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Legacies of Tactical Media. The Tactics of Occupation. From Tompkins Square to Tahir

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Legacies of Tactical Media

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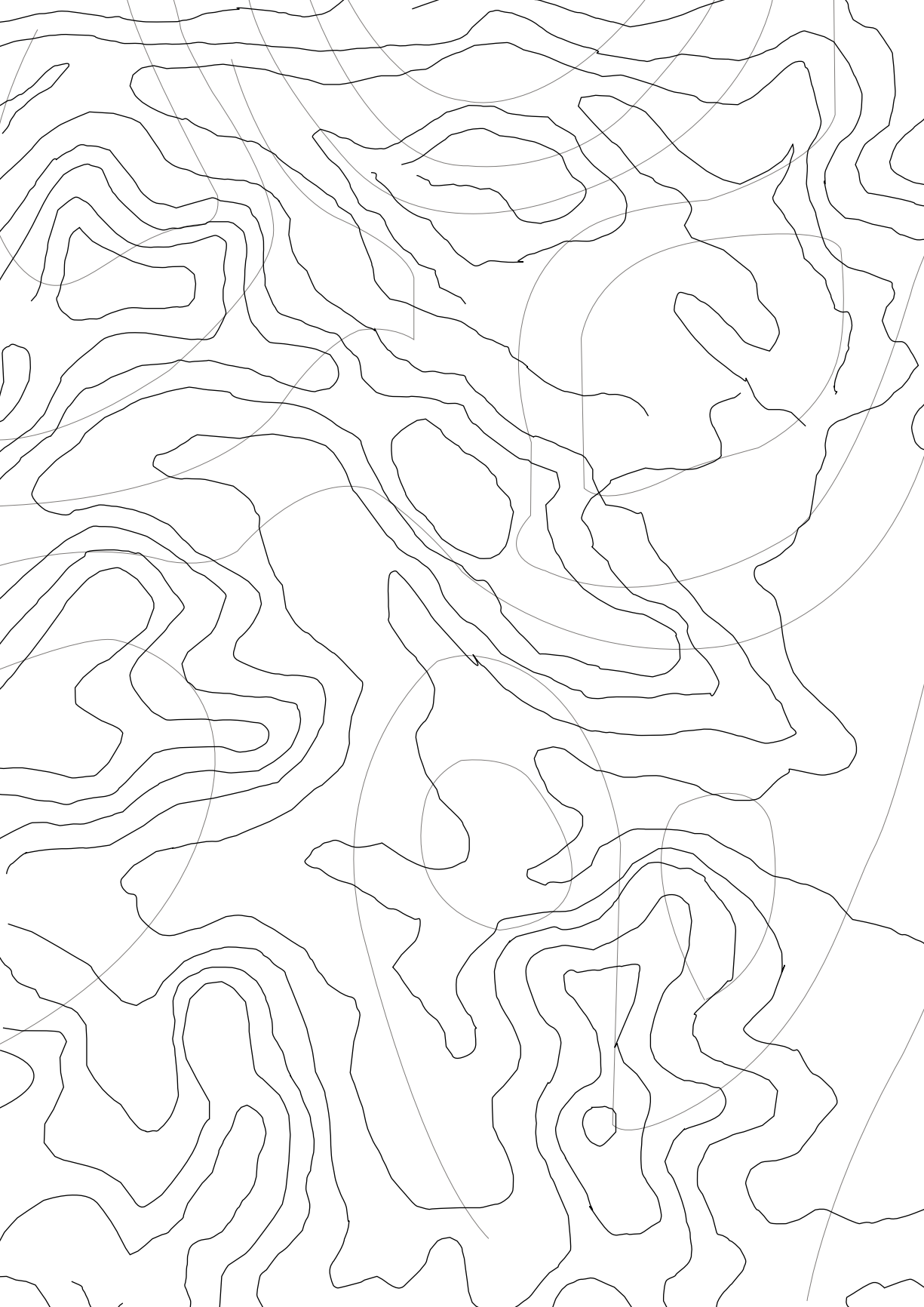
*The Tactics of Occupation:
From Tompkins Square to Tahrir*

ERIC KLUITENBERG

Network ⁰⁵
Notebooks

Legacies of Tactical Media

*The Tactics of Occupation:
From Tompkins Square to Tahrir*



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Introduction

A RESURGENCE OF SOCIAL PROTEST IN AN ERA OF UBIQUITOUS MEDIA

One of the great rediscoveries of the past year has been the act of physically gathering on streets and squares – the transformation of the individual into a crowd, and more importantly into a ‘public’, and the collective assertion of protest creating an intense form of public visibility through the re-appropriation of public space. Recent events, ranging from popular uprisings against mostly authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, to anti-austerity protests in Southern Europe and the UK, to the occupy movement in the US and its replication across the Atlantic, mark an intense resurgence of social and political protest. However, most of these events seem to point emphatically beyond the ‘media-question’ deemed to be at the heart of Tactical Media. They certainly point beyond the now-tired discourses of cyber or online activism of the past two decades.

