social networking and corporate control in contemporary online environments.

Part I of this thesis sets the scene by establishing the terrain of the research. As an initial analytical effort, this chapter proposes a typology for understanding radical

online video as 'political mash-up genres', emerging in the context of an increasingly complex set of media practices and circuits across intertwined and hybrid communication networks. This chapter further extends the terms of analysis by offering an account of the history of video activism and suggests how an analysis of historical modes of video activism may help contextualise and understand social movement media practices today.

The six empirical articles account for Part II of the thesis. Each on its own terms, the articles offer empirical contributions that promote an understanding of the various ways 'the political' is on display and radical politics are being forged on YouTube. In a dual vein of analytical enquiry, the articles examine radical online video as a range of media forms for political argument and portrayal and interrogate the possibilities and constraints offered by the 'architecture of participation' on YouTube to the specific groups and struggles represented in the three case studies. In doing so, the articles identify and analyse a set of tensions and dualities that characterise the ways in which individual and collective actors engage in racial video practice, through media forms that straddle the discursive registers of fact and fiction, art and document, information and entertainment, politics and popular culture. Together, the articles give shape to a range of social movement media practices across a historical, technological, political and aesthetic-discursive range.

In the concluding considerations of Part III, I return to the issue of historical contexts to illustrate how close comparative attention to historical modes of video activism can help us understand the complexities and contingencies of online video recruited for radical politics today. The analysis exhibits how contemporary modes of video activism are characterised by practices in which the old and the new, the past and the present, clearly overlap. While we may recognise the incentives and dynamics behind contemporary video activism as well known to the trajectory of Left thinking and action, these insights are suggestive of how such media practices are re-organised and refocused in keeping with the emergence of new means of, and arenas for, political engagement.

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Content

Part I: Establishing the terrain of the research

INTRODUCTION

This thesis has been written in the midst of a complex series of events around the world in which online media have been hailed as catalysts of rapid political mobilisations and radical change. As video documentation from Athens and Tahrir square to Zuccotti Park, Madrid and London began to proliferate unprecedentedly in online spaces, we found ourselves enmeshed in an immense battle of images, bolstering longstanding concerns about the politics of representation. In this extended moment, citizens, activists and filmmakers alike are trying to document these events as they unfold, attempting to create their narratives and intervene in the construction of their history. Calls are being made to produce spaces and archives that will connect historical and ongoing struggles: mediated spaces, media practices and scholarship that reject a 'year zero' approach and instead work to reinstall the historical and socio-political specificity of the events, while maintaining that they should not be written off as isolated or regionalised phenomena.

While populations in the Arab world are fighting for democracy and democratic rights, in Europe and the Western-liberal context of established democracies, the very notion of democracy (its ethos, institutions and practices) is increasingly challenged and undermined by mechanisms of neoliberalism (see e.g. Couldry 2010; Dahlgren, 2009; Dean, 2009; Rosanvallon, 2008; Sandel, 2011). In Europe, the wave of protests of the past two decades, although heterogeneous and multi-directional in nature, can be seen to coalesce around a common critique of neoliberalism as a monolithic economic paradigm, as well as a cultural motif shaping all aspects of society. In a series of large-scale mobilisations of civil society, spanning from the 'alter-globalisation' protests of the late 1990s over the counter-summits of the 2000s and encompassing this past year's austerity protests and Occupy movements, citizens are contesting the ways in which normative frameworks of justice and social equality are eroded by market fundamentalism, the dynamics of neoliberal globalisation, and austerity measures.

In Western democracies, the doctrine of neoliberalism increasingly permeates and puts a price tag on all aspects of human life, including our possibilities of politically engaging with and deliberating on alternative political horizons and visions of the good society (Couldry, 2010, 2012; Sandel, 2011). Citizens increasingly experience a lack of accountable political systems, which undermines the efficacy and meaningfulness of participating in institutional democracy (Harvey, 2012). As a consequence, they increasingly turn to alternative, non-institutional modes of engaging in politics in order to voice their distrust and dismay. In so doing, they contribute to what Rosanvallon terms "counter-democracy", the process whereby

citizens, in various constellations, exercise indirect democratic power outside the formal political system (Rosanvallon, 2008).

In these 'years of protest' as some observers have labelled them, notions such as 'Facebook-politics', 'YouTube democracy', 'Twitter revolutions' and 'Blackberry riots' have been fervently used to denote the use of social media in various forms of political action. Some of the discussions are haunted by assumptions of a direct causal relation between technology, the expansion of access to information, and democratic change (for various versions of this critique see e.g. Aouragh, 2012; Christensen, 2011; Cottle, 2011; Fenton, 2012). Further, the debates have revealed a certain degree of disciplinary 'silo-thinking' among the already established frameworks to hand for understanding and critically questioning the interplay of media and political engagement. In the wake of these waves of protest and popular dissent, important questions arise and demand our attention. These are critical and sobering questions concerning the contexts and possibilities of activist media, and online media more generally, begging to be posed in ways that demonstrate sensibility towards the broader historical trajectory into which events inscribe themselves.

To scholars who see a continuity and revival of 'old' Left-wing projects and concerns in, for example, the Occupy movement, the widespread austerity protests across Europe and current waves of transnational climate change activism, this complex historical moment demands a pause to evaluate the struggles of radical Left politics and contemplate how previous projects and experiences may help us understand and sustain current events. We need to make this intervention not because we have "seen all this before", as some veterans might be tempted to point out, but because history should be recovered usefully and in ways that we can learn from. By highlighting what is similar and what is different, we elucidate what the best political path may be in the present circumstances.

It has been interesting to witness how, seemingly overnight, in the wake of the hype of the past couple of years about the 'Twitter revolution' and 'YouTube politics', issues of the interfaces between media and social movement politics were transformed from an object of analysis in a niche area of research by a relatively small group of scholars to a popular topic of dinner-table conversations and something everyone everywhere had an opinion about. Similarly, the timespan from the first waves of the global financial meltdown in 2008 to early 2012, during which this thesis has been written, would become a period in which anti-capitalism and Left-wing analysis and action were transformed from pejorative labels for marginalised and chastened groups to the heart of debates which began to emerge in mainstream media discourse about alternatives to the global capitalist system and unregulated markets. That said, the vast majority of these political movements, while radical in their approaches and visions, are ultimately more reformist than revolutionary. That is, they are calling for fundamental changes in how economic life operates, and how the political system

functions – and are thus 'radical' – but overwhelmingly are not encouraging people to use violence or to 'overthrow the system'. Rather, they manifest a commitment to democratic principles.

This thesis is not about 'media revolutions' or the uses of media technologies in recent popular revolts to overthrow repressive regimes. It does, however, open the door to a debate about what words such as 'revolutionary' and 'revolution' would mean in a European or Western-liberal context. How would these translate into meaningful concepts in the context of the networked politics of social movements in online environments? What kinds of change would be considered revolutionary? Furthermore, I want to approach this area from an angle much more specific than the broad issues of the interplay between media and politics raised above. Within the wide repertoire of media recruited for political activism, my concern is with *video* committed to the explicitly political purpose of Left thinking and action. With this thesis, I want to contribute to an understanding of what typifies video activism in today's networked online media environment, what fosters and encumbers its practices. Such an analysis will help us to better understand the nature of contemporary radical politics and the broad changes that liberal democracies are going through, as well as the evolving character of the media environment in the context of these processes.

Consequently, my main concern is with the *practices of radical video* and *the role of YouTube in contemporary forms of video activism for a radical politics of the Left*. With YouTube offering an empirical window onto the broader debate about the relationship between online media and political practices, this thesis is built from three distinct case studies of recent political mobilisations in Europe. By taking into account the specificity of the socio-political contexts of these events, and of the actions and actors studied, I wish to unpack and contextualise some of the uncritical assumptions and techno-deterministic beliefs currently circulating in the study of political communication and beyond.

The short story of a long past

One important dimension of such a critical and contextualised intervention is the *historical context* of radical media. Debates on and academic disputes over the role of media in radical politics evidently predate these past years' hyperbolic claims made to a relation between social media, political upheaval and democratic change. While I take a specific interest in debates concerning video and modalities of audio-visuality, I want to position these analytical concerns within some of the broader issues in the area of radical media, which emerged prior to and go beyond visual media. As an initial step, I shall therefore briefly sketch out some of the seminal events and

developments in visual media technology that prefigured and paved the road to the kinds of video activism we see emerging in contemporary online environments.

In the late 1990's as the web radically democratised access to production, consumption and distribution of video, many launched themselves into video and filmmaking in order to document and challenge prevailing social ills and power structures (Gregory et al., 2005). In this period of increasingly globalised media structures and infrastructure, a number of counter-networks were set up among transnational groups of Left-wing activists. Most notably, Indymedia was born out of the collective project, by a broad transnational coalition of activists, networks, organisations and movements, of providing independent coverage of the shutdown of the WTO ministerial meeting in Seattle in 1999. In the following years, many similar alternative media projects would follow in connection with the mass protests and economic counter-summits in Genoa, Prague, Gothenburg, Rostock and Toronto and elsewhere. Such events were, and continue to be, covered at a grassroots level by provisional networks[1].

Alongside these short-lived visual media networks, a number of more established video activist organisations emerged or reinvented themselves after the long period of silence in Left social critique in the 1980s and early 1990s[2]. These media networks provided people dispersed across the world with a place to turn to for alternative news reporting of the demonstrations against neoliberal globalisation. The importance of such alternative coverage endures, as mainstream media have proved prone to framing Left-wing activism as the acts of violent rioters looting the streets. Efforts to contemplate, mobilise for, document and raise awareness of these decentralised, but 'spectacular' forms of protest event were part of what brought about the rapid growth of video activism in the late 1990s (Harding, 2001). A new generation of media activists thus (more or less knowingly) furthered a time-honoured tradition including the social-realist documentaries of the 1930s, the experimental projects of *cinéma vérité* in the 1960s and the 'third cinema' of indigenous movements in the 1970s, as well as a variety of other community and alternative media movements of the 1980s and early 1990s (Gregory et al., 2005).

When YouTube came along in the mid 2000s - with it came a range of social media that scholars have considered to indicate a second wave or version of the internet and therefore designated as Web 2.0. With the advent of YouTube, alternative video

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[1] One such example of a provisional broadcasting site is the G8-TV.org, which was created for the G8 counter-summit in Germany in 2007.

[2] In the UK alone, several video activist organisations born out of this period of radicalisation are still active (e.g. VisiononTV and Reel News in London, SchMovies in Brighton, and Camcorder Guerrillas in Glasgow (Presence, 2012).

cultures began to involve not only techno-geeks and social activists, but a potpourri of amateur videographers, video diarists, video artists, self-proclaimed documentary filmmakers and individuals uploading seemingly raw or roughly edited cell-phone footage. Prior to the existence of YouTube, it was difficult to upload and watch video online. In this manner, much like the way in which technological development in the late 1960s had put the power of the moving image into the hands of the 'ordinary user' with the handheld camcorder (see e.g. Boyle, 1995; Hill, 1995; Faber, 2007), the democratization of access to visual media took a new turn with the rapid growth and popularisation of online video-sharing on YouTube and beyond.

Political organisations and activist networks were quick to turn to YouTube, Facebook, MySpace and later Twitter for the quick and cost-free distribution of their material. In so doing, they left Indymedia and similar non-profit media spaces empty at the expense of these corporate-run platforms. Today, virtually all alternative media organisations and video collectives have a YouTube channel[3].

YouTube and political communication

Scholars examining YouTube's contribution to political communication and discourse have so far focused primarily on how the platform has become a potent campaign tool for politicians and political parties (see e.g. Gibson, 2011; Gueorguieva, 2008). Others have looked at how YouTube video blogging and commenting have become popular spaces for more subtle modes of political expression anchored in the everyday life of ordinary people (Burgess and Green, 2008; Lange, 2011; Van Zoonen et al., 2010; Wesch, 2009). Meanwhile less attention has been paid to the platform as an increasingly popular space for political activism in various forms. From the perspective of radical politics, YouTube is an interesting case in that it is emblematic of an ongoing reorganisation of political space and exhibits the changing modes of political engagement in contemporary liberal democracies. To scholars, it marks a shift in the mediated arenas we should be looking in for modes of political engagement emerging at the margins of the

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3 For a few examples of video collectives now streaming old 8 mm and 16 mm film on YouTube, see Peoples Video Network on http://www.youtube.com/user/peoplesvideo, Deep Dish TV on http://www.youtube.com/user/DeepDishTV, The Media Burn Archive by Tom Weinberg, on of the founders of the San Francisco-based video collective TVTV (Top Value Television) on http://www.youtube.com/user/MediaBurnArchive and many more. For examples of contemporary alternative media networks that make use of YouTube, see e.g. Indymedia on http://www.youtube.com/user/IndymediaPresents or http://www.youtube.com/user/PostFactMedia and Undercurrent on http://www.youtube.com/user/visiontontv

dominant public sphere (e.g. Bennett, 2005; Coleman, 2006; Graham, 2008; McChesney, 2007). With still more activists, groups and social movement organisations using social media as arenas for politics, key activities of political activists have to some extent shifted increasingly from non-profit, independent media environments labelled interchangeably 'alternative' (Atton, 2002, 2007) 'independent' (e.g. Rodriguez, 2001), 'radical' (Downing, 2000) or 'small' media (Chanan, 2011) to corporate-run and commercialised spaces (Fenton and Barassi, 2011; Gregory, 2010). Activists use YouTube not only as an archive for the systematic documentation of direct actions, political happenings, demonstrations and police confrontations, but also as a venue for mobilising and building support prior to key protest events. Today, YouTube, for better or worse, forms part of the communicative platform and media repertoire of many political groups – radicals as well as moderates.

There is generally little media strategy in the use of YouTube for political activism. Rather, the abundance of radical videos circulating on its pages could be considered an expression of how the site provides a cost-free and 'handy' platform ideal for staging spectacular events and messages in an age of media saturation and post-visibility (Juhasz, 2008). In a contemporary media environment where everyone struggles to gain visibility (Chouliaraki, 2010; Vestergaard, 2008; Thompson, 2005), YouTube provides the perfect tool for channelling the 'spectacular' and potentially reaching unprecedentedly wide audiences. The promise of 'broadcasting yourself' on YouTube is obviously controversial and burdened by the bias of a pseudo-democratic marketing discourse. While the optimistic vision of the democratic internet still persists in the case of YouTube, it is important not to lose sight of the legal and economic forces at play in the hegemonic struggle between an amateur-led alternative mediascape and a professional-led, institution-driven traditional mediascape which is taking place on this platform (Andrejevic, 2009; Kim, 2012). The constraints and conflicts occurring in relation to issues of control and ownership of corporate media, on the one hand, and the struggles for visibility and voice in radical politics, on the other, are addressed throughout this thesis.

Aim and research questions

Against this backdrop, the thesis contributes to the growing field of research bridging the sociology of media and communication and social movement studies in order to examine the variety and complexities of media practices among political activists and actors. I want to make a contribution to this nexus of research by focusing specifically on contemporary types of video recruited by Left-wing politics. Further, I want this contribution to promote an understanding of the characteristics of video activism on this political vector today, as the long tradition of working with the power of the image in political portrayal and argument is increasingly reallocated to online

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environments and the mechanisms of social networking in corporate online spaces. Hence, the aim of the thesis is to examine how we may understand the practices of radical online video as modes of political engagement and the role of YouTube in contemporary forms of video activism for a radical politics of the Left. Such an analysis is important for an understanding of how media and communication practices enable possibilities for political engagement. As a prism for addressing and illustrating the broader transformation that notions of democracy and political engagement are going through, such an analysis highlights the changing conditions for politics and for being political today.

Three recent mobilisations in Europe form the backbone of the case studies that constitute the empirical material of the thesis:

1. The European Social Forum in Malmoe in 2008

2. The alternative COP15 climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009

3. The G20 counter-summit in London in 2009

These three mobilisations are significant examples of political struggles that sought to render the consequences of neoliberal politics and governance a visible social problem and put Left alternatives on the political and public agenda. They provide windows onto the actual physical spaces of interaction and intervention in which activists convene and translate abstract visions of an alternative political imaginary of Left politics into concrete goals, campaigns and alliances. The three cases provide rich examples of the role of media practices in rethinking and facilitating a radical politics of the Left. They demonstrate the contingencies of and the interplay between spaces in which media work to mobilise for, document and construct the history of certain political events and the broader political struggles they feed into. They are also valuable cases through which to examine the importance of audio-visual modes of engaging with radical politics. They provide rich examples of how video practices and online mediation work to enhance political engagement both within and beyond online environments. The two central research questions driving the thesis, and based upon the three case studies, are:

- *How can we understand radical online video as modes of political engagement in contemporary online environments?*

- *How does YouTube promote and encumber contemporary forms of video activism for a radical politics of the Left?*

The first research question reflects my concern with the particular properties of video, conceived as a set of practices and ethical frameworks and as a range of aesthetic forms and repertoires of argument that are distinctive to videos recruited for a Left political imagery. It focuses attention on activists' modes of engaging with radical video to

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mobilise and sustain support, and on the aesthetic-discursive range they draw upon in doing this.

The second question indicates analytical concern with issues of online mediation and the political economy of social media, and with the possibilities and constraints that a platform such as YouTube offers to the media practices of the specific groups and networks studied. Further, this analytical vein pursues questions of how YouTube works as a cultural archive storing and constructing the history and vernacular memory of political struggles. This also entails raising questions of how the temporality of circulation and the political economy of YouTube shape the kinds of public convened around the videos.

Each empirical article can be understood as containing a separate analytical framework and set of research questions. At the same time, each article responds to these two overarching research questions and, in its own distinctive way, allows me to unpack this broad terrain of interest. The two main research questions thus reflect the dual focus running through the analytical contribution to this thesis. On the one hand, I work with thick analyses and close reading of a limited number of video 'texts', and, on the other, I combine these efforts with an analytical thread of examining how YouTube as a technology and an infrastructure presents, stores and archives these videos, as well as how the architecture of the platform facilitates participation and impacts upon the ways in which the videos are debated and watched. In practice, this means that the textual analyses of the videos are combined with enquiries into how digital media technologies condition or "patron" the discourses and interactions under study (Burgess and Green, 2008: 1).

This dual articulation of the research focus and questions is best understood with reference to the concept of *mediation.* As a central theoretical starting point for this research, mediation indicates that which is produced through *media practice* and is both an artefact and a communicative event (Corner, 2011). According to Corner (2011: 7) "mediation is used broadly to indicate the practices, process and products of using media systems to craft and distribute different kinds of communicative performance or artefacts". The concept of mediation thus serves as a theoretical orientation for exploring media *practices* – the things people do with media – as processes enabled and conditioned by the multiple and complex interfaces between technology, institutions and representations (Couldry, 2004, 2012). Cementing the link between practice and mediation, Silverstone (2007: 42) argues that "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 narratives and spectacles, as well as crucially, those who receive them".

In order to pursue these questions, a range of theoretical perspectives is engaged and the thesis consequently cuts across different areas and arguments. While these are accounted for in more detail in the following sections, in auditing the theoretical

framework of the thesis, a first outline of the four areas in which this thesis makes a contribution is useful at this stage. Rather than a prioritised order of focal areas, this initial cataloguing should be seen as a step-by-step focalisation moving from the general to the particular in increasingly focused frames in which the thesis makes a contribution.

First, the thesis contributes to a deepened understanding of the ongoing transformation of both the means and the meaning of being political (Fenton, 2012). It subscribes and contributes to research concerning *mediated modes of political engagement and citizenship.* In this sense, the thesis contributes to an understanding of the dimensions of 'the political' that emerge beyond the confines of party politics. The kind of radical politics and modes of political engagement to which attention is given in the present research exemplify how people look for ways to make political impact beyond the electoral process. In this manner, I inscribe the research into the growing body of literature that attempts to grasp the political significance of those "fuzzy or ambiguous phenomena, grounded in civil society and the life world of 'ordinary' citizens" (Livingstone, 2005: 32). In so doing, the thesis draws upon and responds to contemporary debates about the shift in the "who, what and where of participation towards non-institutional forms of engagement" (Norris, 2002; see also Couldry, 2012).

Second, the thesis makes a contribution to the research area dedicated to *new social movements and social movement media.* It demonstrates how the media practices of social movement actors are apt sites for studying how activists and activist networks on the Left in Europe tap into the possibilities offered by social media for promoting radical politics and mobilising direct action.

Third, it engages with the theoretical frameworks concerned with *social media and YouTube in particular.* It contributes to an understanding of the ways in which this particular platform and its 'architecture of participation' impinge upon the practices of radical video: how these are watched, shared, circulated, debated, commented upon, remixed and (de)contextualised.

Fourth, the thesis makes a specific contribution to *the theories and practices of video activism* in the distinct context of radical politics on the Left. It does so by directing analytical attention to the discourses, shared ethics and aesthetic forms specific to video and recruited for a radical Left politics. It combines the analysis of aesthetic forms and their claims to truth and (historical and contemporary) visual evidence with questions of how these dimensions of video activism in turn translate into an online context when put into circulation on YouTube. It is on this last level of the analysis that I consider the thesis to make a unique contribution to knowledge.

Radical politics and radical video

Two central notions deserve a more detailed mention, due to their conceptual slippage. In the following, I broach a discussion of what I mean to designate and describe when situating the study of mediated political activism under the broad banner of *radical politics* and framing the video practices recruited for such political purposes and imaginaries as *radical video*.

First, a useful distinction can be made between the broad framework of non-institutional politics[4], on the one hand, and the more narrowly conceived notion of radical politics, on the other. The broad notion of non-institutional politics can usefully be seen as a hub for the various forms of politics that develop outside parliamentary systems as a consequence of how these systems less and less evoke popular trust and steadily become depoliticised via mechanisms of neoliberalism (Rosanvallon, 2008). Non-institutional politics are not progressive *per se*. Nor are they immune to anti-democratic currents or to populism. Therefore, by situating the notion of radical politics at the heart of the research, I also mean to indicate a clear distinction Left and conservative modes of non-institutional politics in order largely to exclude this latter category from the area of interest of this thesis.

Within the broader framework of non-institutional politics, I consider radical politics to designate the democratic activity of Left movements and actors. This discussion prompts me to introduce the notions of counter-democracy (Rosanvallon, 2008) and radical democracy (Mouffe, 2001, 2005) as two central elements in the understanding of 'the political' guiding this thesis. These horizons of political theory emphasise how people are increasingly refocusing their political attention and engagement beyond formal electoral politics in essentially conflictual, agnostic ways. From this vantage point, 'the political' is rooted in the socio-cultural contexts of people's everyday lives and participation in democracy and is seen to move beyond the minimum procedures of democracy such as voting. How and to what ends these theoretical vectors are applied and combined is developed in more detail in the theory section (commencing on page 39).

The framework of radical politics may help to explain and bring into relief the surge in protest politics, new social movements and online activism in Western democracies in the past two decades. Tracing these political expressions back a few years in time, a series of large mobilisations and protest events in the mid and late 1990s have been widely celebrated as marking a renewal of alternative-Left politics. Among these, the early adoption of the internet by the indigenous Zapatista (EZLN) movement in the

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[4] Other synonymous designations for this vector, some of which have been used in the articles, are extra-parliamentarian politics, informal politics, new politics and alternative politics.

Chiapas region of Mexico and the iconic mobilisations in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) ministerial meeting were some of the first examples of coordinated activism emerging in transnational networks that increasingly adapted their actions and communication infrastructure to the online technologies emerging at the time. Since then, an abundant body of literature has emerged on how more or less closely-knit Left-wing groups, organisations and networks relate to and make use of the new digital tools and platforms available to them.