Instead, the central organising logic in these great public gatherings seems to be to ‘take the square’⁰¹ – the shedding of private identities in favour of public roles, and the physical encounter with the unknown other. These remarkable emanations of public protest break all forms of ‘electronic isolation’. Once again the point seems to be re-emphasised that ‘the political’ can only properly unfold in the theatre of the grand urban public space. Contestation requires physical embodiment to draw it away from insular discourse circulation and the self-contained affective feedback loops that feed on the libidinal energies and desires of entrapped broadcast and online media audiences. It seems that only the transgression into public spaces can break the hold of these insular electronic circulations.

Yet something truly extraordinary has accompanied this transgression into public: A massive and unprecedented presence of the camera. No longer the tool of a distanced media professional capturing the event, the camera is now literally held in the hands of thousands if not millions of protesters as the action unfolds. The event is constructed by means of an excessive redundancy of its own mediation. This massive presence of the camera enables a radical multiplication of singular perspectives – captured, mediated, remediated, stored, archived, embedded and mashed-up – to be distributed in near real-time in a virtually endlessly diversified and differentiated networked media landscape.

What had been predicted for so many years, not least within the confines of Tactical Media, has now come to pass. The effect of this radical multiplication of electronically mediated singular viewpoints remains as yet unknown. Its fallout, social, politically, is still to be observed, understood, analysed or digested. One thing is certain, however, the media universe has passed through a singularity shift. Its recomposition on the other side of the singularity is still highly uncertain.

It would be possible to impose an extendable series of contradictory, but equally simplistic labels on top of what is unfolding on squares and screens right before our eyes: The birth of real democracy; radical transparency; global information meltdown, the long feared ‘information bomb’ of Paul Virilio, finally unleashing its destructive power on the

01 | <http://takethesquare.net>.

very fabric of society; business as usual (“What event?”); information is free but politics remains closed; everybody came and went; the net delusion is complete; communicative capitalism shed its secret spell of ‘publicity’; precession of the simulacra; the revolution never happened; the camcorder revolution is complete; synveillance, everybody watching everybody, initiates the final stage of the network society of control.

Perhaps it makes more sense not to jump to conclusions while ‘the thing’ still unfolds. Instead, we could focus on mechanisms, recurrent patterns, and notable disjunctures. They might help us find anchoring points to look more clearly, more distinctively, at the confusing signs of a deliriously accelerated present, a present which in many ways seems to defy established social and political logic.

When I began the project of creating this Network Notebook much that was in the making had not yet broken onto the streets. Indeed, as the American anthropologist Charles Hirschkind⁰² pointed out, writing about the role of the blogosphere in preparing the ground for the 2011 Egyptian uprising, at least ten years of semi-covert online activity had aligned a deeply heterogeneous collection of oppositional social, religious and political groups in Egypt to pursue a common course of action. As important as the iconic images of the Tahrir Square occupation may have been in galvanising what at times appears an almost global movement, subsumed in a single tag ‘#occupy’, this iconic transgression into public space would have been unthinkable without its networked premeditation.

The aim of this Network Notebook was, and still is, to trace the legacies of Tactical Media, a specific fusion of art, politics, technologies and media which has been recognised as a powerful new social, political and cultural force, and as an emerging transnational critical interdisciplinary practice that arose in the wake of the rapid proliferation of cheap media production and distribution tools. The growing efficiency of these democratised media tools, wielded by the many to influence public opinion, to give voice to the voiceless, and to create space for dissident lifestyles, suggested a shift in tactics and strategies. The new approach entailed ‘occupying’ the public sphere ‘by any media necessary’⁰³, beyond the embodied presence of contestational energies, linking the street with the screens. In particular, the mainstream breakthrough of formerly underground media production in Central and Eastern Europe as communist regimes started to crumble in the late 1980s and early 1990s inspired a new mediatised public sphere. It was understood that the appropriation of tools and infrastructures could be used to push a variety of potentially subversive political, cultural, or even personal agendas.

For a short time open access TV networks, happy experimentations with cable television, replicated themselves throughout the former East in the late 1980s and early 1990s, while similar experiments manifested in many other parts of the world to create a space of radical pluralism in the public eye. Suddenly the living room screen no longer reflected a singular strategic authority. Open access public media seemed to construct a media utopia of radical multiplicity. This ‘pirate utopia’ was, however, soon confronted with civil war and

02 | Charles Hirschkind, ‘From the Blogosphere to the Street: The Role of Social Media in the Egyptian Uprising’, *Jadaliyya.com*, 9 February, 2011, www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=50916.