This literature offers an equally abundant vocabulary, using different umbrella terms to designate and describe the activities, actions and practices of Left-wing politics emerging out-side the parliamentary system. Giving flavour to the wealth of this conceptual landscape, some examples include 'the movement of the Global Left' (de Sousa Santos, 2006), 'the alter globalisation movement' (Dahlgren, 2003; 2009), 'the agitated Left' (Rosanvallon, 2008), 'the global justice movement' (della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; della Porta and Diani, 2011), 'the movement against corporate globalisation' (Juris, 2005). While labels may change and go out of fashion, the causes and political arguments raised by activists and organisations on the radical Left remain relatively stable (Munck, 2007). These include, but are not limited to, issues of corporate power, labour conflicts, consumerism, the environment, human rights and the implications of the process of globalisation for all of these areas (Eschule, 2004).

The various kinds of groups and activists engaged in these issues cover a broad ideological spectrum. Some are more radical than others and subscribe to more disruptive modes of action. Both poles within this spectrum are represented by the various actors and events included in this research. Hence, as an object of study, this is a messy, sometimes contradictory landscape of individuals, groups, networks and organisations (Dahlgren, 2003). As a shorthand term and analytical entrance point, the global justice movement (for which a number of obituaries have been written) is indeed a contested starting point for the analysis and discussion of contemporary forms of Left thinking and action. However, this thesis demonstrates how the actors scrutinized in the different case studies share a strong rejection of exploitative corporate globalisation and unaccountable global institutions of power.

These individuals and groups maintain that they do not oppose globalisation in terms of the intensification of cultural exchanges, or of the expansion of supranational government structures. What they object to is the specifically neoliberal policies led by international institutions and national governments (della Porta and Tarrow, 2006: 8). Such groups and networks are united by a shared perception of injustice, rather than necessarily agreeing on the political means and interventions required to remedy these injustices. Further, the prismatic nature of these actors and the atomised expressions of social activism, with a lack of an organised entity, can fruitfully be seen

to reflect the tension and power dynamics between individual and collective modes of action and agency in contemporary forms of social movement politics. This thesis deals specifically with the political actors on this vector. In the following, I consider the broad notion of *radical politics* to provide these diverse worlds and practices with the common language and intellectual coherence required in order to describe the manifold modes of political intervention and activity exhibited by political activists engaged in protest movements against neoliberal globalisation and its consequences for social equality, the environment and human rights across the globe.

The second key concept, radical video, needs a brief introduction and clarification. Although dispersed and diverse in their expressions, the online videos scrutinised in this thesis are all understood to form part of a larger set of political practices situated within the porous boundaries of the prismatic social movement described above. The diversity of the conceptual framework used to describe Left-wing activism and movements is mirrored in the specific field of radical video, which is equally marked by a plentiful, somewhat discordant vocabulary across the various fields and disciplines committed to its practices and theories. This is reflected in the inconsistency of labels applied to such types of video in the various articles. Indeed when reading the articles, the reader will encounter a striking variety of terms applied to the object of analysis in the different empirical studies. While this irregularity testifies to the processual nature of a compilation thesis, the contextualising chapter will introduce the notion of *radical online video* as a label for identifying video 'of a similar kind'. In this way I posit that the level of stability required for such an exercise can admit a considerable degree of contingency and variation. By this token, radical online video serves as a unifying concept for the thesis as a whole, marrying the multiple designations used inconsistently within and among the various articles. A more detailed discussion of the diversity of this conceptual framework is taken up in a later Section (p. 59 onwards), where I chart the different disciplines and areas committed to the theories and practices of video activism.

The structure and elements of the compilation thesis

The thesis is built around a compilation format comprising six articles and a contextualising chapter spilt into two main sections, introducing and contextualising the findings of the empirical articles. The purpose of this contextualising chapter is three-fold. First, it serves to present, interweave and contextualise the findings of the studies conducted. It attempts to present the fine textures of the analyses, stressing their distinctiveness and the specificity of the findings of each one in terms of what YouTube means to different groups of people. I do this before broadening the discussion to propose a set of ideas for how we may understand YouTube and its relation to contemporary modes of video activism. Further, the contextualising chapter proposes a typology indicating some of the stylistic genres and aesthetic forms

of online radical video currently in circulation and including insights into modes of appropriation by users.

Secondly, this two-part umbrella chapter seeks to situate the series of case studies of contemporary forms of online video activism in a longer history of collective video practices and modes of deploying the moving image for politically progressive ends, with roots in times before Web 2.0. Making sure not to fall into the trap of the pervasive discourses of novelty saturating much current thinking on online technologies and political engagement, these efforts stand as a reminder that, while new developments in media technologies "may have a short history, they also have a long past" (Livingstone, 2008: xi). Ideally, one would need to go back to the Soviet Agitprop tradition of the early 20th century, to before Nazi propaganda films, American Cold War propaganda, or the *cinéma vérité* of the 1960s, to confront questions of why and how moving images historically have been claimed so persistently and readily for political projects. In the present context, however, I limit the (very modest) historicising efforts to updating an ongoing academic discussion about the proliferation of online video by drawing parallels mainly between the Left-oriented alternative video practices spurred by the so called 'Portapak-revolution' of the late 1960s, early 1970s (interfacing with the emergence of what social movement literature terms the rise of 'new social movements') and what could be termed as the 'YouTubification' of video activism in today's digital mediascape. Tracing the historical trajectories of technological, economic and politico-cultural developments in radical visual media, on the one hand, and the more recent emergence of online video sharing and proliferation of amateur video cultures, on the other, I argue that whereas YouTube may represent the epicentre of contemporary participatory cultures built in and around video production, it represents neither its point of origin nor its end point.

Last but perhaps most importantly, I want the contextualising chapter to provide transparency concerning the process of this research. As well as reflecting and mapping a process of thought, I want these pages to demonstrate how the compilation format of this research reflects some of the fractured and tentative qualities of the spaces and emerging practices studied. We do not yet know quite what these spaces and practices mean, or are going to mean. In this sense, the contextualising chapter seeks to be explicit about the dangers of steering a course between, on the one hand, an unconvincing attempt to unify a set of articles that embody a degree of heterogeneity and, on the other, running the risk of over-accentuating some differences and losing sight of thematic commonality. Such concerns are addressed throughout this chapter, but most explicitly in the section summarising the possibilities and limitations of the compilation format.

The main body of the thesis is comprised of six self-contained articles. Five articles and book chapters have been published, and one has, at the time of writing, been

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submitted for review. Articles II, III and IV are co-authored, whereas articles I, V and VI are single-authored. The order of the articles, along with their publication status, is illustrated below

Case	Article		Data and methodology	Publication
ESF2008	I	Putting Malmoe on the map of global activism: space, place and geographies of responsibility in online video activism.	Thematic analysis of multimodal texts; videos mobilising for and documenting the European Social Forum in Malmoe 2008. Participant observation, survey of ESF participants.	E. Hedling et al., (Eds.), (2010). *Regional aesthetics: Swedish imagery, images of Sweden.* Stockholm: KB.
	II	Mainstreaming the alternative – changing media practices of protest movements.	Two-fold case study of the Youth House riots, 2007/2008, and ESF2008. Multi-modal analysis of social media platforms, secondary interview- and survey data.	*Interface – a journal for and by social movements, 2*(2), 2011.
COP15 2009	III	Using corporate media for radical politics: COP15 activism and the case of Never Trust a Cop on YouTube.	Discourse theoretical analysis of multi-modal texts (video and para-texts) and interview data, primarily Copenhagen based activists. Participant observation, Qualitative Interview data.	*International Journal of Electronic Governance, 1*(2), 2011.
	IV	Online civic cultures: Debating climate change activism on YouTube.	Quantitative content analysis of comment postings (391 comments). Interview data, participant observation.	Submitted for *International Journal of Communication.*
G20 2009	V	DIY dying: Video activism as evidence, archive and commemoration.	Semiotic analysis of 26 commemoration videos.	*Journal of E-politics, 3*(1), 2012.
	VI	Protest movements and the spectacle of death: From urban places to video spaces.	Visual/semiotic analysis of 36 commemoration videos.	*RSMCC, 5*(x), forthcoming 2012.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The upsurge of academic work on social movement politics and radical media, which boomed with the advent of the internet and new forms of activism emerging in the mid-nineties, signals a renewed interest in the interfaces between politics, public spheres and media. The research has primarily embraced the textual dimensions of online political practices, addressing websites, online debate forums, mailings lists, e-zines, newsletters and similar areas, thus focusing on the written word of social movement actors and neglecting the rich visual language developed by, and as a category of expression in, social movements (see e.g. Bennett, 2004; Cammaerts, 2005, 2007; della Porta, 2011; Kavada, 2005, 2009, 2010; Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2004; McCaughey and Ayers, 2003; Perlmutter and Wagner, 2004; Rauch et al., 2007).

The present thesis is a response to the gap in the literature on Left-wing activism for global justice concerning the audio-visual in general and online video in particular. This response is to be understood in two discrete ways. First of all, this research places video - as a political tool and a particular set of collective practices - at the heart of an inquiry into the broad and by now well-established area of research on the intersection of new media and new social movements. Second, it deploys online video as the staple empirical material in the analysis of social movement media practices, rather than merely considering the audio-visual as a form of illustration or documentation complementing other material (Philips, 2012)[5]. This strict focus does not imply that I consider video as an isolated practice or as necessarily the chief mode of engaging with the public in the larger communicative repertoires of the (more or less formalised) campaigns in which it is used. Nor should it be interpreted as an expression of uncritical media-centrism, reducing everything to the workings of the media. These are of course only smaller pieces in the larger puzzle of contingent variables shaping political communication and social activism today. Rather, the

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[5] Here it is necessary to mention that article II differs notably from the rest of the articles in that attention is primarily directed towards YouTube as a corporate space and service provider rather than towards an analysis of the radical videos it hosts. Further, the article differs in the sense that it sheds light not only on YouTube, but on the interplay between YouTube, Facebook and MySpace as a triad of powerful actors that have come to dominate the communication infrastructure of activists and many social movement organisations. Equally, and adding complexity, the ESF2008 case study in this second article is combined with analytical insights into the creative appropriation of social media by activists involved in the Youth House riots in Copenhagen immediately preceding the European Social forum in Malmoe in 2008.

focus on YouTube as a communication platform and video as a distinct type of medium serves as an empirical, not an intellectual and theoretical, starting point.

Analytically, the ambition is to bring the rich, in-depth analysis typified by the methods of media studies into dialogue with context, both guided by and addressing cultural theory (Burgess and Green, 2009a). In the present endeavour, this implies combining close readings of a number of specific videos with questions of how the specific texts tap into the voices of the activists behind them; their motivations for and experiences of using YouTube as a platform for performing contentious politics.

For these purposes, a range of different methodologies are set in motion in order to articulate radical video as *texts* (qualitative textual analysis), the *voice* behind the texts (semi-structured interviews) and the *practices* in and around the texts (participant observations). These methods and the ways in which they are combined and privileged are presented in more detail in the following sections.

Situating the analysis of multi-modal texts

Media and communication studies have traditionally (to put it somewhat crudely) been seen to embrace the study of media *production, texts and consumption/reception,* and we as scholars are expected to choose our methods in accordance with where on this spectrum we situate our analytical attention in any given study.

The thesis in hand is first and foremost a media study, based on the textual analysis of multimodal media *texts*. That said, I concede that the strict separation between the three dimensions of *production, text* and *consumption* as a way of delimiting the analytical entrance point is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain – even as an analytical construct. In a present-day media ecology marked by new circuits of production and consumption, with huge amounts of user-generated content being uploaded on the web every day, we are said to be witnessing a change in the conceptualisation of media audiences from media consumers to media 'produsers' (see e.g. Bruns, 2007; Kavada, 2010), ultimately breaking down disciplinary boundaries and analytical categories in the study of visual media and viewers' mode of appropriation of texts. To a certain extent, one could argue that insights into the viewers' modes of engagement with the videos are present in each of the 'texts' examined in this study. Their immediate reactions to the videos present themselves in terms of 'liking', posting a comment, starting a thread of debate or posting a video-response. In this manner, the viewers on YouTube become co-authors of the texts and their contributions to the original text surround, frame, re-package and add meaning to the video and the way it presents itself to the viewer. Although information on all three dimensions is in fact integrated into the circularity of user profiles, video presentation, videos and viewers' responses to these, the kind of empirical material

obtained from YouTube (and by using YT as a research database) will provide a rich body of representations and of forms, but will only tell you so much about the production contexts and viewing practices of the videos. I will return to these tensions and how they are confronted shortly.

The process, theories and analysis of visual media represent a special methodological challenge and the analysis of visuals in an age of digital content creation even more so (Schrøder, 2012). Rose (2001) reminds us that visual modes of conveying meaning are not the same as the written mode, and that visual experience or literacy can never be fully explained by the models of textuality (Rose, 2001: 10). The methods applied in this study of video material are to a certain extent based on literary traditions that approach the moving image as a 'text' (Cottle, 1998). Both semiotics and discourse analysis can be seen to represent a text-centred approach, originally developed to interpret written and spoken text. However, both have proved fruitful as methodological tools in visual analysis, especially when re-cast along the conceptual framework of *multi-modality.* Multi-modal analysis goes beyond the mere extension, for example, of discourse analysis from linguistic to visual signs, by conceiving of contemporary media as multi-modal forms that comprise "a range of representational and communicative forms within the limits of one text" (Schrøder, 2012: 126). In this way, the multi-modal approach acknowledges the need to construct text-analytical models that are suited to the analysis of an increasingly digital and hyperlinked media ecology circulating 'texts' that are constantly re-mediated across different platforms and screens (Bolter and Grusin, 1999).

The conceptual toolboxes of the analytical frameworks applied to the textual analyses of these multi-modal texts thus differ from article to article. Overall, three main strands of analytical inquiry have informed the various modes of textual analysis deployed; *discourse analysis;* (articles III and IV), *social semiotics* (V and VI*), and cultural geography* (I and VI). In article III, discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2000, 2005) is broken down into analytical elements such as chains of equivalence, nodal points and subject positions. This makes it possible to identify and examine the formation of antagonistic political identities built and sustained online around the contestation of the 'green capitalism' represented by the UN climate convention process. Questions of the discursive construction of political identities around 'difference' and boundary work are at the heart of critical discourse theory. For these purposes, perspectives on collective identity formation, drawing on social movement theory, are recruited into the discourse analytical framework. Articles V and VI operationalise social semiotics by applying concepts such as the punctum, the voice of the visual, and iconography (Barthes, 1981) to the study of commemorative modes of radical video. These concepts are linked to analytical entry points that derive from a (media) sociology of death and dying (e.g. Zelizer, 2010; Hess, 2007; Wahlberg, 2008). Finally, both article I and article VI make use of analytical tools

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drawn from cultural geography. Article I does this by locating spaces of resistance and places of responsibility in radical video representations of the European Social Forum (ESF) process. It looks specifically at mobilisation videos for the ESF in Malmoe in 2008 and how these calls to action instigate spatial binaries in the articulation of the local embeddedness of global activism. On a similar note, article VI combines a semiotic analytical lens with that of radical geography in order to understand how, in the videos, spatial practices of protest in the urban terrain of resistance are recruited as visual tropes and storytelling devices. In this way, the two articles build on what has been labelled the 'spatial turn' in media and communication studies. Drawing on cultural geography, this interdisciplinary perspective offers a vein of inquiry that accentuates the *geographies of communication* by addressing questions of the production of space through representation and mediation, and the spatial production of communication (see e.g. Falkheimer and Jansson, 2006; Carpentier, 2008).

Attention to media form

I consider the textual analysis of form to be an important and necessary entry point into considering the social and political order of the media. In this manner, my primary justification for a close scrutiny of form lies not, as is the case in much humanities commentary on the arts, with the intrinsic interest in exploring expressive creativity (Corner, 2011: 51). Rather, I subscribe to a tradition of media studies that direct attention to media form and their claims. At the heart of this tradition is a concern with power (Silverstone, 1999) and a sustained commitment to developing a closer micro-analysis of the languages and images of the media, locating media texts within broader contexts of social practice and public conduct (Corner, 1995). Such analytical strategies pose important questions about the ways in which prevalent forms of audio-visual mediation "offer ethical positions for viewers to occupy providing possibilities for enhanced critical awareness and favourable conditions for social action" and provide insights into the virtues of media representations that may cultivate (or impinge on) reflexive and active publics (Chouliaraki, 2006: 5).

Corner (2011) explains the divergence (and at times the disconnect) between the different ways of conducting textual analysis of video, and the moving image more generally, within the social sciences, on the one hand, and the arts and humanities, on the other, as primarily related to different traditions of thinking of media texts in terms either of *content* or of *form.* To simplify somewhat, this distinction can be seen in the choice of methods, where *content analysis* (looking for themes and clusters of themes within an understanding of content as transmitted with varying degrees of efficacy) has long been the dominant strand of analysis within the social sciences. Meanwhile, *textual analysis* (concerned with issues of style and the aesthetic

organisation of media texts), suggesting a carrying over of concerns from literary criticism, is the preferred approach within the Arts and Humanities. Although the boundaries between what is said/shown, on the one hand, and the manner and organisation of saying/showing, on the other, are admittedly fluid and in some cases hard to pin down, this form/content duality is a productive starting point, throughout this thesis, for illustrating and understanding some of the different ways of engaging with the textual analysis of video. Article IV is a particularly good example of a social scientific approach to textual analysis, whereas article V and VI are strongly inspired by the interpretive schemes of textual analysis in the Arts and Humanities.

Here I draw on the work of Corner (2008, 2011; Corner and Pels, 2003) in establishing an understanding of form in terms of three different dynamics: organisation, articulation and apprehension.

> "Organisation raises questions about the production of form but also its 'objectified' deployment as a necessary constituent of discursive and aesthetic artefacts. Articulation raises questions about form as performance, giving to the term a marked sense of process and practice. Apprehension gives emphasis to engagement with form by viewers, the dynamics by which formal factors become active in the production of knowledge and emotions, in the complex subjective interactions of our media encounters which are part of a larger, continues immersion in mediation" (Corner, 2011: 50, emphasis added).

This understanding of form, carried into the textual analysis of the YouTube environment, has implications for the kinds of attention given to the different dimensions of the videos. It becomes possible to extend the scope of the analysis beyond questions merely of what is depicted, and to induce analytical susceptibility in the various dynamics involved in the making of and engagement with the texts. In this manner, considering form as a three-dimensional concept reflects the various (often overlapping) ways of approaching my object of analysis in the different studies, some of which have primarily addressed issues of aesthetic form, and others modes of appropriation by viewers.

Challenges of the co-productive audiences and anonymous producers

To clarify, what is described above does not, however, mean that the textual analyses conducted within the frames of this research make claims to further research on *audiences* and *reception practices* in online environments. Neither does it mean that they contribute substantially to knowledge of the media production practices unfolding in amateur bedroom-studios or in the production contexts and dynamics of activist video collectives. These dimensions are nonetheless certainly worthy of comment, even in a study concerned primarily with texts and not explicitly with the production or reception of these texts.

Since the 1970s a great deal of theoretical work, as well as filmmaking practice, on the Left has been devoted to developing and analysing "a revolutionary aesthetics – a combative form that poses the right questions in the intellectual struggle against capitalism" (Gaines, 1999: 232). But, even with all this work, we still know very little about the politicised *body* of the *spectators* of radical film and video, or about how to empirically solve questions posed in relation to the viewer. What is it exactly, in the political situation on the screen that moves the viewer to want to act, to do something instead of nothing? And what then constitutes action? What counts as change? What are the indicators of political consciousness, and how do we determine where consciousness ends and action begins? These, by way of example, are some of the issues hampering and haunting article IV. Obviously, these questions are meaningless and futile if detached from context and from the specificity of history. The articles in very modest ways seek to situate such questions of audience participation and production of meaning within the study of media form and modes of address.

In the following pages, I define the object of analysis, radical online video, as a range of *forms* for political investigation and portrayal. Defining radical video (and isolating it for analysis as a discernable type of media text) by reference to *form, subject matter* and *purpose/intentionality* largely neglects, however, the definitional sensibilities of the 'work' of audiences in establishing a genre (Corner, 2008). Keeping in mind that genres are as much about viewers' modes of engagement with forms as they are about fixed and pre-existing textual structures, these ambiguously marked materials may be viewed by some as radical politics, whereas others may have different dispositions, horizons or strategies of viewing. From the perspective of audience studies, there is no single type of viewer, but many types of viewer with culturally specific responses to particular genres (Hill, 2007). Although YouTube does provide us with some information about the ways in which viewers respond to and engage with video, these insights are cursory and unsatisfying in terms of deepening our understanding of the role of the viewer in shaping the genre.

Following a tradition within the interpretive analysis of the political aesthetics of radical cinema, one way of neatly sidestepping the lack of insights into the production of the audiences (while keeping these in sight) is to 'settle for' insights into what the body is *made to do,* as opposed to what it may or may not do (e.g. Chanan, 2007; Gaines; 2007). Addressing the lack of engagement with what is taking place beyond the screen, one concept that may become useful here is the notion of political mimesis, indicating what the "politically committed" text (Gaines, 1999), in this case radical video, *wants the viewer to do.* With the notion of political mimesis, Gaines (1999, 2007) emphasises the dimension of *trying to change* in radical documentary practices. This notion promotes an understanding of radical video practices as being about a commitment to social change in an ongoing, open-ended effort, a utopia to strive for, rather than a given or instrumental project. Further, the notion of political mimesis points towards a relation between bodies in two locations: on the screen and in the audience. As a starting point for considering what the one body makes the other do (2007: 90), the textual analysis of political mimesis addresses what the radical video *wants* us to do, and not necessarily what it actually makes the viewer do. In this sense, rather than making any claims to 'effect' or direct causal relations between text and the social world, the various textual analyses in this research are primarily concerned with considering what the images want the viewer to do. They examine the strategies of revelation, exposition, argument, testimony or emotional registers through which radical video attempts to create change in its viewers.

As a final preliminary, the dimension of the sender/producer of the video deserves a brief mention. The 'producer' is most explicitly addressed in article III, which examines the rationales and motivations behind using YouTube for disseminating radical video on the basis of interviews with activists. When defining radical video partly along the parameters of the explicit political intentionality of the sender – to which I will return later in this chapter, how do we deal with the problem that our knowledge of the person behind the user-acronym is very scanty, that knowledge of her political horizons and motivations for producing and disseminating videos is limited in most cases to what the video and its para-texts tell us?[6] How do we justify the identification of these people as activists or social movement actors? The fact is that we know very little about the people behind the channel names on YouTube. People tend to use acronyms and YouTube is generally considered as a space where

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[6] Only rarely have people responded to my questions or invitations via the YouTube channel to meet, and even when they have most have been sceptical of revealing more of themselves and have preferred to remain anonymous. I therefore quickly stopped contacting people through the contact forms that YouTube channels allow for and found different ways to explore the question of the sender, in some cases settling for the information people had chosen to make public, while in others raising these questions through contacts not initially made through YouTube.

people play with identities in creative online 'facework' (which obviously is also a question of security for the activists). While some producers quite explicitly state their political agenda in making and posting a video, others do so implicitly by making references to and leaving links to the websites of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Social Movement Organisations (SMOs) and activist networks. This kind of information was of course used in the process of selecting videos for study, where priority was given to those whose producers explicitly stated in their channel or video presentation their affiliation with or support for the global Left and social justice campaigns. Whereas accurate demographic data on age, nationality and political conviction or affiliation may be hard to derive from channel profiles, an abundance of (in some regards far more interesting) insights into the creative ways in which the user chooses or chooses not to present herself is readily to hand.

A short note on inter-subjectivity in visual analysis

I have outlined above the methodological basis for a thesis solidly rooted in the *interpretive* research tradition and underwritten by a hermeneutic, constructivist ontology. Irrespective of their theoretical and methodological origins, the qualitative micro-analyses applied to the different case studies confront and conceive of texts as socially constructed objects and of the process of analysing these as a social construction in itself (Schrøder, 2012).

An important feature of critical visual methodology within the interpretive tradition is the recognition that no image is innocent or can be said to mirror reality. One of the central aims of the cultural turn within media studies (and social sciences more generally) was to point to the fact that social categories are not natural entities, but rather constructed within the immediate historical and socio-cultural context they form part of. Consequently, at the heart of all inquiries into visual media representations lies the question of how cultural practices and their representations both depend on and produce social inclusions and exclusions (Rose, 2001: 16).

Rose (2001: 72) brings attention to the difficulties of "being critical" without merely imposing a new ideology on the subject one is trying to untangle and disclose, stating that "not only is the video interpreted and exposed to interpretation; the interpretation is also on display, exposing the critic's ideas to interpretation to others (…)". This double exposure to interpretation illustrates the intricate relationship between academic subjectivity and the subject matter it purports to analyse; this demands a certain degree of reflexivity in one's viewing practices and the baggage one brings to this process. In other words, any analysis of visual representations must take a critical stance towards the perspective of the analysis itself (Rose, 2001).

Participant observation and semi-structured interviewing in social movement research

The ways in which participant observation and qualitative interviews have been engaged as methods in various studies differ greatly. How and why this is the case deserves a short mention[7]. The participant observations and qualitative interviews conducted during ESF2008 and during a three-day Attac Summer University held in Saarbrucken in 2008 are primarily explorative in nature and serve to underpin the textual analysis, rather than contributing to the body of empirical material as such. At an early stage of the thesis process, such fieldwork initiatives served as very important sources of background knowledge that became useful when later analysing interview data and activists' own media representations. For example, attending workshops and organisation meetings held in Lund and Malmoe prior to the ESF, as well as working with a sociology research group in developing and conducting a quantitative survey of the ESF participants in Malmoe, provided insights into the demographic composition of the complex array of overlapping, multi-level networks, groups and SMOs that make up the global justice movement (della Porta, 2005).

On the other hand, the in-depth interviews and participant observation conducted with activists in connection with the United Nations Copenhagen Climate Change Conference of 2009 (COP15) play a different and far more central role in the empirical framework. The articles centred around the COP15 protests mainly draw on semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with social movement actors involved in the COP15 counter-summits before, during and after the UN summit in Copenhagen. Respondents were recruited on the basis of participant observation at Klimaforum09, the Global Day of Action and the Reclaim Power demonstrations in December 2009. The interviews are used for two purposes. Firstly, the articles unpack respondents' accounts of the planning and execution of counter-summit events and the December 12 protest around COP15 to paint a picture of the role of the specific anti-capitalist network under study in this project. Secondly, the interview data is used to analyse motivations for using YouTube as a platform for mobilising collective action and the perceived possibilities afforded by online media more generally, as articulated by respondents.

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7 See Appendix 1 for a list of interview respondents.

Dealing specifically with the death of Ian Tomlinson and more generally with the role of video in documenting protests and the policing of these events, the interviews conducted within the confines of the G20 project were with activists behind the G20meltdown network that formed part of the broader coalition of groups and networks protesting during the G20 summit held in London in 2009.

A number of expert interviews have been conducted with people not directly linked with any of the case studies. These respondents include media historian Deidre Boyle (US); independent filmmaker and documentary scholar Alexandra Juhasz (US); Hamish Campbell from the video activist group VisiononTv (UK); Jakob Jakobsen (DK), co-founder of the Danish alternative broadcast station TVTV; former spokesperson of attac DK, Kenneth Haar (DK); sociologist and protest movement scholar Rene Karpantschof (DK), and collaborative documentary filmmaker Mandy Rose (UK).

There is obviously a big difference between *video documentation* and making a *video documentary,* and admittedly some of the videos scrutinised fall into the first category. The people I interviewed are both filmmakers doing activism and activists doing filmmaking. Some have been active within video collectives, social movements or alternative media organisations, while others are independent video-makers involved in cultural production and more artistic modes of video-making. A third and ancillary category of interviewees could be tentatively termed 'cell-phone video-makers', and these interviews were conducted in order to understand the grey zones between video documentation and constructing video documentary narratives and argument, and in order to engage in a debate about where the boundaries might be drawn between these two. These initiatives were confined to conducting interviews with people in the streets during the student demonstrations and rallies in London in the winter of 2011.

Although many of the respondents are not explicitly given voice in the thesis, on all occasions the interviews and participant observations provided me with indispensable insights into the driving forces behind the actions on the screen and the interplay between offline and online modes of engaging with the protest events. These initiatives thus continually provided me with new horizons of understanding and relevant vantage points for the analysis of the media texts themselves.

YouTube as a research object and a research database

In the following section, I will discuss the challenges that YouTube poses in terms of methodology, while in the theory section (p. 55 onwards) I will present an analytical background to YouTube as a site for politics.

Graham (2008) argues that studies of online modes of political participation have focused primarily on politically oriented forums, rather than including the abundance of non-political online spaces where political talk and interaction take place. It is, he continues, precisely in non-political spaces such as the popular social networking sites primarily modelled for diversion and entertainment, such as personal blogs, MySpace, YouTube etc., that individuals start to 'form a public' and engage in informal, counter-hegemonic political activity. Numerous scholars have raised this argument and empirically demonstrated how media formats and experiences traditionally boxed as mere entertainment and confined to practices within the private realm can become stepping stones to public connectivity and political engagement (see e.g. Bakardjieva, 2008, 2009; Barnhurst; 2003; Dahlgren, 2005, 2007, 2009; Kaun, 2012). They remind us of how we need to look in different directions and beyond traditional political arenas in order to grasp where politics is taking place and how political dispositions are cultivated today.

YouTube is just one example of a popular online space which started out as a site of entertainment for 'online loiterers' looking for some minutes of fun and turned into a platform that is increasingly marketed and redesigned to also facilitate political and civic purposes, demonstrating how these online phenomena need to be conceived of as tools for and sites of politics (Burgess and Green, 2009a; Christensen 2009; Kim, 2012; Meek, 2012; Strangelove, 2010; Turnšek and Jankow, 2008; van Zoonen et al., 2010).

While certainly a dominant actor in the online video economy, YouTube is by no means alone in offering users a space for engaging in video sharing and amateur cultures of production. The web is a true jungle of vlogs, video collectives, video production and video sharing sites. This study centres specifically on YouTube and explores the media practices of activists and social movement actors in this particular corner of cyberspace. Doubtless, all the videos subjected to analysis in the present research are also circulating in a variety of other forums. But common to all the cases brought to the fore here is that they are being circulated and consumed *primarily* on YouTube. Hence, this is a study of YouTube as a platform for video activism as much as it is a study of video activists and the aesthetic forms of radical video. The videos are thus not treated as isolated media texts but considered as an integral part of the broader media practices into which they are embedded.

Through quite specific circumstances of representativity, activist media practices make claims of authenticity, truth and realism. In the case of online video activism, this is done by using a platform designed initially and primarily for entertainment. Entertainment draws on fiction and creativity, and in this case is not merely a 'neighbouring' circumstance of political activism, but rather a factor that affects the kind of message and knowledge that are sourced from the platform.

In her outline proposal for analysing political organisations and their online presence, Kavada (2010) points to the importance of including the whole range of online and offline sites where an organisation is present, in order to fully understand the discourses of and rationales behind certain media practices in a given organisation, i.e. its Twitter account, YouTube channel and Facebook profile, along with the official website. This is not the ambition of the present study. The focus on YouTube as a site of video activism no doubt delimits the analytical scope of the thesis and its possibilities of providing insights into the interplay between online platforms as well as offline/online relations.

From a methodological perspective, the so-called Web 2.0 constitutes a moving target, with its constantly changing interfaces and the continuous flow of 'newcomers' being added to the list of self-publishing, social networking and file-sharing sites. Moreover, from a methodological point of view, the object of analysis itself, a heterogeneous social movement in constant flux, has a rather intangible character. Given the loose, overlapping, interwoven, and at times transitory character of the organisations within the movement, it is difficult to specify in any detail the boundaries of radical Left politics, let alone to encapsulate the complexity of the various groups and organisations which could be framed under this umbrella term.

Finally, YouTube is not only a moving target as a research object, but also hopelessly chaotic and aimless if used as a research database to collect and archive material, as well as biased if used as a search engine - the world's second largest after Google and favouring in more or less explicit ways sponsored content over amateur, user-generated content.

Possibilities and limitations of the compilation format

The pros and cons of writing a compilation thesis could be the subject of a long discussion. Although I will spare the reader most of my personal laments of and tributes to this format, a few observations is of relevance here. On the positive side, working with fixed deadlines forces one to write over an extended period, just as writing against the backdrop of specific thematic sessions in conferences and journal special issues has provided me with concrete intermediate aims. Further, I believe the format has allowed me to be flexible, open to new input and ideas, and perhaps even broader in my analytical scope.

To base the project on case studies of current protest events, taking place within a certain geopolitical space and time, automatically makes the study prey to the ephemeral character of the events and networks under scrutiny. Social movement organisations and activist networks are notorious for being 'moving targets' and elusive research objects, emerging around specific protest events and mobilisations

that unfold and dissolve within a finite timeframe. In this sense, the specific mobilisations remain 'current' only for a certain period of time, before tending to quickly disappear from the media limelight and from public attention. In this sense, the study of political activism is a study of ephemeral events and of fluid activist networks that may have dissolved even before the last sentence of an article has been composed.

When working with online phenomena, a thesis is always at the risk of being outdated before it reaches print since 'new' media tend to be subject to hype for a certain period of time, only to then be abandoned by users and forgotten in the wasteland of digital nine-day wonders. Recently, Lovink (2011) has articulated these concerns as a general problem of PhD research in this area, which he described as at perpetual risk of trying to capture "vanishing networks and cultural patterns". Unable to anticipate or synthesise the speed with which these structures come and go, we are faced with the realisation that "theory in the form of detailed case studies is condemned to history writing" (Lovink, 2011: 6-7). To be sure, this study reflects a certain time period when YouTube was the 'happening' place in terms of online video distribution and consumption. But such venues tend to change rather quickly and abruptly. With the article-based format, I hope to avoid at least some of these difficulties and address the challenges arising from the ephemerality of our research objects. That said, I tend to disagree with Lovink (2011) and likeminded scholars when they claim that we stand without theoretical guidance in the face of these incessantly evolving user cultures, gadgets and applications. The present is always part of a not-so-distant past to be usefully recovered and reclaimed. When we follow well-trodden paths in social and political theory we are by no means left impotent if these are applied to the study of today's mediatised society and all its claims to newness.

There are a number of problematic and frustrating elements tied to the decision to write a compilation thesis, some of which deserve some mention here. When choosing to produce a thesis by publication one needs to be prepared for the many compromises to be made along the way in the process of getting the articles published. In order to meet the demands and criticism of several (not always unanimous) reviewers and editors, the end product becomes something far from the initially proposed study. The analytical contribution of the final article may end as a much reduced version of an original case study that has been boiled down and re-written extensively in order to fit the journal article format. Whereas a monograph allows the writer to expand extensively on her own reasoning and analytical work, writing articles involves a painful process of 'killing darlings' in a world of constant wordcount limit limbo.

Moreover, issues of potential infringement of copyright can in some cases have somewhat adverse consequences, such as being forced to present a visual analysis in a published article without the actual visual illustrations. In my case, these issues have

been particularity problematic and ironic, since the studies have concerned 'copy-left' politics, 'cut-and-mix' amateur video culture, movements against the corporate control of free information and the monetisation of user-generated content etc. In most cases, the results of endless email correspondence with editors and publishers have been articles stripped of all or most images and thus scarcely reflecting the beauty of the online 'mash-up' practices under study.

The quality of a researcher's work, should ideally improve notably, both stylistically and in terms of theoretical rigorousness, in the time span from first drafts and conference papers to the empirical chapters written and articles submitted in the final stages. Within this trajectory, the individual articles are very much a product of a specific time period and perhaps of a particular perspective or idea the writer may have been working with at the time. A thesis by publication involves renouncing the possibility of going back over the text to change and rewrite the empirical 'chapters'. Rather, the writer must put her name to articles authored at the beginning of the process; articles that include reasoning she perhaps now considers somewhat naïve and tentative. I would argue, however, that in this sense a compilation thesis, in comparison to the traditional monograph, is much truer to the very process of writing a thesis, since it puts on display the various stages passed through and steps taken both intellectually and stylistically.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section audits the main strands of theory cutting across the different empirical studies of the thesis. It starts by presenting the cultural approach to political theory, with a privileged focus on the role of media in political activism, which is paramount in the intellectual scaffolding of this research. By funnelling down from the abstract level of political theory through to the operationalisation of notions of 'being political', this first section paves the way for more concrete concerns about how current debates around social media in general and YouTube specifically can be seen as a small window onto broader currants of developments in new media spaces and the changing relation between media, politics and change. It moves on to situate the research within the field of social movement theory, clarifying the ways in which it draws upon, rather than makes a contribution to, this broad interdisciplinary area. This part of the contextualising chapter thus seeks to pull together the key concepts and theoretical horizons of the thesis. My hope is that, with this in hand, the reader will experience reading the empirical articles as less of a bumpy and unpredictable ride and, provided with this map of the route ahead, will have a sense that any potential detours eventually lead back to the main road.

Politics and political engagement: A cultural approach

In the following section, I account for the horizons of political theory that inform this thesis, offering an understanding of politics and 'the political' beyond the framework of representative democracy. What I wish to demonstrate is that the cultural approach taken here to democratic theory, which asserts that politics are deeply embedded in the practices and routines of everyday life (Barnhurst, 2003; Dahlgren 2000, 2005, 2009; Miegel and Olsson, 2012; Nash, 2001, and many more), as well as having a privileged focus on notions of radical democracy (Mouffe, 2000, 2005, 2007) and counter-democracy (Rosanvallon, 2008), opens the door to fruitful analyses of political practices and portrayal. Drawing on these perspectives, my research begins from the two fundamental assumptions that: 1) politics and political participation are always embedded in the structures and routines of everyday life, and 2) political communication and (mediated modes of) engaging politically are about passion, anger and emotional response as much as deliberation and purposive, goal-oriented interactions. What these two premises both bring to and entail for the research is demonstrated in the following.

For a number of years now, debates about the decline of Western democracy: the drop in voter turnout, party membership and social capital among youth in

contemporary liberal societies, have been at the forefront of discussions concerning political engagement and disengagement (e.g. Dalton, 1996; Franklin, 2004; Putnam, 2001). Ruminating on how to understand these numbers and statistics, scholars have argued that we need to look beyond the confines of the representative democratic system to locate and appreciate the spheres where people, and especially young people, are engaging with politics in alternative, less formal ways. Many scholars have thus situated the media at the heart of this discussion, considering traditional broadcast media as well as new digital media as stepping stones for people to connect with public concerns and political issues (e.g. Bennett et al., 2009; Corner and Pels, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009; Loader, 2007).

Likewise, popular culture and entertainment genres have increasingly been seen to add to the symbolic terrain of politics and political expression in important and often overlooked ways. Such research suggests how we might seek explanations for this 'dismay of democracy' in an ongoing process of people refocusing their political attention in ways that scramble traditional conceptions of public and private domains, as well as political/popular and quality/trivial binaries (Coleman 2006; Van Zoonen, 2005). Looking to expand received notions of what should count as civic engagement and acts of performed citizenship, scholars have been especially keen to appoint the internet as a major player in affording and supporting new ways to make sense of public issues and become involved in civic activities that evolve at the level of everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2009). Highlighting people's mundane yet playful engagement with, and creative appropriation of, web content in the process of becoming civic subjects, such practices have been understood interchangeably in terms of "everyday creativity" (Gauntlett, 2011), "DiY citizenship" (Hartley, 2010), "photoshop democracy" (Jenkins, 2006) or what Bennett et al. (2009) refer to as "self-actualising styles of civic participation through participatory media".

Parallel to this discussion, scholars concerned with new social movements and the cyclic waves of political activism in late modernity have, in this same period, identified a rise in social movement activity, volunteerism and protest participation (e.g. della Porta and Reiter, 1998; Melucci, 1996; Norris, 2002). Such studies argue that the declining engagement with and trust in institutional politics should be understood in relation to an upsurge in extra-parliamentary politics and a growing interest among young people in issues of identity politics such as environmentalism, human rights issues and political consumption (della Porta, 2005; Inglehart, 1997; Zukin et al., 2006). In these debates, the concurrent rise of the internet and with it the opening of new arenas for political representation and participation have been pivotal to understanding and analysing contemporary social movement practices (e.g. Kahn and Kellner, 2004; della Porta and Mosca, 2009; della Porta, 2011). In these debates, the polycentric, networked structure and the user-defined content of the internet have been seen to bring renewed energy into social movements and to

accommodate new modes of political praxis among activists. It has been argued that there is a natural affinity between the non-hierarchical, open protocols and flexible identities of social movement actors and the global structure and participatory ethos of the internet as a communication technology (Curran, Freedman and Fenton, 2012; Fenton, 2006: Salter, 2003).

These two parallel (and at times coinciding or overlapping) paths of scholarly inquiry, pursuing questions of how the internet provides both 'ordinary' citizens with mundane modes of political expression in everyday life and political activists with tools for communicating and organising political actions, intersect in a joint critique of the shortcomings of the model of deliberative democracy to understand the various ways in which citizens engage politically outside the confinements of the representative system in liberal democracies (see e.g. Mouffe, 2005; Rosanvallon, 2008; Young, 1990). Key to this critique is a reaction to the idealised view of political interaction as based on consensus and communicative rationality which is inherent in the (Habermasian) model of deliberative democracy. Proposing notions such as counter-public spheres (Downing and Fenton, 2003; Fraser, 1992), public sphericules (Gitlin, 1998), agonistic public spaces (Mouffe 2007) or civic cultures (Dahlgren 2009) as alternative conceptual categories to that of the public sphere (Habermas, 1989), the extensive body of literature criticising the model of deliberative democracy has emphasised the messy, polemic and affective nature of political struggle and expression.

As a broad framework for assembling, connecting and framing these diverse modes of politics and of being political in non-institutional contexts, I lean on the work of Rosanvallon (2008, 2011) and his notion of "counter-democracy". By the notion of counter democracy, Rosanvallon (2008) means to signal the "unconventional forms of citizen participation" that reinforce traditional electoral democracy and in so doing complement the episodic, deficient democracy of the electoral-representative system. On the basis, essentially, of *distrust* of formal institutions - what he refers to as 'democratic distrust' - citizens are described as exercising different *powers of oversight*: vigilance, disclosure and evaluation. These three forms of citizen oversight (and what we may understand as modes of engagement in politics) are, according to Rosanvallon, both nourishing and intrinsic to a functioning democracy. The notion of vigilance is coined to citizens' practices of monitoring state actions, whereas denunciation refers to the act of exposing the wrongdoing of politicians. Finally, evaluation can be seen to signal the informed reflexivity of citizens to analyse, review and critique policies.

These modes of engagement should not be mistaken for manifestations of politicisation or of political apathy. Quite the contrary, "the negative citizen is not a passive citizen" (Rosanvallon, 2008: 185). According to Rosanvallon, these powers of distrust demonstrate meaningful ways of participating in public life, which tend,

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however, to take essentially hostile forms. They are testimony to a commitment, but it is a commitment mainly to rejection. Finally, they are symbolic communicative expressions, but come most often in the truncated form of slogans and denunciations (2008: 186). Rosanvallon is thus essentially concerned with a shift in the balance of incentives and disincentives that structure from below the landscape of political possibilities. In this shift media are key enablers and amplifiers (Couldry, 2012). To Rosanvallon, the importance of the internet to radical politics lies in its spontaneous adaptation to these modes of participating in democracy through the exercise of vigilance, denunciation and evaluation. In fact he goes as far as to say that the internet is the *realised* expression of these powers of oversight and should be considered a true political form in itself (Rosanvallon, 2008: 70). In the final parts of this contextualizing chapter I will reconnect with the question of how we may understand contemporary modes of online video activism against the backdrop of these powers of oversight.

This research thus situates itself in the broad field of political theory adapting to a "culturalist" perspective (Dahlgren, 2009). It positions media on the frontline of current transformations of politics and modes of political engagement, arguing that they play a significant, yet complex, role in the changing spaces and practices of being political. It conceives of media as public spaces in which citizens and social movements are able to challenge the discursive boundaries of dominant discourses (e.g. Cammaerts, 2007; Fenton, 2007) in "a battleground where different hegemonic projects are confronted, without any possibility of final reconciliation" (Mouffe, 2007: 3). At the heart of this cultural approach to democracy lies an understanding of conflict, passion and emotions as intrinsic to all political struggles.

Cultural citizenship and the notion of participation

Throughout the thesis, the concept of cultural citizenship is addressed and installed in various ways and the notion of participation, which extends from this perspective, is either implied or analytically operationalised in the articles. I thus situate my understanding of the various modes of politicality in the video representations and modes of engaging with these representations within an understanding of democracy located in the cultural approach to political theory described above. This perspective casts citizenship in terms of social agency and emphasises the dimensions of identity and cultural practices as a key to understanding the achieved dimensions of citizenship (among this large body of literature are Dahlgren 2009; Isin and Nielsen, 2008; Isin and Turner, 2003; Pateman, 1989).

Illustrating how these theoretical horizons of citizenship necessarily extend to the empirical realm, article IV offers a useful starting point for exemplifying how the cultural take on politics and political engagement is operationalised analytically. The

article starts by arguing that contemporary debates on how to understand YouTube as a public sphere and a curator of political discourse tend to focus on the issues of reach and numbers by raising questions of whether, for example, posting video comments can be said to constitute public participation when most user-generated contributions never reach beyond a very narrow circle of often likeminded people. Tapping into the ongoing debate on whether online participation should necessarily be equated with public participation, YouTube may be seen to have provided people with a democratic space in which to raise their voices. But, at the same time, it is a space in which no one is necessarily paying any attention. This and related positions build upon the assumption that voice is only meaningful if a substantial number of people are listening (Couldry, 2010). Leaning on the notion of achieved citizenship (Dahlgren, 2009; Isin and Nielsen, 2008), article IV instead suggests that a comment or video response, however insignificant in terms of ranks and views, should be assessed and interrogated as a meaningful performance of social agency through which people construct their political selves. In this line of reasoning, what becomes important is not how many people are paying attention to this performance, but rather the steps taken by the individual commenter to consider herself as a legitimate stakeholder in a political controversy and to debate as part of an unbound public (Van Zoonen et al., 2010: 252).

Similarly, online debate forums are often accused of diluting political discourse and promoting titillation, slander, superficial banter and other kinds of lowest common-denominator exchange between participants who fail to achieve a reasonable level of respectful listening or commitment to working with difference (e.g. Dahlberg, 2001). Attempting to understand the conflictual and polarised nature of political discourse beyond a consensus paradigm, several of the articles (I, III, IV) take issue with the inflammatory interactions and hate speech saturating the discussions taking place around radical video, demonstrating analytical sensibility towards the antagonisms and irreconcilable plurality of political struggle.

The notion of cultural citizenship and the ideas of maximalist participation stemming from this resonate well with the perspective of radical democracy as developed in the later work of Mouffe (2001, 2005, 2007). This perspective maintains that politics and being political are a struggle between opposing hegemonic projects, which can never be reconciled rationally. The conflictual nature of politics constitutes the necessary starting point for the creation of political identities that evolve around the establishment of difference in the construction of a 'constitutive outside' of a 'we'. According to Mouffe (2005), political identities consist of a certain type of we/they and friend/enemy relationship. The creation of identity is relational and implies the establishment of difference, which is often constructed on the basis of a hierarchy. This creation of a 'we' in political communities can exist only by the demarcation of a 'they' (Mouffe, 2005: 15). In article III, a discourse analysis paying specific attention

to political identity construction around radical video practices, these insights are translated into research praxis.