03 | Critical Art Ensemble, *Digital Resistance*, New York: Autonomedia, 2001.

ethnic conflict in the break up of Yugoslavia, where state-controlled hate media played a prominent role in violent mobilisations. Reasserted control and regulation, and the influx of large-scale commercialisation of cable and satellite TV, left the vestiges of open access television and radio to all but wither and decay on the peripheries of the media landscape.

Alongside the newly opened Cold War broadcast media space, the hyperbolic growth of the internet created an alternative space of communication, networking and self-produced media expression that would quickly become the torchbearer for the open access movement. As a communicative structure the internet has always been a double-edged sword. More than merely decentralised, it is characterised by a distributed structure that locates the emphasis of media activity at the nodes of the network rather than at any centre, even if a multitude of aggregating systems and forces, such as filters, search engines, directories, and gated networks have coevolved with the distributed network protocols. However, this networking of the nodes, while invigorating marginalised actors in social, political, cultural and artistic fields, also implies a measure of insularity that is hard to shed or transcend.

The digital network, always a parallel space, if left to its own devices easily becomes a double entrapment. Digital information itself is information without an analogy to its origin. It no longer reflects its source in the carrier code. This carrier code is fully articulate throughout, exact and finite in terms of the performative logic of the digital machines that operate on these codes⁰⁴. It prompted philosopher Jean François Lyotard to exclaim in the press release to his infamous 1985 'Les Immatériaux' exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, 'It is as if a filter has been placed between us and the things, a screen of numbers'⁰⁵, making our relationship to the things strangely intangible and elusive. Even more so, the circulatory logic of networked exchange seems to run counter to the very nature of publicness, as it precipitates the encounter of the like-minded rather than the encounter with the 'unknown other'⁰⁶.

The distributed structure of the digital network could thus be seen as the very antithesis of publicness. Combined with the inherent abstraction of the digital code, it seems to defy the deep longing for public visibility and encounter that fuels the expression of dissent and the escape from the marginalisation and silence that underpin tactical media operations. Hardware theory alone certainly cannot account for the contradictory logic of the tactical appropriation of digital networking for a variety of subversive political, cultural, or personal purposes 'in' public. This desire for a radical publicness should first of all be understood as libidinal principle that is not contained in the hardware system, nor expressed through it, but which manifests itself in that contradictory interaction.

In recent writings political scientist Jodi Dean has forcefully argued that it is exactly the displacement of these libidinal forces in the digital network that constitutes the most dramatic and powerful entrapment of contemporary subjects. The networked communica-

04 | See also: Eric Kluitenberg, 'Delusive Spaces – Essays on Culture, Media and Technology', Amsterdam and Rotterdam: Institute of Network Cultures and Nai Publishers, 2008. p. 373–374.

05 | Jean François Lyotard and Thierry Chaput. 'Les Immatériaux: Conception', Exhibition catalogue, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985.

06 | Richard Sennett. *The Fall of Public Man*, New York: Knopf, 1977.

tive exchanges displace these libidinal forces in processes of communication, discussion, inclusion, and participation captured by a 'strange conversion of democracy and capitalism in networked communications and entertainment media' that she terms 'communicative capitalism'⁰⁷. As these communicative exchanges are commodified and capitalised they create massive distortions of wealth and power, to 'enrich the few as it placates and diverts the many'⁰⁸. Following this logic, it is exactly the longing for publicness that prepares the ground for the double entrapment of the subject in insular digital networks. According to Dean, this implies nothing less than the destruction of the political.

However, one cannot think that the libidinal drive for encounter exists without the body. Here again, hardware theory and overly formalised network theory overlook this primary constitutive unit of subjective experience. The body, like the 'real', is always there, constructed in imaginary projections or cut across by symbolic codes, but always in its place, preserved as an exteriority to the system. It is an outside to the insular circulatory systems of digitally networked communicative exchange, waiting for its moment of *jouissance*, of 'coming' or 'climax', rather than 'bliss'.

It is the body, and the body alone, that can act as a libidinal force breaking through the containment of the virtualised 'circuits of drive' that attempt to capture the restless desire of the contemporary subject for the encounter in public with the unknown other. Thus, the transgression into public requires as an absolute necessity a physical outpouring onto the streets and squares, even if, as in the Egyptian case, its digitally networked premeditation was equally necessary for this boundary breaking moment. The transgression constitutes a holy moment of ecstasy, of *jouissance*. Impossible and unthinkable for so long, these actions transgressed the social, political, and violent order.