Intimately linked to these arguments and debates about democracy and citizenship, and how they relate to the media, are notions of *civic engagement* and *political participation.* This research plunges into controversies about what constitutes 'real' participation in politics. This debate has often reflected a certain apprehension concerning the risks, inherent in maximalist notions of participation, of equating everything and anything with democratic involvement and thus turning it into an empty floating signifier, overloaded with meaning Carpentier (2011) has a lucid overview of this ongoing debate. Since the notions both of civic engagement and of political participation are addressed and recruited as analytical categories in the thesis, a short clarification of the distinction between the two is in order. According to Dahlgren (2009) this distinction can be understood in terms of gradual steps, with engagement as a necessary condition for participation. Understood from such a perspective, *engagement* signifies the orientation towards or disposition to political participation (as a form of prefigurative politics), whereas *participation* signals the more manifest forms of *action or activism.* Hence, while civic engagement may be expressed in thought, in a subjective state, participation suggests some kind of visible practice (Dahlgren, 2007: ix). Carpentier and de Cleen (2008) work with a similar ladder metaphor, talking of a three-step model of *access, interaction,* and *participation,* which understands the first two as conditioning the latter[8] (Carpentier and de Cleen, 2008; see also Carpentier, 2011).

Critical to the understanding of how this maximalist conceptualisation of participation is operationalised in the different empirical studies is the notion of 'politicality' (Corner, 2011: 189) seen to indicate the "different levels and degrees of 'the political'" at play in the various empirical studies. In some cases, the articles showcase groups that are actively campaigning for more participation within an extended democracy, while others depict groups, networks and individuals that are carrying out self-conscious 'guerrilla' actions against a system about whose possibilities for change they remain pessimistic. Another way of illustrating the different modes or levels of participation at play across the different studies is through a distinction between what could be termed *on-screen* and *off-screen* modes of politicality. On the one hand, the video representations studied are defined by (and chosen for analysis

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[8] While a great deal of political theory organises the complex notion of participation around a three-step model of interaction between people and the political sphere, these steps or dimensions are often understood and labelled divergently. One such example is the work of Rosanvallon (2008), in which he speaks of participation in terms of *expression, involvement* and *intervention* as three distinct forms of political activity.

with reference to) their very explicit, directed and self-conscious engagement with core political issues unfolding on screen. On the other hand, the analysis of the various modes of appropriating these representations (sharing, editing, debating etc.) could be understood against the backdrop of a stronger articulation of maximalist participation as a prism through which to examine the more subtle ways of engaging with politics and only implicitly critiquing institutions and structures of power (which might then more accurately be labelled as engagement, following the distinction between participation and engagement made by Dahlgren (2007; 2009).

In this sense, the empirical studies work concurrently both to deliver the political as a set of participatory practices directly attacking and intentionally seeking to affect the formal institutions of political and economic power, and to bring out a sense of action and participation indicating the broader manifestations of politicality, i.e. the multiple ways of 'being political' and performing politics which can materialise in numerous, often unforeseen (and sometimes even unintended), ways across the cultural terrain.

Media(tion), politics and change

With this outlined ambit I am entering a longstanding and sometimes virulent debate around issues of mediated participation, online modes of activism, and the transformative potentials that stem from new digital media. While these issues could at first sight seem essentially new, media and social uprisings/transformations are diacritics that have paired up throughout history, and the relationship between media and social change has preoccupied and puzzled scholars for the greater part of five decades (for extensive historical accounts, see e.g. Lule, 2012; Thompson, 1995). In very recent years, these longstanding debates have been framed around a new generation of social media and 'sexy' labels such as "Twitter revolution" and "YouTube politics".

We have seen the kinds of debate over the role of and renewed hopes for technology in society first raised in the mid-1990s, when the internet was first popularised, being rehearsed again across the span of new media phenomena and claims being made over new, yet familiar territory. In many ways, the advent of social media midway through the first decade of the 21st century translated into a second wave of hype, and of hopes vested in online technologies as agents of radical change that replicated the polarised viewpoints circulating a decade earlier. Projected onto the broader discussion of the role of technology in democratic development, current debates on social media as catalysts for change can thus, crudely put, be seen to position themselves within a spectrum of techno-dystopian and techno-utopian perspectives (Bakardjieva, 2005; Christensen 2011).

From the very beginning, visions of the internet were imbued with hopes for the emergence of a non-market, peer-produced alternative to corporate mass media (Curran, 2012). At the optimistic end of the spectrum, online media are seen to facilitate grassroots democracy and connect disparate groups and struggles. Celebratory rhetoric about the possibilities of the internet as a vehicle for democracy focuses on the opportunities for civil society actors to promote self-representations uninhibited by mass media filters, making available new terrains for the visibility of groups that tend to get negative coverage in or be excluded from the mainstream media (Kellner, 2003; Barassi, 2010). Theorists such as Castells (2009) offer similarly positive interpretations, arguing that the internet forges new forms of agency and creative autonomy at the level of the individual by enabling novel forms of "mass self-communication".

Within this optimistic perspective, links have been made between cosmopolitanism and new media with the latter seen as a midwife of global understanding and a 'worldly' outlook amongst global citizens. The common denominator in this literature has often been (explicitly or implicitly) the promise of an emerging cosmopolitan global society, populated by engaged world citizens, communicating, engaging politically and not least acting ethically and empathically across boarders in a spirit of mutual tolerance, reciprocity, universal morality and demands for justice. The role of new social movements, articulated as, for example, the demos, the multitude (Hardt and Negri, 2005), the swarm intelligence (Carty and Onyett, 2006), or rooted cosmopolitans (Tarrow and della Porta, 2005), has often been highlighted in these redemptive dreams of difference. In this literature, the media and the process of mediation have been scrutinised in order to interrogate the extent to which media can create the 'proper distance' and modes of identification required to forge new forms of social and moral cohesion among transnational audiences (Chouliaraki, 2006; Kyriakidou, 2008;,2009; Silverstone, 2007; Vestergaard, 2008,2010).

From the more pessimistic vantage point, scholars call for a general scepticism towards technology, not only because it pacifies, but because technology itself entertains the illusion that the audience participates in public life when in fact they are nothing but passive spectators lured into believing otherwise by powerful media corporations filling their days with endless invitations and exhortations to consumption. From this vantage point, radical politics operating online is drenched in the very same capitalist logic and discourse that it seeks to contest and subvert. In such an environment, online modes of political activism have no real clout and can only (or at best) be seen as a degradation of participation in real-time, offline, 'putting-your-body-out-there' activism. Designations such as point-and-click-activism, two-minute activism, e-topia, slactivism and lazy politics have been coined for different forms of online activism, such as e-campaigning, e-petitions, hacktivism,

political Facebook groups etc. by critics dismissing the impact and power of the media to produce real change and accusing scholars of mistaking blog posts and tweets for 'real' political action (e.g. Dean, 2009; Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011).

Emphasising the political economy of social media, this side of the discussion maintains that the online domain has been irrevocably subsumed into the market logics of global capitalism, fostering a system of commodification which privileges lazy politics and a form of engagement that does not involve commitment to social change (Dahlberg, 2005; Fenton, 2007; Fuchs, 2009), by directing people towards entertainment rather than politics. Further, this approach argues that the fragmentation and increasing dispersion brought about by the internet's affordances as a 'pull-medium' cultivates individualism, undermines sociality and isolates people behind individual screens (Sunstein, 2007). Much of the information we encounter online merely presents one aspect of an issue. It represents bits of information, factoids divorced from context, in a communication model that "adapts to the snack cultures of the multitasking prosumer" (Juhasz, 2008: 310). Thus, the internet is said to connect only likeminded users and to fail to challenge presumptions or offer new perspectives (Dahlgren, 2001; Cammaerts, 2005; Dahlberg, 2005; Dahlberg and Siapera, 2007). From the perspective of radical politics, this means that only users with prior knowledge and interest in politics tend to seek information about social movements and their causes (Cammaerts, 2007: 138-9). Equally concerned with issues of fragmentation, Habermas (1998) points out:

> "Whereas the growth of systems and networks multiplies possible contacts and exchanges of information, it does not per se lead to the expansion of an intersubjectively shared world or to the discursive interweaving of conceptions of relevance, themes and contradictions from which political public spheres arise. The consciousness of planning, communicating and acting subjects seems to have simultaneously expanded and fragmented. The publics produced by the internet remain closed off from one another like global villages" (Habermas, 1998: 120).

These dichotomised approaches – labelled techno optimism and techno pessimism – continue to powerfully shape theoretical debates concerning the potentials of media technology. The crux of the matter can be viewed as whether the process of mediation poses a threat to global democratic development or, on the contrary, is to be seen as a means for enhancing democracy and enlarging our possibilities for engaging in politics. In *(Mis)understanding the internet*, a recent contribution to this debate on the potentialities and constraints of the internet in progressive politics, the authors paint this somewhat gloomy picture of the state of affairs:

"The world is unequal and mutually uncomprehending (in a literal sense): it is torn asunder by conflicting values and interest; it is subdivided be deeply embedded national and local cultures (and other nodes of identity such as religion and ethnicity) and some countries are ruled by repressive regimes. These different aspects of the real world penetrate cyberspace, producing a ruined tower of Babel with multiple languages, hate websites, nationalistic discourse, censored speech and over-representation of the advantaged" (Curran, 2012: 11).

Similarly using the tower of Babel as a metaphor for describing life in contemporary societies, Lule (2012) juxtaposes two conflicting (and classic in the literature) visions of where media technologies will lead us. Here the pessimistic perspective is embodied by the biblical trope of Babel: a world in which human hubris, greed and vanity have condemned us to a life of misunderstanding, division and confusion with no common language for ensuring peace and cohesion. In opposition to this dark image stands the optimistic vision embodied by McLuhan's idea of the global village: a borderless world with access and opportunity for all. A world in which people would be brought closer together by the power of global media translating the diverse languages imposed at Babel and restoring unity. However, rather than ending in either of these realities, according to Lule (2012), we are facing some sort of hybrid version, a "macabre marriage" of the two. We are living in a world in which everything and everyone are in fact connected and networked together, *but* it is a dark and divided village of gated communities, ghettos of human suffering and a violent structural inequality. It is "the global village of babel": a place of division and woe rather than peace and unity, and a globally connected world in which in which media technologies are not only used "for the betterment of humanity, but dominantly for capitalism, militarism, profit and powers" (2012: 62).

In isolation, and seen as binaries rather than parallel dynamics pulling development in different directions, both of these approaches, the optimistic and the pessimistic, misunderstand the complexity and contingency of contemporary practices. At the heart of both views lies a media-centrism and a technological determinism which disavow the critical contextualisation of social and political life with all its exigencies (Fenton 2012: 125). Rather than taking a dogged position within either of these views, this research addresses the interplay between opportunities and constraints and acknowledges the contingency of our research objects by giving attention to media practices (see e.g. Coleman, 2006; Couldry, 2004; 2012; Mattoni, 2012). I thus take the concept of *mediation* as a theoretical orientation for exploring media practices – the things that people do with media – as processes enabled and conditioned by the multiple and complex interfaces between technology, institutions and representations (Couldry, 2004, 2012).

In this vein of inquiry, media-oriented practices and the ways in which citizens understand and perform these are related to their knowledge, skills, identities, and similar factors that condition and prefigure engagement (Dahlgren, 2009). In this sense, media are double-edged swords; sometimes they work for the betterment of the project they promote and sometimes, quite the contrary, for the betterment of corporations and repressive, conservative forces. Instead of assuming direct causal relations and making claims to 'media effects', the relation between media and social change should rather be understood against the backdrop of a set of complex interplays between alternative and mainstream media, broadcast and digital media, in a context where political communication is operating within an increasingly hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2011). The internet, and later social media, (and now the semantic web) have not installed a new form of democracy as early aspirations predicted, either in the context of the institutional political system or in non–institutional politics (Curran, 2012).

What recent history has shown us, however, is that transnational social movements, as well as more single-issued protest campaigns, are *facilitated* and *strengthened*, although never instigated or embodied, by online media (Curran, 2012; Fenton, 2012). In many cases online media work as apt and ingenious spaces for challenging dominant representations of political dissent and direct actions[9].

This research is thus premised on the belief that there is rarely any clear-cut either/or in these matters, and no single current or 'ism' directing the way in which the development of online spaces and our interactions in these spaces is heading. This position can be summed up by the argument that technologies have potentialities, some even radical, but it is ultimately people's appropriation of these technologies and actualisation of their affordances that will bring about change. A non-media-centric approach thus centres less on issues of media technology and more on the complex processes of *mediation* and their relationship to social and cultural practices (Couldry, 2012; Fenton 2012). To study the interplay between media and politics is always a matter of complex, interrelated and often contradictory dynamics. Rather than becoming stuck in deadlocked discussions between techno-optimism and techno-pessimism, we should continue to look for and promote the small stories of groups and organisations on the margins of – or outside - the political system that are working for progressive change in an extended democracy. We should do so

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[9] For a recent example of how online video (primarily on YouTube) has worked to counter-frame and contest the authorities' official statements and mainstream media reports of the student rallies in the UK, see Chanan (2011) and Solomon (2011). Also, Lewis, Ball and Halliday (2011) and Beaumont (2011) provide interesting critical commentaries on the unsubstantiated assumptions that Twitter was crucial to the actual mobilisations in Egypt in 2009.

regardless of how insignificant these 'stories' may be in terms of audience size or impact. In this regard, the present study rests on the normative assumption that the voices given space in this thesis are some, among many, that tell stories of hope and change.

Media perspectives on new social movements

As 2011 was coming to an end, the newsmagazine *Time,* in line with a century-long tradition, ran their 'Person of the Year' special issue in which 'the Protester' was praised and granted the title of most influential person of 2011. Situated next to a feature article declaring Kate Middleton's wedding dress the best fashion moment of 2011, the cover story is illustrated by a photo of a masked Arab woman. This thesis engages with issues of the historically conflict-ridden and complex relationship between social movements and the media. One (albeit minor) ambition in the following pages is to demonstrate the irony and hypocrisy of this type of journalistic exercise.

While this research does not aim to be a full-scale contribution to social movement theory as such, I contend that the study addresses and describes a phenomenon (and a development) of relevance to social movement theories and concepts. It contributes to this area by offering a much-needed media spin on social movement practices which is relevant for an expanded understanding of the communicative dynamics in contemporary political activism. Further, the study provides an empirical inquiry into the audio-visual dimensions of social movements that have been so persistently neglected by research. What I will highlight in this short discussion of media perspectives on social movement practices is: a) the need for and value of research on audio-visuality as a distinct category of expression of social movements, b) the critical role of (in-bound and out-bound modes of) communication in the construction of collective political identities, and finally c) the chapter ends by framing social movement actions and counter-summits, in particular, around the notion of 'global media events', indicating how such protest events increasingly take place through and in relation to the media.

Social movement media practices have proved particularly fruitful as sites for studying how citizens tap into the possibilities of the web for communicating, organising and mobilising, and have attracted much academic attention in recent years (among this vast literature, see Atkinson and Dougherty, 2006; Bennett, 2003a, 2003b, 2005; Cammaerts, 2006, 2007; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2007; Costanza-Chock, 2003; Cottle, 2006, 2008, 2012; Dahlgren, 2007, 2009; de Jong, Shaw and Stammers, 2005; della Porta 2011; della Porta and Mosca, 2009; Downing, 2008, 2012; Fenton, 2007, 2008, 2012; Juris, 2005; Mattoni, 2012; van de Donk et al., 2004). Put crudely, media perspectives on social movements and the cycle of transnational

mobilisations occurring within the past decade and a half since the Seattle events tend to cluster in three overlapping areas. In an explicit echo of McCurdy (2012), I proposed to categorise these under the labels 'strategies', 'framing' and 'alternatives'.

Firstly, studies of social movement organisations' more or less formalised and strategic use of online media have focused on the use of web-based platforms and tools to gain visibility and to raise debate and public awareness on key issues and campaigns. Such studies often raise questions of how the findings relate to the normative viability and empirical possibility of transnational public spheres said to forge an unbound (cosmopolitan) citizenship extending beyond that of the nation state (see e.g. Cammaerts, 2005; Cammaerts and Van Audenhove, 2005; Kavada, 2005, 2010b). Secondly, in a vein of inquiry concerned with issues of journalistic framing, studies have probed how mass media tend to distort – if not simply to ignore - representations of alternative politics and political subcultures. Such studies, for instance, employ content analysis to code mainstream news coverage of specific protest events for dominant frames and the tenor of media portrayals (see e.g. Rauch et al., 2007; Rucht, and Teune, 2008; and Gitlin, 1980, for a classic study of framing). The third category covers studies promoting a more relational or dialectic understanding of the interplay between radical politics and mainstream media. From this vantage point, scholars have explored the politics of representation by raising questions of how mainstream media logics increasingly shape activist practices in the preparation for and enactment of political actions (see e.g. Mattoni, 2012; McCurdy, 2009, 2011).

Within the third cluster, scholars have taken an alternative-media approach examining how activists produce and use independent media outlets for promoting self-representations that are undistorted by mass media filters (see e.g. Atton, 2002; Downing, 2007). I tap into this latter category with a contribution that aims to put an audio-visual spin on these issues by focusing on the role of the *moving image* in contemporary social movements and by raising questions of how YouTube is used by political activists as a platform to mobilise (inbound) and gain visibility (outbound) in a highly media saturated environment. I do not consider YouTube to belong to the category of radical media positioned outside the political mainstream. On the contrary, I take an interest in how radical video resides within YouTube, and the contribution to research on alternative media thus lies in how YouTube increasingly replaces or incorporates itself in alternative, non-profit spaces.

Collective identity and communication

Although the notion of political identity is not of central concern to the research questions of this thesis, it is important to establish an understanding of political subjectivity as a critical component in and dimension of *political engagement*. The issue of identity is central to an understanding of people's subjective views of what it

means to be "an empowered political agent" (Dahlgren, 2009: 120). The concept of collective identity and how this relates to social movement media practices is relevant not least because it helps position the analytical efforts of Article III within the broader framework of the thesis. The article deals specifically with the construction of collective subject positions among anti capitalists that formed *in opposition to* the more reformist fractions of the climate change mobilisation as represented by the professionalised NGO's and lobby groups in the broad coalition. Dovetailing on the work of Mouffe (1999; 2001; 2005; 2007) I subscribe to an understanding of political identities as shaped by ever-shifting contingencies and evolving political alliances. Identities are argued to be built and sustained around 'we/ they' boundaries that are continuously being redrawn as new issues and conflicts arise (Dahlgren, 2007). In the following I briefly outline the importance of political subjectivity within the *cultural approach* to the study of politics and social movement practices

Within social movement theory, the extensive use of the internet in organising, mobilising and raising debate within contemporary movements has gradually led to a recognition of the integral role of media and communication technologies in political identity formation (see e.g. Bennett and Toft, 2009; Kavada, 2009, 2012; Mercea, 2012). The internet is seen to reflect a defining feature of anti-capitalist organising and to facilitate the networked and fluid structure of organisations, and the affinity and *flexible identities* of activists within new social movements (della Porta and Mosca, 2005; Fenton, 2006; Salter 2003). A growing body of literature takes issue with the influence of interpersonal communication and the impact of intra-movement communication on issues of identity, structure and ideology (see e.g. Atton, 2007; Howarth and Griggs, 2004; Kavada, 2009; Uldam, 2010).

Within social movement theory, the growing interest in the concept of collective identity has come to mark a shift from rationalist to cultural perspectives on social movements, shifting attention "from the how to the why of mobilization" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001: 283). In this 'cultural turn' (Johnston and Klandermans, 1995), social movement theories have collapsed the European post-Marxist approach and the more rationalist-oriented American approach into a dual logic of contemporary collective action, seen to involve both individual and collective identity formation while also articulating instrumental strategic activity. Put differently, contemporary protest movements are concerned with both strategy and identity, and scholarship examining such actors should be approached accordingly (della Porta and Mosca 2005; Munck, 2007).

According to della Porta et al. (2006), a transnational social movement can be perceived as built through the symbolic construction of a collective identity by way of "meaning work". Through meaning work, social movements symbolically construct a collective subject, integrating the structural mobilisation potential and convincing sympathisers to become involved. At the same time, such communicative practices of

meaning-making legitimise their cause in the eyes of the broader public by demonstrating that, unlike the status quo, it is just and fair (della Porta et al., 2006: 62). New social movement theorists thus perceive collective identity as a continuous, self-reflexive and open-ended process. Considering collective identity formation essentially as a communicative process, in which media frame and shape interaction, Kavada (2009) argues that collective identity is objectified in the rituals, practices, cultural artefacts, stories, characters and symbolism of political activism. This makes online spaces particularly fruitful as a site for the empirical analysis of issues of identity, since the abundance of digital trails of direct actions and protests left by activists online - on a site such as YouTube - can be seen to represent the objectified rituals and practices of collective identity.

In what follows, YouTube is seen as one such space, in which stories are being told, characters are built up and dismantled, agency is mapped and the symbols and artefacts of protest and dissent are put on display. Critics of the use of collective identity as an orthodox conceptual template within social movement studies have argued that political action in today's networked capitalist society is a matter not of mobilising solidarity, but rather of forging "a public experience of self" in so far as collective action needs to be understood in terms of "a shared struggle for personal experience" (McDonald, 2002: 125). Based on the core assumption that there is rarely any either/or in such matters, this study is premised on the belief that we are faced with parallel, often contradictory, currents. Consequently, this research sets out to explore both the 'I' and the 'we' residing within YouTube, looking for intersection points where common public concerns and individual political expression intermittently, yet inevitably, come together.

Social movements and global political *media* events

The radical video practices that emerged from three recent, large-scale protest events in Malmoe, Copenhagen and London constitute the empirical starting point for the three case studies. In this sense, these physical gatherings of the very diverse set of actors and actions involved have served as a relatively fixed point of departure for studying a messy and not easily arrested alignment of social movement actors in the even messier context that YouTube offers. Although different in scope and political agenda, the ESF, the G20[10] and COP15 counter-summits need to be understood as important and intimately related moments in the circuit of transnational

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[10] Although the 2009 G20 protests constitute the empirical starting point of both articles V and VI, these trace and connect videos of the London protests with those of previous counter-summits, as well as those immediately preceding. A more accurate label for this third case study would therefore be G8/G20 2001-2011, signalling the historical scope of the videos scrutinised.

mobilisations and constantly shifting networks from which the global justice movement is built. Emphasising the role of the media in planning for and enacting protest events, it has been argued that the actions of social movement actors at counter-summits occur against the background of a *global political media event* – one that becomes meaningful and validated only when covered in the media (Dayan and Katz, 1992). These global events have in recent years become *routinised* both in the sense that the summits are recurring events rotating through a cycle of host member-countries, and in the sense that the media tend to cover the events against the backdrop of an fixed, implemented template of how previous summits have unfolded and subsequently been covered by the press (McCurdy, 2009).

On a similar note, the historical trajectory of sensationalist media coverage of previous international summits has proved to be a crucial component in police perception of certain groups of activists and ultimately to have a significant bearing on how police prepare for and enact 'summit policing' (Rosie and Gorringe, 2009). To state that activists perform 'image events' (Deluca and Peeples, 2002) and that they plan for and stage direct actions to meet the news criteria dictated by mainstream media (McCurdy, 2011) is not to say that all actions are carried out solely for the sake of gaining media attention. Nor does it imply that all actions that aim for this actually receive coverage in mainstream media. Rather, considering counter-summits as global political media events underscores how the logic of broadcast media continues to permeate political activism, even in today's digital and diversified (or fragmented) media ecology. At the same time, it reflects how social movement struggles are largely waged through image wars over symbolic representation and interpretation (Juris, 2005).

In this discursive struggle, social movement actors actively seek to counter and disrupt trivialised or stigmatising representations, using their own alternative media outlets and means of communication. In the pre-planned demonstrations organised around these global political events, giant puppets and colourful banners, spray-painted walls, smashed windows and burning dumpsters all make for eye-catching elements. These, to put it crudely, make good visuals. These protest artefacts, however, are not the only visually arresting elements used (or misused) to produce startling images and headlines in the mass media; the *visual documentations* of violence and the cultural practices tied to performative violence (Juris, 2005) are powerfully used in video documentations and narrations by activists seeking to provide alternative representations and interpretations. This study undertakes to provide one such alternative angle on these issues by probing how photographs and video taken during protest events are creatively used in online video platforms as central components in passing on stories of communion and contestation. This suggests to us how these images, their recruitment and appropriation, form part of the symbolic material from which radical identities are built and sustained.

YOUTUBE AS A SITE OF (RADICAL) POLITICS

This section serves to place YouTube within a broader map of the contemporary digital media environment. Addressing the underlying political-economic structures and the 'architecture of participation' in which the videos under study are embedded, this section moves the discussion beyond the inclusive rhetoric and abstract promise of 'broadcasting yourself' promoted by YouTube. In doing so, it offers some rudimentary attempts to understand the ways in which 'the political' is on display and politics are being forged here.

From cute cats to militant activism

The principle function of YouTube is to enable video sharing, but user participation in the platform can take a variety of forms. Besides the act of uploading videos, users can 'befriend' other users; 'like', dislike or rate videos; list 'favourites'; post comments on videos and channels; post video responses etc. As a consequence, the platform should be addressed in terms of a social networking site, as much as a content-sharing platform, (Boyd and Ellison, 2006) that provides users with a range of possibilities for expressing social linkages. Further, we might consider YouTube an agonistic public space (Mouffe, 2005, 2007) where users engage with one another in (often polarised and heated) discussions in the video comments triggered by the viewing experience.

The popularity of YouTube is often explained by reference to the way in which it successfully joins together tools for blogging, content sharing and social networking by integrating all three dimensions into one platform. Established in 2005 by three former PayPal employees, the site rapidly grew into what is today the world largest repository of moving-image culture. By 2006, it had been purchased by the Google empire, sharing this fate with numerous other skyrocketing phenomena in the online marketplace. Significantly, social media such as MySpace, Facebook and YouTube all seek to translate captive audiences into advertising revenue, and Google has been a forerunner in experimenting with models of monetising the ever-growing internet audience. Nevertheless, the Googleplex has experienced some problems with finding the magic formula for making a profit on the cultural goods on YouTube (Wasko and Erickson 2009: 378). In the wake of the buy-out, the site quickly moved from being a mere rallying ground for amateur home videos of birthday parties, pets and babies into being more than just a site for entertainment, online pranks and your ordinary

cyber 'goofing around', extending its influence in a wide variety of areas including the political arena.

Today, political parties, as well as extra-parliamentary groups, make extensive use of the platform as part of their communicative repertoire and campaign strategies. The US presidential election of 2008 was termed by political commentators the first ' YouTube election' because of the ubiquity of online video posting by candidates, and is only one illustration of the increased influence of social media in politics - the so-called 'YouTubification' of politics. At the time of writing, YouTube is estimated to account for 10 % of all Internet traffic. Over 800 million unique users visit YouTube each month and over 72 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute.[11]

From the perspective of online political activism, social networking sites such as YouTube and its counterparts make for interesting cases in that they are emblematic of a reorganisation of political spaces for civic engagement. With ever more people and organisations using social networking sites as sites for politics, online political activism has to some extent shifted from taking place in a commerce-free, independent environment, often designated 'alternative media', to increasingly occurring in the context of these corporately owned and commercialised spaces. Despite numerous attempts within activist circles to create an independent and advertisement-free space where moving images can be watched and shared no other freeware alternative has so far proved successful in providing the proper tools for online video sharing. YouTube has positioned itself as a dominant player as the world's largest video repository, and YouTube videos are currently embedded in virtually all websites screening videos.[12]

In the present thesis, YouTube is conceptualised as *a tool for and site of politics,* and the analysis consequently centres on questions of how the (potentially political) practices around radical video are shaped by the technological constraints and opportunities it offers to users. Certainly, in terms of research design, a much safer option would have been to follow one particular video-activist organisation, one particular case of a protest event, or even one particular video. Instead, this thesis sets

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[11] These are the latest numbers according to YouTube's own Press Room statistics. Retrieved on October 14 2012 from http://www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics

[12] One such example of a systematic effort to create a non-corporate environment as an alternative to YouTube is the Media Burn Archive on www.archive.org - a website run primarily by Tom Weinberg, who is a former activist/artist in TVTV. Yet another example is the Hub, set up in December 2007 by the activists behind the organisation WITNESS. As of 2010 however, the Hub shifted from being a 'living' platform to becoming an archive of 'videos for change' uploaded to the site since its launch. All content on the Hub remains accessible, but the uploading and commenting functionality were turned off.

out from the somewhat muddy starting point offered by YouTube, examining how three distinct yet intimately related social movement events have taken on a life of their own on YouTube in videos that document and reconstruct the narrative of these protest events.

In the section presenting the theoretical framework, I bring together two tracks of literature on mediated modes of civic and political engagement. The first track addresses the political dispositions of the day-to-day, mundane engagement with media by unaffiliated individuals, whereas the second track concerns the more direct and explicit modes of political participation through media by activist, groups and organisations. I want to put forward the argument that, in order to understand what video activism signals and implies today and appreciate the various ways that new generations are furthering and changing a historical trajectory of radical video praxis, we need to locate the analysis between these two horizons. In this way, I seek to cultivate an understanding of YouTube as bringing ordinary amateur users into politics, on the one hand, and as a space where political activists (demonstrating a different form of explicit politicality in their actions) make use of YouTube in their work by uploading videos in the name of a stated goal and for an intended community. Again, this sits well with the duality and circularity of the overall argument that YouTube is a space in which these two groups of social actors come together and their video practices merge in a "cross-pollination of genres" (Hill, 2007).

The political economy of YouTube

YouTube and its Web 2.0 counterparts have been hailed by two different and somewhat conflicting camps. While heralded as a major contributor to the transformation of political discourse, with huge democratising potential, the platform is at the same time praised for its ability to produce a relatively effortless profit from business opportunities and promotion (Kim, 2012; Wasko and Erikson, 2009). A sojourn in the political economy of the site and the tensions between democratic and commercial potentials is of course critical to this inquiry into the 'architecture of participation' of YouTube (Kavada, 2012).

From a politico-economic vantage point, it is important to remember that, despite the initial intentions and aspirations to create an inclusive alternative to professional broadcast media, YouTube is today a commodity owned and produced by capitalist industries. Critically questioning the assertion that YouTube is a purely democratising force in the digital mediascape, Wasko and Erikson (2009) point to the fact that the participatory design and inclusive rhetoric of 'broadcasting yourself', which at first sight might seem relatively straightforward, neglects to inform us of how various techniques have been adopted to enhance advertising in ways that ultimately privilege

some videos over others. 'Most viewed', 'most popular', 'most discussed' and 'top favourites' are all categories intended to drive traffic to sponsored videos or videos produced by so-called content partners (Wasko and Erikson, 2009: 382).

In an argument akin to Wasko and Erikson's, Gillespie (2010) points out that YouTube, like television networks and film studios before it, is a content intermediary and effectively a curator of public discourse. Therefore, as the primary keepers of cultural and political discussion increasingly move online, vigilance is required as to the role that YouTube and similar providers aim to play and the terms by which they hope to be judged (Gillespie, 2010: 348). Scrutinizing the politics of the term 'platform' Gillespie (2010) complicates and deconstructs the idea of YouTube as a democratic and easily accessible platform with unlimited possibilities to engage and be seen (Gillespie, 2010). Since its launch in 2005, a number of different terms have been used to position YouTube's unique sales proposition in the world of online video: website, company, service, forum, infrastructure, community, but recently most frequently the term *platform*. All press material and self-presentations following the Google takeover in 2006 have strategically and consistently used the term 'platform' in both popular appeal and marketing pitches. The use of this term leans on a number of technical, political, as well as architectural, connotations; computational, in so far as it is something to build upon and innovate from; political, in so far as it is a stage to communicate from, YouTube is construed as an open-armed egalitarian facilitator of expression without elitist gatekeepers (2010: 352). These connotations all fit neatly with the enthusiastic rhetoric of user-generated content and the democratic potentials of social media.

However, a number of different factors collide with the inherent promise of free expression and equity for all. For one thing, the direct appeal to the amateur user and to grassroots activity - most obviously present in the semantic markers 'You' and 'Community', but inherently also in the promise of the 'platform' - elides the obvious tensions between the cultural and commercial dimensions of the service, between user-generated content and commercially produced content, between cultivating community and serving the industry (Kim, 2012). If we keep in mind that YouTube is funded almost entirely by advertising and looking to profit from all cultural productions, the fact that the users making the videos usually do not enjoy any revenue from this does not seem to be in keeping with the ethos and philosophy behind the participatory web (Cammaerts, 2008).

Secondly, while the term platform is used to trumpet its role as a defender of free speech, YouTube is systematically shutting down channels and, by setting up content fingerprinting systems that makes it easy for copyright owners like, for example, WMG to automatically search for content that matches what they consider to be intellectual property. These complex economic allegiances compel YouTube to host the cultural productions of amateur users and at the same time to provide content

owners with the tools to criminalise such users. This business model seems to hover somewhere between two stools, on the one hand aspiring to remain neutral and on the other showing no reluctance to intervene in the delivery of content (Gillespie, 2010: 359). The term platform is used consistently in this project when referring to YouTube. This use is, however, accompanied by a critical reflexivity concerning the problematic aspects of the term highlighted above. While I am well aware of the underlying pervasive objectives, I do not uncritically disregard the wider political implications of the term, but chose to use it because there is currently no more neutral or precise language for describing this hybrid online space.

DEFINING VIDEO ACTIVISM AND RADICAL VIDEO

> "Is video activism, filmmakers doing activism - or activists doing filmmaking?" (Campbell, 2011)[13]

The following section offers a historical contextualisation of the notion of video activism, bridging the various understandings of the term within the different (and often divorced) fields and disciplines within which video is an object of study. In doing this, I am engaged by the question of what the historical trajectory of video practices, and the ways in which these have been labelled and defined, have to offer to an understanding of more recent notions of and perspectives on online video cultures. This will involve attention to the changing cultures of video today and questions of what current debates about YouTube may bring to a comprehensive and useful definition of radical online video and how this diffuses and destabilises the boxes and labels we have hitherto worked with. In short, before defining *radical online video*, we must first establish an understanding of what the notion *radical video* has signalled across perspectives and over time.

Participatory video, video for development, radical video, alternative video, community video, guerrilla video, underground video, advocacy video, DIY video, video for social change… While there is no shortage of terms to choose from, a clarity and consistency around the various uses and meanings of these terms is harder to find[14]. The term video activism has been used within a variety of different disciplines and political contexts. To be sure, the term means different things to different people and communities working with video, be it for use in legal proceeding, aimed at getting footage on the international news agenda, for public screenings, or intended for the 'imagined' global publics of the web (Gregory, 2010). In trying to understand this conceptual jungle, we should not confuse the nature of the relationship existing between all these as activities (video practices) with the

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[13] Hamish Campbell (Undercurrents/VisiononTV) in the panel 'Workshop on Video Activism' at the Documentary Now conference, University of Westminster, February 2011.

[14] Here I might remind the reader of how the variety of terms applied to the object of analysis in the different empirical studies should be seen in the light of the processual nature of the compilation thesis. By this token, radical online video serves as a unifying concept for the thesis as a whole, so as to marry the multiple designations used inconsistently both within and between the various articles.

relationship that exists (or does not exist) between different kinds of scholarly attention they have attracted (the *study* of video practices). In most cases, there is hardly any direct connection between the two[15].

A certain distinction (and perhaps even divorce) can be found between the theoretical/academic and the more 'hands-on' definitions. One straightforward definition is offered in some of the more practitioner-oriented literature on the topic. Harding (2001: 1) by way of example, identifies video activism as "the use of video as an essential tool in social justice activism". From his vantage point, video is a shorthand term for a range of different audio-visual media with different formats, purposes and lengths. Again from a practitioner's perspective, Gregory et al. (2005: 8) define *video advocacy* as "the process of integrating video into an advocacy effort to achieve heightened visibility or impact in your campaigning". While these definitions may work readily for and with some of the more well established and institutionalised ways of working with video within a collective or as part of a broader advocacy campaign and lobbying effort, they are not so apt for some kinds of radical video and (individualised) media practices that we see emerging in the online realm.

Therefore, complicating matters somewhat, let us first look at how the multiplicity of terms on offer and the variations in what these are seen to denote could be understood, at least to some degree, as the result of scholars working in so-called 'silos' across different academic disciplines. While these variations cannot merely be set aside as a matter of Chinese walls between disciplines, a certain pattern does emerge in how the different terms link with different forms of scholarly attention towards radical media, for example in development studies, film and documentary studies and social movement studies. To guide the reader in this conceptual jungle, I point out three distinct trails to follow in the academic literature, identifiable by the different accentuations on and sensibilities towards video as *news, empowerment, and documentation.*

1. *Video as alternative news.* This strand of scholarly inquiry committed to video for politically progressive ends has predominantly pursued the study of video in terms of a source of *alternative news* and *bottom-up political commentary* that picks up the challenge of independent, informed and counter-hegemonic news production where corporate mainstream media fail (Atton, 2001; 2007; Downing, 2001; Halleck, 2005; Stein, 2001). This perspective evokes notions of counter-public spheres and of counter-publicity, which for some

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[15] Thank you to Professor John Corner for pointing this out in our discussions.

years now have been at the centre of attention in the study of political activism and social movement media (see e.g. Fraser, 1992; Downing and Fenton, 2003). Among the labels most commonly applied to practices of video activism in this area of research are *alternative video* and *radical video,* both of which have etymological roots in the video activism and the reinterpretations of political documentary born out of experimental video-making in the late 1960s among US based collectives such as TVTV, Paper Tiger TV and Deep Dish TV. Feminist and queer theorists have focused on the category of AIDS videos made in the 1980s as one important chapter in the history of radical video (Juhasz, 1999; Juhasz and Saalfield 1995). **Meanwhile,** the alternative news agenda of the numerous alternative television groups and networks that have come and gone over the years, promoting alternative anti-capitalist/consumerist world views and lifestyles, have been subject to study from the perspective of citizens journalism and alternative media (see e.g. Boyle, 1997).

Some of the key disciplines in which this perspective has been applied are social movement studies, media and communication studies, and radical film and documentary studies. Over time a certain art/craft distinction can be seen to have emerged within this conceptual frame, in which perspectives on visual art, video installations and various modes of video documentary and radical cinema differ from the focus on news and actuality in being more about creating new ways of *seeing* and *perceiving* the world (Boyle, 1992; Hill, 1995). Put crudely, this divide reflects a difference between ways in which scholars have approached and understood the object of study across disciplines. In much work within the arts and humanities, video has primarily been seen to reflect a certain cultural imaginary and art form: a set of cinematographic and artistic investigations of human consciousness in some cases foregrounding the dimensions of perceptual process over the actual product (see e.g. Gaines, 2007; Renov and Suderburg, 1996). Meanwhile, as a prevailing line of inquiry within the social sciences, radical video is seen as primarily concerned with matters of alternative representations, news production, counter-framing and communication strategies of social movement actors (see e.g. Atton, 2001; 2007; Kidd, 2003). In recent years, a growing body of literature within a dominantly social scientific perspective has emerged focusing on online video platforms as public spheres and curators of political discourse (Edgerly, et al, 2009; Milliken, Gibson and O'Donnell, 2010; Van Zoonen, Vis and Mihelj, 2010; Vergani and Zuev, 2011). These contributions to the academic debate focus mainly on the production and distribution contexts of online video with little or no concern for the content of these video as such or their aesthetic qualities.

2. *Video as empowerment.* The focus on video as a source of personal and collective empowerment prevails within the academic areas of development studies, globalisation studies and the field of communication for development. Empirically attention is focused on the video practices of diasporic communities, ethnic minorities or indigenous groups as well as case-based interventions in the context of third world countries. Historically, film and documentary studies have also directed attention to video formats such as Third World Newsreel (TWN) (see e.g. Renov, 1987) and the Canadian 'Challenge for Change' video project which ran from 1968 to 1980 to promote the self representations of ethnic minorities and their social struggles as diaspora communities, under- or misrepresented in Western countries (see e.g. Waugh et al., 2010). Conceptually, terms such as participatory video, social change video and community video is commonly used in the literature. With a particular emphasis on the dimensions of *self-assertion, self-reflexiveness and empowerment,* video is for example examined as empowering low-income inner city communities or remote rural areas (see e.g. Aufderheide 1995; Calvelo Rios 2006; Harris, 2008; Hausmann, 2004; Lunch, 2004; Turner, 2002; White, 2003; Worthham, 2008). What distinguishes this understanding of video for change from other forms of video practice is the importance assigned to the very *process* of video making as an empowering and emancipatory practice "promoting self/other respect, a sense of belonging and a claim to an identity rather than the final product" (White, 2003, p. 65; for a classic reading on the Fogo Process that pioneered video for change from this perspective see Snowden, 1984). Understood as a reflexive, self-changing experience more than a tactical tool, participatory and community video does not always directly address options for social change. Rather, the empowering element lies in the options made available for individual and communities "to reconstitute their own cultural codes, to name the world in their own terms" (Rodriguez, 2004). The field is to some extent dominated by handbooks offering practical guides for how to set up participatory video projects across the world (see e.g. Harding 2001; Lunch and Lunch, 2006; Shaw and Robertson, 1997) as well as descriptive evaluations of participatory video projects and discussions of best practice case studies conducted in collaboration with NGO's and aid organisations (see e.g. Braden 1998; Evans and Foster, 2009; Lie and Mendler, 2011).

3. *Video as documentation:* To examine and understand video as tools for visual evidence is most strongly associated with the strand of literature engaging with issues of human rights and the role of media in the documentation of human rights violations. The scope of investigation involves video practices

in the context of both repressive regimes and liberal democracies. Terms such as *advocacy video, witness video, video testimony, sousveillance and citizen watch* proliferate (see e.g. Anthony and Thomas 2010; Huey, Walby and Doyle 2006; Whitty 2010). From the perspective of human rights activism, Gregory, Caldwell, Avni and Harding (2005) tap into the conceptual discussion of what differentiates one type of video activism from others by offering a useful taxonomy of video genres and their potential audiences in accordance with how these have been used to document human rights abuses. Within this tradition, video is accentuated and studied in terms of its use as a) evidence in courtrooms and international war tribunals, b) in quasi juridical settings and UN bodies (see e.g. Pillay 2005), and c) as a direct form of address to decision makers, or alternatively they are used d) as *mobilisation videos* in community mobilising campaigns – shown in order to mobilise a community to take action on a specific issue, "for and by activist and participatory organising within a community or virtual community of solidarity" (Gregory, Caldwell, Avni and Harding 2005). An example of an organisation working with video from this perspective is the US based human rights organisation WITNESS that was born out of the so called Rodney king riots in 1992 (Gregory 2010). In December 2007 activists behind the organisation WITNESS set up the online video space 'The Hub' dedicated to human rights videos. As of 2010 however, the Hub shifted from being a 'living' platform to becoming an archive of 'videos for change' uploaded to the site since its launch. The project thus illustrates the numerous, not always successful efforts to create non-corporate alternatives to platforms such as YouTube.

Within this broader landscape, this thesis situates the study of video practices chiefly within the confines of the first path, with a definition and conceptual understanding that draws primarily on the analytical commitment to radical video practices and cultures within film and media studies by bridging the dominant perspectives within the arts and humanities and within the social sciences. In doing this, it considers radical video to be defined by a shared commitment to activist exhibition (that creates a possibility of *conversation* and then of *action*) and radical form (that creates new ways of *seeing* and *knowing*) (Juhasz, 2008: 303). In my understanding of the concept, the prefix radical, has (post-)Marxist roots. While etymologically indicating the movement of going further and not stopping (Gaines, 2007), I would argue that the conjuncture of showcasing *visible evidence* of material conditions and the *aspiration* to subvert and change these is one fruitful way of understanding 'radicalism' in the context of the image/action (cor)relation implied in this definition.

In the Marxist narrative of social transformation, material conditions cause changes in consciousness, which cause social rebellion, which causes societal change (Gaines,

2007). However this image/action relation should not be understood as a directly causal one. In stressing the importance of the dimensions of aspiration, I argue that the implied element of action in the notion 'radical' should be seen to include an aspiration not yet to transform, but "to first grasp the social world in political terms" (Gaines, 2007: 18). This in turn resonates with notions of prefigurative politics, pointing towards the various prerequisites for and steppingstones to participation and the cultural approach to political theory outlined in the previous sections. It further suggests an understanding of politicality that embraces the various steps taken and the dimensions of political subjectivity that come prior to taking action. Conceptualising radical video not as an instigator of immediate social change, but as one agent (in a complex relation of many) that impinges upon the pre-conditions for civic engagement and participation on an everyday level links back to Juhasz's (2008) account of video as creating ways of *seeing* and *knowing,* as well as galvanising action.

In a previous section presenting the privileged focus on textual analysis in the research design (Chapter 2), I introduced the notion of political mimesis (Gaines, 1999) in order to emphasise the dimension of aspirations, or elements of *trying to change,* in radical documentary practices. From this vantage point, the commitment to social change in radical video is an ongoing, open-ended and almost utopian effort, rather than a given instrumental project. This understanding informs the definition and delineation of radical video practices, as well as the methodological choices of how to research this. Renouncing a 'media effect' paradigm inclined to look for causal relations such as how a certain video has a certain outcome, or the impact beyond the screen, the methodological framework builds on textual analyses of the various strategies deployed to galvanise change in the viewer and in the world, never losing sight of the various ways in which the texts may promote and mould the preconditions for this change by creating new ways of knowing and seeing.

In further pursuing an understanding of why and how moving images have historically been claimed so persistently and readily for socialist and Left-wing projects (Corner, 2011), this next section provides a brief historical contextualisation of some of the seminal moments and events that have shaped practices and political communities around radical video in the past decades.

A brief history of video activism

The co-founder of the British media collective *Undercurrents*, Thomas Harding, claims that the term video activist first came into widespread use around the 1980s with the proliferation of camcorders (Harding, 2001). However, while the arrival of inexpensive portable video cameras may have marked a sudden and radical boost in alternative video production, it does not mark the beginning of such practices, which have roots in the early history of the radical cinema of the Left. Listing some of the

practices that precede online video will take us to the workers' photography movement of the 1920s and 1930s. Examples of groups within this movement range from the Workers' Film and Photo League in the US, organised in 1928 and existing until around 1935 (Nichols, 1973), through the Soviet newsreels distributed through 'agit-trains', 'agit-boats' and town screenings in the first decades of the 20th century, to the Griersonian social realist documentaries on the everyday realities of life during the Great Depression (Nichols, 1991). The list continues through the newsreel collectives of the late 1960s (Boyle 1992; Nichols, 1973; Renov, 1987) to the AIDS videos of the 1980s (Juhasz, 1999), the counter-summit narrowcasting and systematic video documentation of the early 2000s, and the kinds of alternative news production that these geo-political events and their discontents have spurred.

The release of the half-inch Sony Portapak in 1967 marked the embryonic stages of what has been broadly labelled video activism. With the technological landmark came cultural and political surges and an 'alternative television' movement was launched to design and implement alternative information structures that would transcend and reconfigure existing power structures and challenge commercial television codes (Radical Software, 1970). Just as the invention of moveable type in the fifteenth century made books portable and private, and the development of off-set printing launched a radical print movement in the 1960s (Thompson, 1995), video revolutionised the televised image, and camcorder technologies paved the way for unprecedented possibilities for 'ordinary' people to become media practitioners and artists (Boyle, 1985). The technological development fused with a cultural and political movement of the time premised on the belief that radical social change was possible through collective endeavour. The newfound possibility of working with video for change was in turn conflated with opportunities for personal change, subjectified consciousness explorations in countercultural, libertarian lifestyle choices and artistic expressions (Hill, 1995; Boyle, 1992). The developments of the time within visual media should therefore not be understood as an isolated process, but rather as part of a larger alternative media tide affecting radio, print, press, magazines and publishing as a whole.

In a US context, *Top Value Television* (TVTV) was one of the first significant video collectives, dating back to 1972. Platforms such as *Paper Tiger TV*, *Free Speech TV* and *Deep dish TV* also served as important spaces of production and distribution. In New York, San Francisco, Boston and beyond, self-proclaimed video activists turned their cameras towards the stories they felt were disregarded or simply ignored in mainstream media news coverage and in so doing challenged the power structures of the broadcast media of the time by questioning who decides what images of the world we see and what 'truths' we are presented with. In these early years, there was little to distinguish video artists from video activists, since art was increasingly seen as the product of social and political engagement on the part of the artist (Boyle, 1992).

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In these years, art was embraced as documentary and vice versa (Boyle, 1985). In this way, the movement was as much about re-thinking the relationship between art (and more generally representation) and reality as it was about producing new media forms for new media content (Hill, 2011). Around the 1970s, however, a separation between 'video artist' and 'video maker' emerged, as a result of changes in the political and cultural climate and new policies of government funding which led to the breakdown of the all-in–one bandwagon that had hitherto prevailed within the movement (Boyle, 1992). Video activists, then, were only later divided into two different factions: *community video and guerrilla television*. These factions persist today and to some extent sum up the differences in how video activism is defined and differentiated in contemporary literature on 'video for social change'. 'Community video', used for empowering local communities, is fostered and theorised primarily in the context of development studies, whereas the social science spectrum has looked at radical video in terms of alternative news practices, strategies and tactical tools in mobilisation and propaganda discourse, for example in social movement studies.

Returning briefly to the issue of definition and the various different terms used (seemingly interchangeably) over time, Boyle (1992) offers one useful way of navigating this conceptual jungle. She argues that, in order to understand these overlapping definitions and labels and the ways in which they are used today, we need to trace the notions backwards in time to their roots within the specific cultural movements and art projects they were born from in the late 1960s and early 1970s, in a public dialogue about new cultural forms and access to participatory media. Assigning different terms to the various phases they represent in the history of video and collective video practices, she argues that alternative television, guerrilla television and grassroots video were used interchangeably in the early years of video activism in the mid-1960sand early 1970s, whereas underground video and hyperbolic notions such as cyber-genetic video warfare were used synonymously in the 1970s and 1980s (Boyle, 1992: 78).

In this manner, community video is often synonymously referred to as participatory video. Most often serving a localised constituency, the scale of the struggle remains confined to social issues on a local level (Boyle, 1992: 71). The term *Guerrilla television* was itself the title of a 1971 book by Michael Shamberg and the pioneer video collective Raindance Corporation (1992: 79). Using video to challenge the communication infrastructure of broadcast media, the guerrilla television movement produced documentaries inspired by the *cinéma vérité* of the 1960s and aimed specifically at bypassing the gatekeepers of mainstream media. While attempting to secure airtime on broadcast media, guerrilla video makers built upon an explicit critique of what was considered the "aesthetically bankrupt and commercially corrupt" broadcast medium of the time (1992: 69). Video and the collective practices that formed around these collectives were conceptualised as essential tools for

"decentralising" television by providing people with the equipment and skills to produce interviews, programmes and documentaries representing the invisible, the marginalised, the quaint and the queer, and providing a space for these to be 'narrow-casted' on cable television. In its early form, guerrilla television is best defined and understood in contrast (but not in opposition) to community video, and by the shared interest in developing the medium as a technology and getting tapes aired on broadcast television, disseminating content to the maximum available audience, rather than serving a single, localised community. The aim was nothing less, to put it simply, than changing the world through television, (Faber, 2007). To some extent, this distinction between the two different but overlapping traditions of media ethics is viable today, since contemporary organisations, collectives and activist networks centred around radical video are sediments and products of these past work practices and ethics.

Although affordable portable video equipment was available and used widely and with some political efficacy, it was not until the introduction of the 8mm and SVHS camcorders of the mid-1980s that video activism truly began to proliferate (Harding, 2001: 9). In Denmark, libertarians ran a weekly public cable show, TV Stop, later TVTV. After the initial enthusiasm for U-Matics and the Portapak, activist involvement with video subsided for a period as the cost of production, and especially of post-production, became untenable when working with subaltern, under-privileged communities. According to Boyle (1992), the 1980s arrived on a wave of conservatism that threatened to undermine the efforts of the social activists and video innovators of earlier decades. Analytical interest in the study of video also became for a time relatively unfashionable, which may be understood in concert with a broader vacuum in alternative Left political projects and visions from the late 1980s until the late 1990s. With some exceptions, such as Earth First! in the US and the British anti-road movements, campaigns in which radical video practices were key components received little academic attention in this period (see e.g. Wall, 1999). Some of the actions involved anti-roads activists filming the police evicting them from three houses and selling the material to television stations (see Harding, 2001).

In the late 1990s, yet another rise in video activism occurred. This boom in activism, once again rethinking the possibilities of the medium, was, according to Harding (2001), a result of a number of correlating factors: a) a new wave of political activism; b) the failure of mainstream media to cover social and environmental justice movements; and finally c) technical improvements in video equipment and greater possibilities for access. In the early 1990s, the video collective WITNESS came out of the momentum created by the Rodney King incident. One of these 'second wave pioneers', Sam Gregory, sums up this later period within the historical trajectory of video activism, from the early 1990s until today, in the following way:

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"(…) we've seen a progressive expansion the participatory possibilities of video: first increased access to cameras, the increased access to editing capacity, then the dramatic growth of online video-sharing for distribution. And in the past three years we see the possibilities for increased collaboration in editing and production, for online distribution, and for more immediate and widespread filming – all facilitated by a digitally literate youth, by mobile technologies with still images and video capability and by new online tools" (Gregory, cited in Jenkins, 2009).

Gregory (2010) explains that, whereas the gatekeepers at the time of early video activism were the networks and cable television stations, in a present day context, where technological capacity to share content has radically changed, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and the like become the primary gatekeepers when, for example, systematically removing content of a politically 'controversial' nature. In this sense, gatekeeping today has become a question of censorship. Gregory (2010) goes on to argue that the ubiquity of cameras in protests, in conjunction with the ease of content sharing, both represents a great potential and newfound possibilities for activists and at the same time raises significant questions of agency and action, and that distributing material on YouTube comes with a certain set of challenges and risks that need to be addressed.

As this brief historical outline suggests, the novelty of the kind of video activism we see today concerns not so much the use of videos as a political tool as how these videos are produced, distributed and consumed in new forms of global networks. Whereas the video productions of the 'Portapak days' circulated within grassroots networks as edited documentaries on tape, today the material is often put directly onto the web, signalling a different kind of immediacy and simultaneity with the events covered. As increasingly media-literate individuals have ever-greater access to advanced media technologies, how are the modes of radical video practices changing? How do the new arenas and practices by which radical videos are spread feed into earlier conceptualisations of video activism? And how is the implied, and at times explicit, critique of capitalism in radical video propelled and transformed in the process?

Radical online video

At this point, we have established that video is not one, but many things. When referring to video activism throughout this thesis, I do so well aware of its multiple meanings dependent on contexts and perspectives. By using the term video activism, I mean to signal an intersection between visual art, political documentary, amateur video cultures and social activism. I mould my understanding around notions of

inter-mediality and hybridity, with a sensibility to what Renov (2011)[16] has called "the chorus of bits and pieces" in todays remix video culture. In so doing, I admit to the contingency and fragmentation of this 'genre' and its limitations as an adequate label to identify similar kinds of video on YouTube. Radical online video is seen to intersect across the junction point of a number of modes of documenting and constructing radical politics today.

In the academic literature, video is most often referred to as a collective practice. In the context of YouTube, videos and channels are, however, often the work of individuals who may or may not be affiliated with political organisations or networks. YouTube has proved to be a platform for individual, self-centred political expression and identity as much as it is part of the communication repertoire of political organisations, groups and networks (Fenton and Barassi, 2011).

Interestingly, in this context, respondents interviewed during demonstrations while filming told me they were making "YouTube videos" or "videos for YouTube", indicating how YouTube is (misleadingly) considered a generic, self-contained category. Online video is quite often referred to merely as YouTube video, indicating how the platform has become synonymous with all online video. In reality, however, the same videos are found elsewhere online, on less frequented and popular video sites. In this respect, YouTube has complicated our sense of what the term video activism can now be used to signify. The broad and motley range of radical online video we meet on YouTube, I would argue, conflates and collapses all of these different definitions and distinctions made between advocacy, radical, community, amateur, DIY and participatory video.

From this maximalist perspective on participation, the argument could be made that all video is political, if we subscribe to the view that the political is a quiet and implied, yet pervasive, dimension of culture per se. To avoid such 'accusations', and for the sake of specificity, I subscribe to a definition from the work of Corner (2008, 2011) on political documentary, which 'confines' and emphasises the political commitment to action and change, as implied in the prefix radical. The notion of radical video comes with a long history of political practices and traditions of scholarly attention to these practices. The prefix radical has been put in front of a variety of nouns: radical documentary, radical cinema, radical media, radical politics, all of which are essential to the understanding of video activism today. These labels all bring different conceptual baggage and frameworks into the discussion.

When I refer to radical online video, then, I refer to video "explicitly engaging with and contesting issues to do with the control of resources and exercising of social

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[16] Michael Renov in keynote speech at the 'Documentary Now' conference, London January 2010.

power through formal institutions and procedures of regulation" (Corner, 2011: 189). Arguably, this definition may foreshorten some of the more subtle forms of social critique in video work and the understanding of politics as an inherent dimension of everyday life and culture at play in some videos. Although I do not dismiss these softer, less formal dimensions of the political, when it comes to delineating what constitutes radical video and defines it as an object of analysis, I find that this firmer definition, directing attention to the more direct and explicit attempts at political engagement, is a more useful compass for the purpose of the project and the tightening of its analytical efforts. That said, this 'tighter' understanding of politicality, with a focus on intentionality and purpose, does cause some analytical ambiguity, and matters are complicated somewhat when the focus moves beyond theories and definitions into the messy empirical world. On its road from being radical video to becoming radical online video, something happens in the online re-mediation and appropriation that makes it hard to maintain these strict criteria for identifying content of an explicitly political and directional kind. By way of example, this definition or set of criteria is at risk of missing out a number of videos, which seem to be in the 'grey zone'.

There are many examples of how capturing an event in ill-focused and blurred images or on a mobile phone can sometimes stir reactions far greater than any well edited, time-and-money-consuming documentary on political wrongdoing and social injustice. We find numerous examples of this within the body of videos scrutinised in this project. By way of example, many of the videos documenting and commemorating the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 demonstrations in London in 2009 use footage taken by an American investment banker who had unknowingly caught the events leading to the man's death on his mobile phone. Such is historically the case with seminal moments in the development of video activism, such as the video documentation of the beating of Rodney King, where it was a carpenter, George Halloway, who happened to be filming on his balcony and captured the events as they unfolded. These examples all epitomise some of the issues tied to considering intentionality as a key parameter for defining 'radical' or the explicit politicality of certain videos and the recording of much material. History is crowded with cases of individuals and groups who had no idea, and could have had no idea, of the chain of socially disruptive events they were setting in motion (Downing, 2001).

These ambiguities and question marks signal the acute need to address and identify some of the themes, forms and defining features of radical video within these grey zones where amateur meets professional, anti-capitalism meets corporate control, and the mundane politics of everyday life meets militant activism. The work of, for example, established video collectives documenting police brutality is mixed with that of unaffiliated, more or less politically motivated individuals who, perhaps even by

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chance, have caught a demonstration on video and made of it a simple 'fly on the wall' film in observational mode (Nichols, 1983). Here I mean not only the conjunction of videos in terms of how they are sandwiched randomly together on YouTube. I am also referring to how snippets from different videos are cut up and put together in new compilation videos. The circulation and re-appropriation of images shot by others is a key aspect of contemporary online cultures in which people engage with the annotation, appropriation and re-circulation characteristic of the redaction practices of "do-it-yourself citizenship" (Hartley, 2010) or the notion of "photoshop democracy" as described in the work of Jenkins (2006). Still, very little is known of how this remix ethos relates to and translates into video practices concerned with social justice issues, or of whether it is even possible to reconcile the mash-up aesthetics of online video with the evidentiary truth claims made in and for radical video.

While these issues may signal discrete methodological and analytical challenges for this specific project, I believe that the issues raised signal on a more general level the need to refine the tools and epistemologies for studying these hybrid forms and their spaces of distribution and consumption. Indeed, one of my main arguments is that what scholars have defined and labelled interchangeably as radical video, activist video or participatory video is changing as a consequence of this *dual process* of, on the one hand, expanding grassroots access to media production and circulation and, on the other, corporate control over grassroots media and communication infrastructure. In what follows, I confront some of the issues of hybridity and extreme inter-mediality in a proposed typology for understanding and examining some of the kinds of radical video we see emerging today.

A typology

In this section, I wish to engage with some of the principal conceptual themes and concerns that shape the various forms of radical online video addressed here and propose a tentative typological scheme for understanding them as distinct genres that, despite their variations, are united by *purpose, practice* and to some extent *form*. These include the *mobilisation video*, the *witness video,* the documentation video, the remediation and archiving of activist documentary and, as an example of *political mash-up videos*, the *activist commemoration* video.

The empirical articles in this thesis identify and analyse some of these modes of video in detail and in doing so bring light to the variety of different forms and combinations of forms to be found online. However, as the articles rarely have the privileged space for considering these in concert, analytical attention tends to treat them as somewhat isolated forms. Instead of seeing them in isolation I try here to understand these as part of the same generic mode of radical video for a politics of the

Left. Needless to say, this is no exhaustive categorisation. Not only would such an undertaking be relatively useless, it is also not possible to make any empirical generalisations about universal patterns and categories on the basis of the research design. These are hybrid genres within a chaotic and staggeringly abundant sea of online videos. Hence, in the proposed typology, I engage with some, but not all, of the different forms of radical online video one can encounter on YouTube.

1.　　The term *mobilisation video* was coined, by practitioners and activists, for the short videos disseminated prior to a pre-scheduled demonstration or direct action event (other terms used for the same kind of video are 'protest trailers' or 'demo teasers'). Interestingly, on numerous occasions during the course of this study, activists and video makers referred to these videos specifically as 'riot porn'. Explicitly calling for political action, the mobilisation video urges viewers to take action by joining the protests or direct actions, or to engage online, for example by redistributing the call for action in their own personal networks. These are short, piecemeal, bite-sized slogans often adapted to the time frame of a television advertisement. As a flexible genre, guiding rather than determining styles and strategies, mobilisation videos follow a certain set of shared dramaturgic rules. They bring together discursive resources and historical genres to stage injustice as a spectacle that requires action and set up a number of given spaces of action for the viewer. Mobilisation videos usually end with a link directing viewers to a website for additional detailed information on the event being promoted.

　　　　Characterised by a stark visual contrast between evil-doers and benefactors, the condensed narrative of the mobilisation video reduces complex political issues to a feasible space of action. In different ways, they stage injustices and make an appeal to the public for social and political change. Mobilisation videos make for a particularly interesting genre because the political intentionality is so explicit, just as there are interesting parallels to be drawn between online mobilisation videos and historical forms of Left-wing agitprop theatre and political propaganda. The story told in order to "rally the troops" (Gregory et al., 2005: 10) obviously differs dramatically from that intended, for example, to persuade a committee of sceptical legislators or from an in-depth political commentary on broader societal structures.

　　　　A fruitful distinction can thus be made within this genre between the mobilisation video, re-educating and re-solidifying solidarity among the converted, and the video used to initiate, convert or recruit (Gaines, 2007: 87). Yet another useful notion in tracing the roots of the dramaturgy in these calls for action is what Gaines (2007) refers to as "body genres": the commonalities of works that make us want to do something, designed for the "production of outrage" to galvanize "body works". In the comments posted

on these videos, users often leave links to other mobilisation videos calling for new actions.

2.   The 'witness video' is a label used to designate videos documenting specific unjust conditions or political wrongdoings/doers, police brutality or human rights violations. These videos are often uploaded without much editing. Also falling into this category are the videos meticulously documenting protest events and direct actions in order to challenge the dominant image-frames of these events and provide visual evidence and eyewitness testimony. While these videos dominantly apply strategies of realism, using the bumpy handheld aesthetic to induce a sense of authenticity, of 'being there' and seeing with your own eyes what happened, others rely on more performative strategies, setting the footage to music and adding on-screen graphics, voice-over or text. (These have also been called, in the various articles, *protest videos* and *demonstration videos*).

In these videos, the space of action is often implied rather than explicated (as in the mobilisation videos that provide much more explicit directions for action). Chanan (2011) dubs this kind of video 'citizen reportage', to signal how ordinary citizens (non-activists) increasingly engage in video documentation that stands out not for technical or aesthetic proficiency, but for its sense of participation in audio-visual immediacy (Chanan, 2012: 220). One of the crucial contributions of radical online video to is to challenge existing forms of political communication with new modes of audio-visual immediacy.

3.   'Documentation videos' are videos archiving activist events and actions. This cluster of self-documentation videos represents a straightforward archival documentation of marches, speeches, community meetings, direct action events, political happenings etc. These work mainly as modes of auto-communication and reflect the role of video in providing dimensions of collective identity, a sense of belonging, community and sustained commitment. In a recent study of the use of YouTube by London-based social movement organisations, the author finds that "members use online spaces as visual archives of their offline activities and personal ties", indicating how "photos from offline events can help sustain commitment to the group by providing group members with possibilities for viewing documentation from their own participation" (Uldam, 2010: 312). For these purposes, YouTube works as a cultural archive of visual collections of offline activities forming a place of memory that fosters commitment to the act of participation (Carpentier, 2010). Here we might also situate the longer video items that have sprung up recently in connection with the wave of occupied campuses, for example in London, and public spaces seized by activists in the

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Occupy movement. Featuring the talks of supportive academics and writers such as Graham Turner, Judith Butler or David Harley on visits to the protest camps, these videos are strongly reminiscent of what in the 1960s was dubbed the 'teach-in' (Chanan, 2011).

4. For want of a better term, I have called the specific cluster of videos brought to the fore in the third case study 'activist commemoration videos'. These could be considered a subgenre of what I label 'political mash-up videos', which take found material from multiple sources and recombine it in new ways (Chanan 2011: 220). Such videos epitomise the hybridity and inter-mediality found at the intersection points of radical politics and contemporary online video spaces. They collapse together a whole range of different narrative and documentary modes of video. In pervasive strategies of sequence construction and linking, they merge direct and indirect modes of address with online modes of commemoration, putting on display vernacular mourning rituals and the symbolism of collective grieving. They do so by building an emotional narrative from a compilation of images of the victim in his about-to-die and moment-of-death representation. Still others feature the vernacular voice of the vlog and its confessional style of chronological photograph slide-show documenting the acts and actors involved in the crime and indexically pointing out the victim, perpetrator and benefactor. In doing so, these address the interfaces between the aesthetics and ethics of representing death and the use of online technologies for screening and portraying death and constructing political martyrdom.

    The soundtrack holds a dominant position in these videos, in which music plays a significant role as both a marker of individualism and a signifier of group participation (Burgess and Green, 2009a; see also Boyd (2007) for the function of music in social networking sites more generally and Gaines (1999) on music augmenting political argument). Some videos in this category even deploy the 'talking head' characteristic of the confessional mode of vlog, while others combine caught-on-camera material and eyewitness accounts with archival material. This grouping of radical video also includes amateur music videos that featuring self-made footage of singer-songwriters contemplating the death in question and its broader political implications.

    In this sense, this particular 'genre' collapses the mode of bearing witness and the evidentiary documentation of the witness video with discourses of both mourning and mobilisation. These videos demonstrate some of the ways in which the shift in control over production and distribution of videos epitomised by YouTube has given life to a multiplicity of new video forms combining its aesthetic-discursive qualities in various creative ways. As

emblems of historical events, these videos are testimony to how activists seek to construct meaning and to have a say in how the history of certain events is written and in how protester and police violence is framed and presented to the public.

5. YouTube is also a space in which 'old' 8/16mm activist documentaries and videos are remediated and (potentially) given new life and a new audience. With a textual presentation contextualising and historicizing the video for a present day audience, videos from activist collectives such as Deep Dish TV and DIVA (damn interfering video activists), documenting the Act Up AIDS protests in the 1980s, are presented next, for example, to recently uploaded videos of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations and a video discussing the role of social media in the Arab spring. Other examples include the Third World Newsreel (TWN), which has celebrated its 40th anniversary of working with video and documentary to promote the self-representation of ethnic minorities, LGBT and other traditionally marginalised groups (See e.g. Nichols, Renov, 1987). TWN today continues its work online, with a YouTube channel hosting both new and historical material. Another way of appropriating and re-making is by adding on-screen speech balloons with small texts presenting the video. This type of radical video is not examined independently in any of the articles, but it nevertheless represents an important category in terms of how YouTube provides a broader representational space in which new videos are presented to the viewer, potentially connecting past and present struggles.

By introducing some of the modes of radical online video that the reader will encounter in the following pages, I hope to have established a preliminary understanding of the objects of analysis that reflect the strengths as well as limitations of such a schematic effort. Rather than an exhaustive inventory of radical video in the online realm, I consider the proposed typology to be a point of entry into broader discussions of how we might understand these 'genres' in relation to an increasingly complex set of media flows and circuits of distribution and consumption across intertwined and hybrid communication networks (Chadwick, 2011). Further, the typology should be seen as setting the scene for a continued investigation of this conceptual scheme in the concluding sections. After having presented the articles, I will be able to return to these questions with more nuanced and situated insights into what this online mix of 'radical' and 'video' just might entail for how we understand and define video activism today.

Part II: The articles

Article 1:

Article 2:

Article 3:

Article 4:

Article 5:

Article 6:

Part III: Concluding considerations

FROM THE 'PORTAPAK REVOLUTION' TO THE 'YOUTUBIFICATION' OF VIDEO ACTIVISM

Before pulling together the findings of the empirical studies, I want in this final part of the contextualising chapter to again briefly refocus our attention to the pre-internet era. In the first section of the contextualising chapter, I argued that, in the midst of all the 2.0 hype, we should not forget the longstanding debates on amateur media production and the politically committed video among (and not always between) media scholars and practitioners. A number of scholars have called attention to the need for a historically grounded understanding of YouTube and the term video activism, urging scholars and practitioners to "reclaim what happened before YouTube" (Jenkins, 2009: 125; see also Chanan, 2011; Lovink and Miles, 2011). In the introductory section, I argued that in order to understand contemporary forms of online video and their political uses, it is important to include the larger history in which contemporary practices of radical video can be traced back. By placing YouTube within the broader history of amateur video production and political activism, this second part of the contextualising chapter thus starts by further mitigating the relationship between past and present forms of video activism. This question is approached here on the basis of the insights provided by the empirical studies and of the typology proposed for an extended understanding of these contributions. By tracing the emergence of video as a technology and as a set of cultural practices within communities, which formed around the practices and ethics of sharing tapes, it provides a historical context for current debates about video activism. Finally, in the last part of this section, I tie these insights to a discussion of how the kinds of digital practice of radical video exhibited in the various case studies are intimately linked to, yet differ from, previous modes of video activism.

In the trajectory of academic interest in the relation between media and social change, scholars and practitioners have long shared visions of audio-visual media designed to serve progressive movements (Juhasz, 2008). At first sight, YouTube embodies the radical promise of access and voice in the somewhat utopian visions of the video pioneers (Jenkins, 2009: 112). From this perspective, contemporary forms of radical online video might be seen as the fulfilment of the dream in the 1960s and 1970s of making "people's television" (Boyle, 1995; Faber, 2007; Hill, 1995) and YouTube

might be seen as enabling the vision of the cinéma vérité of the "caméra as stylo" (Lovink, 2011).

In the late 1990s, when confronted by the first wave of 'E-democracy' optimism and the early phases of what would become a boom in oppositional politics and social movement activity after a long period of silence and disillusionment among 'guerrilla video warriors', media historian Deirdre Boyle (1997) made a plea to future generations of media activists and those who study them to consider "what happened to the last pilgrims to venture down that rocky road of social change" (Boyle, 1997: xvi). Boyle describes how many of the radical video pioneers of the Portapak days eventually left for Hollywood or the major television broadcast stations after bitter conflicts over funding and resources within the alternative television movement. In this manner, by the late 1970s increasing numbers of video artists and independent producers, drawn by the prospects of making profit from their practice, were negotiating the contradictory possibilities of broadcast television's greater visibility and potential censorship (Hill, 1995).

Decades later, in the early days of the internet, faced with the promise that this information super-highway would take us to a utopia where electronic democracy would finally be realised, Boyle (1992, 1997) urges us consider this as a cyclic process of co-option in which history repeats itself. From such a perspective, one could argue that the period preceding the large scale mobilisations in Seattle in 1999, and the decade that followed, marked by an upsurge in alternative media practices, are now undergoing the same process as described by scholars studying early video activism and the cyclic waves of social critique that have influenced such activism. The process by which the print-based radical press of the labour movement in the late 19th and 20th centuries bowed under the pressure of the market, leading to its monopolisation, mainstreaming and finally destruction, provides one such example (Yossarian, 2008).[17]

With alternative media, such as Indymedia, losing out to corporate-run platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, we have still to see what the implications of this will be in the longer run. The market mechanisms of consumer capitalism tend to co-opt and neutralise every critique levelled against them by turning it into a commodity and selling it back to us through advertising and the mass media (for variations on this argument, see Boltanski and Chiapas, 1999; Heath and Potter, 2006; Willig, 2007). Today's networked capitalist societies tend to individualise and singularise. Several of the articles take issue with questions of the entrapment and

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[17] Posted on Indymedia UK in November 2008 by user 'Yossarian'. Retrieved from http://london.indymedia.org/articles/203 on 10 October 2012.

commodification of radical politics in corporate media spaces and activists' felt experience of de-radicalisation. Such processes unfold not only as a consequence of an increasingly monitored, censored and commercialised media environment, but also in a political context where Western democracies increasingly police and criminalise dissent and civil disobedience (articles II, III and IV). YouTube, and contemporary practices of online activism more generally, increasingly direct all traffic to a few powerful mastodons of the new economy and in so doing fail to fulfil early video activism's dreams of creating social change and autonomous spaces through visual technology. Discourses on the unprecedented opportunities of digital media and endless reach of YouTube often lack a critical concern with regard to these corporate spaces and their implications for the free flow of radical voices in society. Further, they tend to dismiss the basic argument that access alone will never bring about critical participation in democracy.

However, the story of YouTube is not only a story of social activity being colonised, but also one of pluralism, of transnational networks of people connecting, sharing ideas and committing to political projects. It is a story of both complicit technologies and subversive practices. One of the insights emerging from the case studies is that YouTube is often used as a 'dumb pipe': an empty host for videos embedded in a different website through which an intended audience share, discuss and act upon the video. By directing all traffic outside of the platform itself to 'free' spaces in which videos are shared and discussed, activists were conscious of how they could optimise the technological affordances provided by the platform without falling prey to or adding to its corporate value chain. McChesney (1996) reminds us of a cyclic process in which new technologies such as electricity, postal services, the telegraph, telephones, radio etc., initially introduced with utopian expectations of democratic progress, have all been turned into industries dominated by business and manipulated for profit. The technologies that provided previous generations of video activists with eloquent, practical and affordable camera equipment were all products initially released for a household market (with Sony releasing the Portapak and later JVC the first Camcorder). Such insights illustrate McChesney's argument that swift changes in access have always been related to developments in technological commodities. Then as now, this technology was intended for the production of home videos of the same cute pets and giggling babies that today torment viewers of the majority of YouTube's channels. Yet people directed and continue to direct the camera elsewhere.

Image/action: seeing is believing?

The early years of video activism were marked by a very strong focus on technology grounded in a firm belief that 'seeing is believing'. This adage was later deemed a somewhat naïve belief in the indexicality of the image and the idea that visibility will

ultimately create action (Harding, 2001). Gaines (1999) calls for a critical evaluation of the assumed causal relations between an image and its referent. She describes a kind of "social change myth" widespread on the Left, both within and outside academia, arguing that scholars dedicated to the analysis of radical cinema and what she terms the "committed documentary" would like to believe that the history of the moving image is intimately connected to a legacy of cataclysmic change, even though none or very few examples exist of films that have shaken things up politically (Gaines, 1999; Renov, 1987).

In 1992 camcorders were just beginning to enter ordinary households. In that year many people were radicalised by the so-called Rodney King incident, when Los Angeles police officers were caught on camera beating a black man in the street. In the aftermath of the riots that followed the public broadcasting of the home video that had captured the incident, a group of people formed the video activist organisation Witness. These pioneers asked themselves what would happen if everyone had a camera in their hands, all the time. What untold stories, what visual evidence would people be able to capture and share (Gregory, 2010)? Today, twenty years later, this is close to becoming a reality. Camera technologies are deeply ingrained in every aspect of our day-to-day life and embedded in virtually all media technologies. So has everyone with a mobile phone become a video activist overnight? And what are we filming?

The use of images for political purposes relies on the recognition that abstract concepts and complicated events can become visible and understandable through certain kinds of depiction (Zelizer, 2010: 20). In this sense, radical video that uses realism for political ends derives its power from the same world it copies. Radical video can thus be seen to derive power and political efficacy from the very real political events it depicts (Gaines, 1999: 95). Inherent in this recognition is an implied and presumed connection between visual evidence and public action – an idea which, although put to rest on several occasions, still persists to some extent in contemporary media practice and theory. In her work on public memory and representations of death, Zelizer (1998; 2010) reminds us of how, following the Holocaust, the sentiment prevailed that had there only been pictures available of the atrocities as they unfolded, the events would have been brought to an immediate halt. In subsequent years, public reaction (or lack of reaction) to televised, broad-, narrow- or cyber-cast wars, famines and genocides have put this notion permanently to rest. History has shown us that visual evidence does not necessarily produce public outrage, action or even attention. The media have familiarised us with distant suffering and injustices, and over time a certain reluctance and fatigue have come to characterise audiences' reactions vis-a-vis 'heavy politics' and the mediation of distant, unjust conditions (Chouliaraki, 2006; Boltanski, 2006). Gregory (2010) signals this same reticence when he points out that several decades of an ever-increasing

availability of and access to visual media have taught video veterans to be sceptical of claims to any direct proportionality between visibility and action. Despite all the new opportunities to capture and distribute footage of the harsh realities of human rights abuses or corrupt global politics, video activists are most often working with images that most of the world does not *want* to watch (Gregory cited in Jenkins, 2008; Gregory, 2010). So, despite increased digital literacy and increased opportunities for sharing, remixing and circulating video, we are still mainly filming the same old cute pets and giggling babies.

In the previous pages, I have established that modern cyber culture can trace its roots back to the cultural practices of the early years of analogue video, radical newspapers, radical documentary and a variety of other related practices, such as fan-vid productions (Jenkins, 2009; Turner, 2005). Jenkins (2009) argues that the creative amateur culture mushrooming on YouTube today is a continuation of the longstanding practices of media fan cultures, merging fandom video production and activist politics[18]. With examples from fandom cultures, garage cinema, avant garde zines, vaudeville and other DIY and underground practices, he argues that if YouTube seems to have sprung up overnight, this is because so many groups were ready for something like YouTube to happen. These were groups and individual video makers anchored in communities that had already developed a set of practices, routines and genres of amateur publishing, as well as social networks in which to circulate a constant flow of videos (Jenkins, 2009: 110). For Jenkins, then, YouTube is the fullest embodiment of convergence culture and its army of amateur producers the culmination of early hopes for the future possibilities of the media.

However, we need to develop concepts beyond the uncritical framework of fan cultures promoted by Jenkins in order to fully understand the social-political uses of YouTube and the aesthetic, political and cultural aspects of the online videos it is filled with (Juhasz, 2008). When 'reading' YouTube against the goals and accomplishments of previous movements that used video as a political tool, a number of problematic issues present themselves. McMurria (2006) reminds us that participatory culture is not necessarily diverse, subversive or even meaningful. He highlights the mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation taking place on YouTube, urging us to consider that:

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[18] See e.g. Jenkins (2009) on the case of The Harry Potter Alliance against Wal-Mart, in which convergence fan cultures became a platform for civic engagement against corporate exploitation.

"Perhaps we might think about the difference between what it means to be a YouTube community and what it would take to use the YouTube video sharing technologies to help expand the movement for radical and economic justice" (McMurrie, 2006).

Juhasz (2008) joins in the criticism of the unresolved potentials of YouTube as an infrastructure for radical video. As the realisation of a truly democratic platform used for politically progressive ends, YouTube fails to fulfil the promise of universal access envisioned and anticipated by radical media theorists and practitioners across the hundred-year trajectory of the moving recorded arts. We should keep in mind, she argues, that "access without theory, history, community, and politics and access enabled by (post) capitalism, is not yet all we might demand the future of the cinema to be" (Juhasz, 2008: 302). For someone like Juhasz, who speaks from the vantage point of an activist and an independent filmmaker and is reading YouTube against the hopes and struggles of a larger movement for democratic media and participatory cultures, YouTube fails miserably. From the perspective of a human rights activist, Gregory (2010) insists that one of the main problems faced by activists when uploading to YouTube is that the video is taken out of its context and put into a hybrid media space. Taken from its original location, "it becomes de-coupled from options to act unless those are built into the video itself" (Gregory, 2010). As far as witness videos, (i.e. videos documenting social injustice, human rights violations, police brutality etc.) are concerned, this leaves the viewer hanging, with no concrete directions for how to act upon what is witnessed. In this regard, unless the video directs the viewer to a space of action outside the platform itself, YouTube consolidates action into the video production and consumption of the individual, rather than into a community. In so doing, it fails to unite the like-minded voices that *are* in fact present on the platform (see e.g. Fenton and Barassi, 2011; Juhasz 2008).

The centrality of corporate power is a direct reality at the heart of the digital age (Turow, 2011). But what are the implications for engagement in radical politics in the shift from an open source and independent media environment to the context of an increasingly corporate-run and commercialised circuit of media spaces? Within this broader set of transformations, the practices of video activism are arguably entering a new phase. This is a phase in which we will need to map out the key dynamics of this ongoing transformation and pin down the place of radical video within these mechanisms of social networking and corporate control. There is no doubt about the importance of visibility and accessibility enabled by platforms such as YouTube for actors who have previously been relegated to more remote margins of online spaces and the public sphere more generally. But we still know nothing about what the long-

term cost of this enhanced immediacy and visibility in corporate and highly monitored spaces will be.

The battle for a free internet is not yet over, or so, at least, we are told. The insights emerging from the empirical contributions to this research are illustrative of how, as long as something is at stake, new enclosures will produce new generations of outlaws – and critical positions that further their projects (Lovink, 2011). Once again such insights indicate that, rather than launching a pessimistic critique against optimistic market rhetoric, it is far more interesting to examine more closely the messy contradictory online reality and the ways in which people navigate and make sense of this reality.

From radical video to radical *online* video

I began this section by stating that recovering the history of video activism is important for an understanding of contemporary practices of radical video and the role of YouTube in contemporary forms of Left-wing activism. While the historicising efforts should be considered a contextual framework, rather than a main analytical strategy, they provide a backcloth upon which the object of analysis should be projected and understood. So what distinguishes contemporary forms of radical video, in online environments assigned to the mechanisms of social networking and corporate control, from earlier modes of video activism? In the light of this historical hindsight, in what ways do the case studies provide insights into what constitutes and characterises radical video practices today? How does what I refer to as radical online video differ from the political ethics of documentary persuasion, the use of visual evidence (Chanan, 2007) and the protocols of argument (Corner, 2011) in the more traditional documentary modes of political portrayal? What aligns videos like these with the documentary tradition of radical cinema and pre-internet modes of video activism – and what separates them from the latter?

First of all, as argued in the previous sections, it is important to establish that the novelty of the kind of video activism we see today relates not so much to the use of videos as a political tool as to how these videos are produced, distributed and consumed in new forms of globally networked circuits of cultures. These work under conditions in which the ubiquity of camera technologies, the ease of distribution and the sheer abundance of material available create an increased competition for attention. Adding 'online' into the mix of radical and video thus requires us to rethink previous distinctions and definitions. Arguably, when scholars acclaim the 'newness' of something it is often because they want to be seen sailing in uncharted waters. While I hope to have established that this is certainly not the case, I do mean to signal that something fundamentally new is going on in terms of the sheer numbers of people engaging with video and the nature of the circuits and

communities within which they do so; and that history can tell us something, but not everything, about this newness. In order to wrap up the discussion of how a historical perspective may deepen an understanding of contemporary forms of video activism, I pull together my argument around four critical aspects in which we may characterise radical online video on YouTube as different from past modes of radical video.

A difference in aesthetic form?

Whatever the specific form, there are several discernible aesthetic trends across the videos in this study. This (abundantly rich) discursive-aesthetic range is testimony to how new forms of "redaction" (Hartley, 2004) or "mash-up" (Chanan, 2011) editing practices are used to narrate and communicate a sense of urgency and to raise political arguments. To these ends, different modalities and performative and realist strategies are used to mobilise direct action and sustain commitment among activists and activist networks on the radical Left. The amateur compilations that remix images and footage from different protest events and actions are testimony to how radical online video works to visually connect struggles and their actors. Radical video has always made use of and experimented with a range of available techniques, styles and protocols of argument. What we might consider as a new aspects of radical video, prompted by the shift from offline to online spaces of circulation, is the speed with which they circulate, the fluid and ephemeral quality of their existence, and the collaborative nature of how they are constructed, by tearing apart and putting together the material from the vast sea of images made available online.

A difference in the lack of a clear line of distribution?

Video art and documentary filmmaking have within a relatively short time-frame, seen a progression from analogue VHS through DVD to digital video distributed online (Lovink, 2011). Distribution, in the Portapak days, consisted of a poorly publicised mail order service and was marked by a huge shortfall between manufacture and use (Downing, 2001). Reflections on the many problems of distribution at the time should however recognise that many videos were not intended for an international (or even national) audience. Rather, the majority of radical video of the time spoke to "a certain locality significant for the aesthetics and political concerns of a particular community" (Downing, 2001: 197). Article III demonstrates how this logic still applies to issues of distribution in a contemporary digital mediascape where many of the videos on YouTube, despite potentially reaching millions, are in fact directed towards a small and closed community. The COP15 case study demonstrates how, using YouTube as a 'dumb-pipe' - an empty host to facilitate the screening of the video elsewhere, the controversial mobilisation video on YouTube was never intended for the broader public. In earlier years, radical video and documentary were distributed as finished pieces, 'closed' works that circulated within a certain space of dialogue. They were more formally defined places in which

the work met the public. As these increasingly move online, the spaces of dialogue become fragmented and decontextualised, creating not only possibilities for an extended audience but also confrontations with unintended audiences.

However, the work of video activists has always blurred the line between amateur and professional media practices. In the discussions between Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno around Adorno and Horkheimer's seminal critique of the cultural industries in the 1940s, we see some of the first disputes over whether this new medium, film, should be considered an important tool for social change or a manipulative pacifier in the hands of the ruling class. Adorno was sceptical and claimed that film should be considered a double-edged sword, used not primarily by Left-wing activists, but more dominantly and effectively by those in power and with control over resources (Harding, 2001). The transformative project of image and film, he argued, should be about showing "alternative realities", rather than blunt social realities. These polarised debates have continued to run through film and video history ever since, and are mirrored not only in the arts and crafts divisions in video practices described earlier, but also in recent disputes between those hailing the user-generated content on YouTube and its vernacular genres (see e.g. Gauntlett, 2011) and those accusing the platform of promoting degenerate low culture or "loser-generated content" (Petersen, 2008). In this manner, this longstanding idea of the moving image as a doubled-edged sword reverberates in current debates about the battle between user-generated and 'big media content' on YouTube and beyond.

A difference in the commitment to 'truth', authenticity and non-market alternatives?

Surely, some radical online videos are not substantially different from radical political documentaries in terms of their 'realist' strategies, while the reality-play in other genres is much more blatant? The blurring of boundaries between fiction and factual documentation in some cases makes it difficult to discriminate between the aesthetic conventions in the two forms and between what I have described, drawing on Zelizer (2004; 2010), as a question of where the "as is" of an image ends and the subjunctive dimensions of the "as if" of an image begins. Manovich (2001) has argued that, when digitalised, the image can no longer be distinguished from animation. The image "is no longer an indexical media technology but rather a subgenre of painting" (Manovich, 2001: 295). The process of digitalisation in itself should make us question pre-given markers of realism and the ways in which these are mediated through the rapidly changing "technologies of truth telling" (Juhasz and Lerner, 2006: 165).

In this sense, the videos studied make a case for the constructedness and artificiality of the long-contested distinction between fact and fiction, and for the blurring of boundaries between the discursive registers of the two. If we add to this the fact that

YouTube has radically democratised access to video and possibilities for sharing video, along with the multiplicity of technologies and software programmes allowing for the production and editing of video, a patterned landscape of video ubiquity and hybridity emerge. As radical videos are hurled into the online remix ethos of YouTube and of its user cultures, the power of these videos as evidence and argument can be seen to enter head first into a "crisis of the index" potentially devaluing the poignancy of its political portrayal (Gaines, 2007; Landesman, 2008). One of the questions raised in this regard concerns how adding fictive, subjective elements and emotional layers to the portrayal of 'the political' undermine (or at least destabilise) the "sober" (Nichols, 1991)[19] documentation of unjust material conditions and the informed call for social change (articles V and VI). However, reality-play, creative identity face-work and what has been termed "inauthentic authenticity" are part of the cultural repertoire on YouTube (Burgess and Green, 2009b: 95) and viewers can be expected to 'read' the videos against this platform-specific knowledge.

Further, the case studies shed light on the tensions that emerge as radical video, ideally seen as creating and upholding discursive spaces for countering profit and corporate power meets the corporate imperative of monetising user behaviour on YouTube. The articles call attention to the blurring of boundaries between community and commodity modes of address. It seems particularly crucial to address such tensions in the contexts of videos promoting anti-capitalism and an anti-systemic agenda. From this perspective, the fact that radical videos are watched on YouTube is not just a neighbouring circumstance, but can be seen to affect the ways in which the video is addressed and understood.

A difference in the 'politicality' and intentionality of the 'sender'?

I have described and analysed YouTube as part of the broader context in which we increasingly find, and need to understand, radical video today. This context is a messy and blurred environment full of contradiction and tensions. As a final point, I want to address the question of how these dynamics are destabilising an understanding of the 'video activist' as a political subject driven by a political intentionality and instrumentality in her actions. Can one become a video activist by accident? What does it mean to be a video activist today as opposed to in the days of the VHS cassette? The articles provide examples of how the role of the video activist is taken up by an increasingly broad range of different, not always easily identifiable social actors.

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[19] Nichols (1991) uses the notion of "discourse of sobriety" to signify video documentary as a discourse. As a category description that emphasises seriousness and knowledge, he compares political documentary to the discursive registers found in sciences, economics and politics. The notion of sobriety connects with his work on the position of the purely "observational" camera (Nichols, 1983).

If mobile cameras, combined with social media, turn people into video activists, then the figure of the video activist is taken to be that of everybody (and hence nobody?). In this thesis, radical video is defined partly in relation to intentionality on the part of the 'sender'. Yet recent events in the Middle East, Southern Europe and beyond have re-emphasised the importance of amateur/citizen documentation as evidence and news source (Chanan, 2011). These events have unfolded in ways that urge us to consider how an explicitly political motive behind the shooting of the original footage should be addressed in less rigid and pre-defined ways. There is, of course, a world of difference between the amateur 'witness video' shot on a mobile phone and uploaded directly onto the web and the more professionally edited documentary showcasing violations of protesters' rights and creating a political argument around issues of, for example, police brutality and state repression. When examining practices of video activism on a site such as YouTube, it is useful to draw a clear conceptual distinction between what can and what cannot be considered to fall under the umbrella label of radical video. To situate video activism beyond the entry level of mere raw mobile footage uploads allows us to filter out the abundance of videos lacking intentionality or even an implicit political argument. At the same time, it allows for a level of interpretation, and acknowledges the contingency and blurring of boundaries in these matters in order to include the more ephemeral forms of individualised political expression that do not necessarily form part of an editorialised programme, of the political campaign of an organisation or of an activist network, and in order to open up a broader understanding of what defines and typifies contemporary forms of video activism.

Surely, we should be looking for an answer to the question of what is happening to radical video in the shift between offline and online communicative circuits and in the interplay between all of these different elements. Most certainly, the principal mode of production, distribution and apprehension of online video creates very different conditions for engagement than did the small group audiences of radical taped video, and before that of radical independent cinema and radical documentary. This transition is not merely a question of a shift from the shared experience of watching videos in the back of a van to individuals watching videos behind a screen - alone, but networked. It is a question of shifts in technological development and access to camera technologies, as well as shifts in cultural and political climates.

By way of conclusion, let me briefly summon the insights provided by the historical contextualisation of video activism around two main arguments. The idea of recovering the history of radical video can be seen to evolve on two different levels. First, I have established how radical online video, considered as 'media texts', is testimony to history in terms of the aesthetics-discursive repertoire it draws upon and speaks back to. In this sense, some modes of radical online video today is strongly reminiscent of historic forms of 'agitational video' and militant filmmaking, in terms

of how they make use of and blend into these genres. The articles exhibit how past and present imageries intersect by means of sequence construction and footage combinations that point towards the longer trajectory of the events unfolding on screen and their immediate relation to past struggles. These insights demonstrate how YouTube has today become a living cultural archive in which "the past become more accessible to the present" (Bimber, 2003: 91). They demonstrate how online (re)mediation takes what used to be ephemeral and transient and makes it visible, map-able and available for comment and contemplation in the future (Manovich, 2008).

Second, radical online video, considered as embedded in a broader set of political practices, can usefully be seen as an extension of former modes of participating actively in democracy by contesting its limits and denouncing the powers-that-be (Rosanvallon, 2008). In order to understand this interplay, we can return to the repertoire of counter-democratic activities as described by Rosanvallon (2008) in order to demonstrate the long history of citizen participation and attempts to circumvent the limited opportunities for 'voice' (Couldry, 2010; 2011) within the formal political system. For Rosanvallon (2011), one of the main challenges facing the crisis of democracy in a time of neoliberal hegemony is to restore democracy's legitimacy of reflexivity. To this end, he considers civil society actors to have a crucial role in "denouncing discrepancies between fundamental principles of democracy and the reality and reintroducing the people as principle…into the political arena" (2011: 148). By looking at how such powers have been exercised over time, Rosanvallon suggests how we can locate and find similar forms of activity of citizen "oversight" reverberating in the various phases through which the modern parliamentary system has developed and that today have taken on new expressions and forms. If we recall Rosanvallon's account of the historic roots of citizens' engagement with politics outside (and often against) the established political system, we see how the various modes of engaging with politics and contesting the formal institutional system and structures that proliferate in contemporary online environments feed into century-long practices of 'counter-power' exercised by citizens.

We may consider how these 'powers of oversight', that emerge and develop in these "agonistic public spaces" (Mouffe, 1999; 2001; 2007) can help us understand the nature of political engagement in online digital contexts and the dynamics that are profoundly transforming the nature of political activism today. From this perspective, we may consider contemporary forms of networked politics and modes of political engagement in contemporary online environments as illustrative of the various roles that citizens take on (and have always taken on) as "watchdogs", as "veto-wielders" and as "judges" (Rosanvallon, 2008). Yet, while we may recognise the incentives and dynamics behind these practices as longstanding and well known to the history of

democracy, these are re-organised and refocused in keeping with the emergence of new means of and arenas for engagement.

CONCLUSIONS: VIDEO ACTIVISM, YOUTUBE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT MEDIA PRACTICES

The six articles presented in this thesis all try to capture and analyse elements within the process of a larger reorganisation and amplification of political spaces in contemporary liberal democracies. Each on its own terms, the articles offer empirical contributions that promote an understanding of the various ways 'the political' is on display and politics are being forged in contemporary online environments. Together, they give shape to a range of practices across a historical, technological, political and aesthetic-discursive range. The videos subjected to analysis all share a commitment to 'radical' positions outside the political mainstream and within Left thinking and activism. They use YouTube partly to speak to themselves, as an element of in-group belonging, collective identity, idea development and event planning. But they are also variously aware of an 'exterior' audience which is addressed, sought and galvanized through a variety of different discursive strategies. In the course of previous pages, I have described and defined 'radical' and 'video' in order to scrutinise the conjunction of the two in the practices of radical online video. In pulling together the key findings of the thesis, I want to start by framing my argument around the question of what happens when the prismatic notion of 'online' is added into the mix of the two. Unpacking this argument, the key components characterising radical online video as modes of political engagement can be summarised as follows:

Democratisation

The articles presented in this thesis are testimony to how YouTube has democratised the access to and distribution of video for a group of people whose self-representations, political portrayals and arguments have previously been confined to the remote margins of the internet, and before that to the small distribution circles of communities formed around making, sharing and watching tapes. This is a democratisation that brings something useful, new and 'healthy' to radical politics and the project of fostering and making visible Left alternatives to global capitalism. Critical ideas, debates and discussions are no longer ghettoised at the margins of public life. In this online space, videos can potentially reach a much broader audience. This in some ways forces people to be less self-referential in their mode of address. As we saw in article IV, this encounter does not always take place quietly. By examining how YouTube provides a communicative space for debate, this article demonstrated how YouTube brought together radical and reformist fractions of the climate change

coalition in Copenhagen with sceptical local citizens and fierce opponents of the movement in political conversations around the politics of climate change. Both articles concerning the COP15 mobilisations illustrate how leaving the echo chambers in attempts to 'preach beyond the already converted' may result in conflict and an aggressive polarisation of opinions when radical videos circulating on YouTube become the subject of intense critical commentary.

At the same time, they bear witness to how YouTube connects people who otherwise would never have interacted and to how meaningful political discussions emerge out of and between the dominantly poisonous interactions. As an ephemeral communicative space, YouTube sets up terms of dialogue that allowed the anti-capitalist network behind the much criticised mobilisation video to retort and respond. In fact, YouTube became one of the only places in which this was done openly (although for a very short period before activists began shutting down their channels). Further, the COP15 case study contextualised techno-optimistic rhetoric concerning the interplay between social media and political change. It did so by exemplifying how activists, in the context of a particular political cause and mobilisation, see great potential in the possibilities afforded by media technologies of reaching wider publics. At the same time, the case study demonstrated how such expectations clash with the political realities that pervaded the run-up to, as well as aftermath of, the protest event, as activists were confronted with the dilemmas and tensions of the public attention created by the video.

Blurring of boundaries and 'toothless' politics

The army of self-proclaimed amateur filmmakers throwing themselves into the 'participatory' cultures of YouTube obviously creates a complex mess and a blurring of the boundaries of the term video activism. YouTube disturbs the amateur/professional and community/commerce binaries based on the rules and rituals that once regulated access. It challenges our conception of what 'counts' as radical video, and blurs the boundaries of what has historically been seen to constitute a set of shared and relatively confined practices around the ethical frames of sharing tapes and of a commitment to social critique and explicit political argument. YouTube invites a whole range of 'newcomers' into the game. Some of these people, launching themselves into the tradition of video making or commentary, might not even describe themselves or their political mash-up videos as part of a political genre embedded in the practices of video activism[20]. Article IV broaches issues of the proto-political dimensions of political engagement in online environments. Using political

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[20] Curator statement by Jonathan McIntosh at the screening of *DIY Video 2010* at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles organised by the Institute for Multimedia Literacy.

practices of online commentary as examples, the article interrogated how YouTube, as a proto-political space, may draw people's interest and attention to politics. In so doing, it urged us to consider the colloquial and informal meanings of political engagement in new media spaces.

This opening-up of the field is seen by some as 'taking the sting out' of radical video. The wider accessibility and mainstreaming of video practices, bringing in more playful political 'genres', can be seen as diluting and devaluing the political efficacy of radical video practices and as conflicting with the 'seriousness' of some of the political issues taken up. Scholars and practionners alike are currently raising critical questions of what will happen, as video is now so much more accessible, to the shared ethical frameworks that once characterised a video collective (see e.g. Gregory, 2010; Juhasz, 2008). To be sure, the rich uncertainties of sender-addressee relationships, on the platform that now stores and shapes radical video, raise some fundamental questions of where these projects are going in relation to where they have been. The space of dialogue has largely moved online on an arbitrary, chaotic and corporate platform with no commitment to the kinds of political projects that these videos promote. In so far as YouTube becomes an environment stripped of context, with no features directing the viewer outside the platform, the potential of radical video is limited. Ultimately, it is this lack of engagement with political context and spaces of action, and the inability of YouTube to unite its users in a sense of collectivity, that cause the platform to default on its radical promise.

Mash-up media practices

Online videos are often accused of parading quantity over quality, and YouTube of failing to model a hotbed for innovative aesthetics and experimental filmmaking. One of the most important insights that emerges from this research concerns how new media practices create new media forms for political portrayal and argument. People are using the material made available to them online to reconnect past protests and struggles with contemporary Left politics. They produce their own videos by putting together bits and pieces of other videos in ways that demonstrate creative constructions of argument and attempts to intervene in the history of the events they chronicle. It is these processes of convergence and hybridity, in conjunction with practices of assemblage, bricolage, compilation, and mashing up of a profuse variety of multimodal materials, that bring something essentially new to video activism as a set of political practices. Mash-ups and vernacular voices are two of the dominant modes circulating in the video diaries and bedroom music videos that make up the majority of the content in the most watched and most popular categories on YouTube. Both of these are key elements in the discursive-aesthetic repertoire of radical online video today, indicating a "cross-pollination of genres" (Hill, 2007).

Articles V and VI underline the argument that the development in radical online video today is not only a question of new circuits of distribution of political content and form well known within a Left political imaginary and imagery. Rather, these circuits of production and distribution impinge on the repertoire and combination of the aesthetic forms of radical video, in some cases by messing up and changing existing forms, in others by adding new forms into the mix. I have argued that the combination of vernacular commemorative genres with those of a radical mobilisation discourse examined in article V and VI exhibit essentially new ways of combining video 'genres' and modes of address. Such political mash-up videos demonstrate subtle and playful modes of political engagement, with a small 'p', through media forms that address political topics with a capital 'P'.

As an attempt to induce order in this chaotic landscape of online video, I have offered a typology for organising and describing the prismatic range of radical videos circulating in contemporary online spaces. We may return to this typology for the purpose of concluding. In pursuing an understanding of the motley landscape of videos recruited for Left thinking and action, this chapter has offered a conceptualisation that works across the different case studies by examining how radical online video straddles the variety of different disciplines and fields committed to the theories or practices of video activism. I have listed the different labels applied to the practices of video, and distinguished between, for example, advocacy, radical, community, amateur, DIY and participatory video. A key argument in concluding how we may make sense of the radical video proliferating online is that the broad host of radical online video we meet on YouTube conflates and collapses these different modes and understandings of radical video.

The body of videos that I have brought to the fore in this research are the muddled results of multi-authored efforts, crowd-sourced materials interweaving archival footage and photos with scenes from contemporary political confrontations, eye witness interviews, the kind of 'voice of God' commentary known from traditional documentary, onscreen graphics, confessional forms, remixed broadcast news, and so on. On the one hand, we find the dimensions of Left propagandist-realism reverberating with the politics of traditional class struggle against unjust social conditions and providing direction for collective responses to changing these conditions. On the other hand, these imageries are combined (and sometimes clash) with amateur mash-up practices and more individualistic responses to political expression, such as personal video diaries (vlogs). These insights apply equally to mobilisation videos, to the activist commemoration videos and to the witness videos described in the typology and scrutinised as separate categories in the various articles. In this regard, an increased and incessant flow of amateur images and footage is part of what shapes and typifies radical video today. The patterns described in this area

may help us understand just how and in what directions digital mediations and online remix cultures are changing present conditions for political activism.

The social shaping of video technology

One insight that brings the different articles together is the recurring finding that people creatively appropriate the architecture of participation of YouTube in ways often different from or in direct opposition to those intended. Even though the main object of YouTube as a corporate platform is essentially to bring eyeballs to advertisements, people are in various ways creatively appropriating the system by tagging, linking, listing and in other ways connecting videos and video responses. In so doing they add sense to an essentially apolitical, chaotic archive that is not built to meet the demands of a space where progressive radical politics comes together or where the dream of making people's television could be fulfilled. Technologies will always be socially shaped by a host of factors, which include the assumptions, orientations and purposes of the people using them. Although these are hard to find and share, viewers do create useful maps across and between materials. One example of such practices is the jamming-by-tagging tactics, which I see as an indication of the various ways that people are actively trying to 'outsmart the system' for political ends. YouTube is characterised by an arbitrary cacophony of voices. Yet the system and its search algorithm are jammed and manipulated for the purpose of connecting actors, alliances and movements across time and beyond single-issue causes and campaigns. Such practices bear witness to an increasing media awareness among political activists, and demonstrate how media reflexivity is built into the diverse "repertoire of contention" understood as the various protest-related tools and actions available to a movement at a given time (Tilly, 2005; see also McCurdy, 2011, for a discussion of activists' lay theories of media).

While YouTube may be seen as extending repertoires for political commentary and spaces in which to engage politically, its architecture of participation offers limited possibilities for connectivity or reflexive conversation. Yet, through the social shaping and appropriation of the affordances of the platform, activists go against the grain of the intended top-down uses of YouTube in order to create a corporate gateway to the alternative.

Again, the 'novelty' assigned to these practices of manoeuvring within and subverting the tools and technologies of a 21st century media system is put into perspective by history. The various tactics and subtle modes of critical engagement with issues both of media power and of politics proliferating in contemporary media practices are reminiscent of what Rosanvallon describes as the "passive resistance, tactical withdraw and clever circumvention of rules (…) to loosen the power's grip" (Rosanvallon, 2008: 121). And, he reminds us, such counter-democratic powers have been exercised by citizens in all the preceding phases through which liberal democracy has evolved.

Such insights suggest to us how broader changes in practices of political engagement and modes of challenging the limits of democracy are in lock-step with developments in media technologies and practices, and vice versa.

Remediation / bridging the past and the present

Today, historical political documentary, radical film and snippets of video from the guerrilla television movement and beyond are increasingly circulating in online environments. YouTube conflates and collapses new and old content onto the same platform. It allows people to re-mediate old material that has long been stashed away or forgotten in cellars and lofts inaccessible to the wider public and even to the people actively looking for these materials (Lovink and Niederer, 2008). These 'voices from the past' bring context and history to new forms of radical video and provide at least the possibility for people to make connections between historical and contemporary struggles in Left-wing politics. The archival properties help to sustain the vernacular memory of seminal protest events of the past and their relation to present struggles. However, the empirical studies show that, even though the archive is there, there is no real coherence, no logical structure, no 'political kit' pulling it all together and presenting it in a cohesive manner. Isolated documents stand undifferentiated and poorly categorised, unmoored from the culture and history in a system unable to reflect, let alone unite, the aspirations and communities from which these videos were born. Yet, the growing number of historical types of radical documentary and cinema uploaded onto YouTube make for an interesting case of re-mediation that raises questions of how conventions and political formulas established prior to the diffusion of the internet may persist and/or change in the process whereby these historical documents are becoming online material (Corner, 2011).

Dualities and tensions

This thesis has explored radical online video as a prismatic range of media forms for political argument and portrayal. It has asked how we may understand the media practices of radical online video as modes of political engagement in and beyond online environments. It has directed attention to YouTube as one of the prevailing spaces in which radical video is screened and experienced today, in order to examine how the mechanisms of social networking and corporate control on this platform promote and encumber contemporary forms of video activism.

As an empirical entry point, YouTube provides a window onto the broader transformations of mediated spaces for political agency and engagement in contemporary Western societies. By directing attention towards one small space in which broad and macro-structural transformations of the public sphere currently unfold and crystallise, this thesis has focused on YouTube as a space in which our engagement and connections with politics are currently being reinterpreted and re-keyed.

In this thesis, I have argued for an understanding of contemporary forms of video activism that is attentive to the great diversity of media practices and the variety of different modes of political engagement these attest and contribute to. Further, this is an understanding that highlights the agonistic pluralism of the spaces in which these practices take place. And finally, it offers an understanding of online video activism as practices in which the old and the new, the past and the present, clearly overlap.

This thesis does not argue that the mediated modes of engagement offered by new media technology, which are currently promoting and challenging practices of video activism, are either all good or all bad for the broader project of a radical politics of the Left. Rather than a straightforward linear argument, the insights brought to this area by this research should be understood in terms of an argument of duality and circularity. Contemporary modes of video activism are characterised by a circularity of creative practices that in some cases works for the betterment of the project and in others disperses and deflates this very same project. This duality of tensions can be understood in relation to at least three different levels of the findings: a duality of individual and collective forms of mediated political engagement, a duality of politicality that works across a spectrum of mundane and militant political expressions with people exhibiting various degrees of political intentionality in their making of or engagement with the videos. And finally, in terms of form and stylistic registers, contemporary modes of video activism are characterised by a duality between politics and entertainment/ fact and fiction.

The practices of radical online video can be understood as part of the communicative repertoire of political organisations, groups as well as unaffiliated activists and individuals in loose affinity groups and networks. In this respect, these are videos

produced as part of a political programme or campaign and may form part of a broader media strategy of a specific organisation, group or network. But radical online video is also seen to include the more individualised forms of mediated engagement in contemporary online environments. On YouTube, these two modes of video activism not only co-exist, but also interact with one another. Radical online video practices thus comprise both individual and collective modes of political engagement, and may be seen to straddle both expressive and creative modes of "mass self-communication" (Castells, 2009), and the collective, collaborative efforts of social movement media practices.

There is of course a very direct link between the insights into how different political actors engage in the practices of radical video and the finding that both "formal and colloquial versions of the political" (Corner, 2011: 190) should be understood as integrative parts of video activism today. These different modes of political expression range from a very explicitly instrumental and self-conscious engagement with core political issues that seek to wield power in the world for particular ends, to the more subtle, latent modes of political expression. Indeed one major insight of this research is that, on a platform such as YouTube, social movement media practices, and the modes of intentional and directed political engagement these represent, merge (and sometimes clash) with the media practices of unaffiliated individuals and the mundane (potentially political) practices of commentary and remixing that develop and assert themselves in online video cultures.

These insights demonstrate how we may understand the modes of political engagement around the practices of radical video as attracting individuals without any initial store of political authority. In that sense, these practices, emerging within the spaces of interaction and action facilitated and allowed for by YouTube, form part of the larger media manifold currently changing "the who of politics" (Couldry, 2012: 120). Whereas the political organisation, groups and networks behind the three protest events studied in this research may be seen to have added to the set of *manifest* political actors over the past decades, the group of people engaging with these events online signal what Couldry (2012: 122) terms a growing domain of "*latent* political actors" (emphasis added). These are ordinary citizens, vlogging, blogging and tweeting about aspects of political life, who are not yet acknowledged as contributing to political debate, but who - given the right time and political contexts - may step forward as political subjects. If we recall Dahlgren's account of the step-by-step process of "becoming political", such performative media practices demonstrate how the non-political may turn into a proto-political engagement, a form of subjective involvement preconditioning political participation (Dahlgren, 2009).

Certainly, the dimensions of latent individual politics and new reserves of potential political actors and actions should not be seen as translating directly into political efficacy or changes in actual political agendas (Fenton and Barassi, 2011). If we

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remain with Couldry's terminology, the reshuffling of "the who of politics" does not necessarily entail changes in "the what of politics" (Couldry, 2012: 123). Online video activism does not incite political mobilisations. Nor does it in itself install new modes of engagement with democracy. In isolation, video recruited for a radical politics of the Left does not translate collective identities and ideological imaginaries into political action or programmes. Radical online video practices can be seen to extend and strengthen existing repertoires for political engagement, at the level of both political commentary and action.

Finally, on the level of media form, I have identified a duality between entertainment and politics, between the performative and realist strategies used to attract the attention of the viewer and direct her into an ethical space of action. Within the circuits of social networking and the mash-up cultures of YouTube, radical video straddles the categories of fact and fiction, art and document, entertainment and information, politics and popular culture. While these insights remind us of how we need to acknowledge a broad range of pathways to political engagement (Bennett, 2008), they are also suggestive of how very serious issues taken up by the political hard core can take on playful and creative forms in spaces primarily constructed for and around entertainment.

Indeed, we are in a time where we have only just started to ask questions about what happens when radical media practices meets the vernacular voices and amateur mash-ups culture of online video. Surely, most of the materials in circulation are forms and aesthetics well known to a Left political imaginary, but new technologies amplify, reconstruct and reinterpret the existing practices. The pattern of insights mapped in this thesis should prompt new questions to be asked of the changing spaces of agency, action and audiences of radical video today. The opening up of the field of video activism comes with a duality of potentials and risks that needs to be addressed (Harding 2001: 14). Future research will need to raise continued concerns about how these emerging practices might bulldoze ethical frameworks built up through the shared set of practices and codes of conduct of past video collectives. Across countries and collectives, 'veteran' video activists are currently working to educate and to promote an increased awareness among the so-called 'digital natives' and a new generation of activists born into a participatory media culture of content sharing and remixing (Gregory, 2010). Such research may raise questions of how the ethical frameworks and shared codes of conduct within the longstanding practices of radical video can translate into guidelines that will work in a space such as YouTube or whatever site may follow it – be this the live-casting video services currently growing in popularity or even a third-generation video phenomenon. To pursue such questions will provide directions for how practionners and scholars dedicated to the theories and practices of video activism can support emerging norms in online

environments that promote respect, tolerance, and an understanding of risk in and beyond these media spaces.

Afterword

> (...) each of these isolated and solo fragments found on YouTube, are not
> the stuff of a political or film movement until someone, or better yet, some
> group unifies them, by linking their claims, strategies and goals (Juhasz,
> 2008).

As I suspect many a thesis before it, the study in hand is the product of another failed
and abandoned project - one that would have attempted to do just what radical
filmmaker Alexandra Juhasz is calling for in the quote above: to map the video
spheres of the progressive Left as this is articulated and materialised on YouTube; to
unify the common struggles and bring together their claims, strategies and goals by
convincingly demonstrating how a historic movement for social change through
radical filmmaking and video activism had now found its way into the democratised
'direct cinema' of cyberspace.

The initial intent was to conduct a content analysis of YouTube's political
documentaries, mobilisation videos, protest videos, archives of community meetings
and the systematic documentation of direct action and political meetings of the
radical Left in order to demonstrate how these were tied to a wider global movement
for social justice; how dispersed activists were connected in complex networks waiting
to be discovered and mapped. After a series of futile search strategies, I realised that
the reason I could not find any coherence in a networked video matrix in which the
progressive voices of the global Left are sharing ideas and strategies is because there is
none.

Having constructed bulletproof selection criteria for capturing what constitutes such a
movement, using YouTube's own (non-transparent) search engine to try to
understand and outsmart the biased algorithm favouring commercial content and
partnership productions over amateur productions, I meticulously listed hundreds of
videos and all para-text data in a comprehensive database, testing cross-variables and
trying to activate my inner social scientist. Looking to find patterns of linkage and
coherence within the sea of videos, I found only those that I myself had artificially
constructed. Eventually, my search results presented me with as many misspelled
amateur videos of crocodile or shark attacks as it did videos featuring the political
meetings or direct actions of the organisation 'attac' which I had initially searched for.
Even among the videos made by people explicitly stating their affiliation with attac,

there did not seem to be any interface between the users, their in-group networks or other spaces in which the organisation had an online presence, let alone connections to other likeminded organisations or networks.

Realising the futility and counterproductiveness of such an effort, I eventually abandoned the inherent promise and false comfort of quantifiable truth in the pseudo-positivist approach as a route to conveying a meaningful story of contemporary forms of video activism for progressive change. With my growing concern that I was looking for answers in the wrong place and the wrong way, the project thus changed course in the hope that a situated, qualitative analysis of particular protest events, and the thematic clusters of video these would generate, would be a far more meaningful and rewarding contribution.

In the course of this project, many of the people I have talked to have echoed a concern that the main problem of Left-wing media is that they do not connect in the same ways that conservative voices and Right-wing movements succeed in linking up online. Translated into the delimited context of YouTube, this means that the architecture of participation is neither coherently nor consistently patterned across the distinct videos and across the pages that surround these videos. The sites of resistances that are present on YouTube fail to cohere as a political programme, a philosophy, or in some cases even as a statement. Political activists and their representations need openhearted, responsive and complicated places in which to interact. This research shows little evidence that YouTube should be or ever will be an ideal model for sustainable, horizontal, radical media. We should therefore continue to look elsewhere for independent spaces in which the plethora of individual and collective expressions of Left politics can be brought together.

In the first pages of this thesis I stated that media scholarship, instead of getting stuck in deadlocked discussions between techno-optimism and techno-pessimism, should pursue and promote the small stories not only of actual change but also of aspirations for progressive change, however insignificant these stories may be in terms of audience or impact. I do believe that that the voices given space in this thesis tell, in some small way, stories of hope and change. In and of themselves the videos have no power to change anything or to be of political significance. Only in connection with moments and movements can radical media be expected to make a contribution to social change (Gaines, 2007: 85). Downing (2001) resonates with this position on radical media, arguing that: "judged as a single project, the point at which they are 'finished' is the point at which the interactivity in their reception hangs both on the political context and on the activism of their audiences; yet, if they are judged as individual moments in an on going flow of movements and media projects over time, the interactivity index is much higher that what first appears" (Downing 2001: 199).

Activists arguing that, "another world is possible" have time and time again been accused of not clearly defining what exactly that other world should look like, and of not being able to pin down and articulate a fully-fleshed strategy and political programme. Yet, in our evaluations of all of these messy, fragmented oppositional groupings and of this multiplicity of voices, we should not reduce radical politics to the construction of a single end-point, monolithic process or vision (Fenton, 2102). The same could be said of how the various empirical contributions of this thesis, committed to these questions, should be approached and understood. In isolation these are quite narrow inquiries into particular, contingent and ephemeral sets of events and actions taking place within a finite time frame. Together, I hope they give a flavour of a broader landscape of political practices and ideas, and that in these patterns we may see more clearly the changing contours of social movement media practices in contemporary online environments.

I am going to let Alexandra, who opened this last chapter, close it as well. Her reflections here I believe to epitomise the kind of passionate engagement and drive I have met in the people I encountered in the course of this project. They exhibited a consistent zeal and dedication to the project of imaging and building non-profit alternatives online - and in life itself; and a profound belief that this is still possible when it comes to the shared spaces of radical video, and more generally to the internet and our possibilities of taking it back from corporate control. Thinking out loud in a noisy campus café, Alex asked me:

> "How do you begin to map the kinds of freedom that occur in the local context, in the face-to-face context that is very specific to the real place in the digital environment? That's what activists need. They need a coffee house inside the internet. And what then are the characteristics of that coffee house? That place we meet, where we're safe, where we can talk and plan for the future? What would that look like on the internet?... and that's where our videos should be!"[21]

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[21]Alexandra Juhasz, interviewed in New York, August 2011, see Appendix 1

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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of interview respondents

Appendix 2: Co-authorship agreement I

Appendix 3: Co-authorship agreement II

Appendix 4: Co-authorship agreement III