The longing for agency, self-determination, autonomy, however elusive, and self-articulation drives this transgression into public. It is the lack of exactly the same that fuels this longing. Repression only adds to the intensification of desire, inevitably resulting in a final moment of crisis, of breakdown, when the libidinal forces can no longer be displaced other than in the final public transgression, a transgression for which scores of ordinary citizens were willing to sacrifice their livelihoods and indeed their very lives.

An examination of Tactical Media, especially in view of the recent resurgence of social protest, has to take into account the possible consequences of its own 'tactical' operations, as these operations are mostly carried out on the terrain of potentially violent powers. It also needs to take into account that such incursions can fail, and that they often do. Even in Egypt the final outcome of the uprising, the end to military rule, the prospects for democracy, or even the lifting of the forty year 'state of emergency' remain thoroughly unclear. Yet these tactical operations must break the bounds of networked and mediated exchange, as tactical media 'never just report events, they always participate'⁰⁹.

07 | Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010, p. 3-5.

08 | *Ibid.* p.4.

09 | David Garcia and Geert Lovink, *The ABC of Tactical Media*, 1997, www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=37996.

HYBRID SPACE

The move beyond the screen seems to designate the essential transition point for the movement of the squares. However, the transgressive presence on the squares is in turn marked by an excess of mediation. It is precisely this double nature that reflects the hybridised logic of contemporary media-saturated physical and public spaces. To understand the dynamics at play here, the old oppositions and dichotomies between mediated and embodied spaces need to be collapsed into a new concept: Hybrid Space.

Hybrid Space offers a conception of space as a layered construct where media and embodied spaces no longer are considered to exist in parallel or in opposition, but rather coexist as heterogeneous elements and flows superimposed upon each other as sedimentary layers within the same spatial confine¹⁰. All spaces are hybrid in this sense, consisting of natural, built, physical, and informational elements, and flows of life, trade, information, exchange, signals, noise and radiation, each with a specific spatial logic and distinctive characteristics that convey localised presence as well as influences from afar.

Hybrid Space is discontinuous and volatile, always varying in density or 'thickness'. The expansion of wireless transmission protocols and wireless network technologies have greatly added to the density, thickness and complexity of hybrid space. In the most literal sense the media have moved into the streets and, although extremely recent, this phenomenon is already accepted as a vernacular of contemporary life. Like all vernacular it exists and operates primarily beneath the threshold of consciousness. There are generally two moments when its operations re-enter consciousness: In moments of extreme urgency, or in situations where the connection is ruptured or the signal carrier wave is absent.

The intensification and diversification of Hybrid Space created by the growing presence of wireless media suggests new forms of agency, in which the relationship between the body and its physical environment is dramatically redefined. Movement in space is coordinated through synchronous and asynchronous information flows, intercepted by millions of wireless clients attached to human bodies. Because information flows become increasingly distributed through space, but never become entirely seamless and continuous, a highly diversified and complex information environment has arisen that is increasingly difficult to survey.

The new densities of Hybrid Space can be put to use to organise, chart, plan, meet, encounter, operate tactically or strategise. In the thickness of contemporary hybridised spaces new modes of detachment and dissociation operate in conjunction with the drive for connection. New forms of electronic isolation no longer exist exclusively in the private sphere of the home, but appear in a space is supposedly public. The inescapable thickness of Hybrid Space also invites new forms of surveillance and synveillance. For instance, wireless clients need to be traceable to function, and radio frequency identifiers can be 'read' passively. Disconnection and untraceability become nearly unthinkable in the new densities of hybrid space, while identification systems become increasingly sophisticated and interconnected in the cloud.

10 | See also: Eric Kluitenberg and Jorinde Seijdel, 'Hybrid Space: How Wireless Media Are Mobilizing Public Space', SKOR (2006), <http://www.skor.nl/eng/publications/item/open-11-hybrid-space-how-wireless-media-are-mobilizing-public-space?single=1>.

Individual attempts to escape the coercion of traceability in the technological matrix are not just complicated by the technological drive for increased density in Hybrid Space. Tracking and tracing have become a social activity. The agency put in the hands of the many through the proliferation of millions of networked cameras, increasingly able to connect to translocal networks, exponentiates the pressures of synveillance. It is not simply a 'public' being watched by a distant observer, but people watching, recording, tagging, registering and reporting each other, with records almost instantly uploaded to global databases, creating an electronic cloud that hangs over our heads and follows us wherever we go.

Contemporary subjects are entrapped in insular networks of communicative exchange that uphold massive distortions of wealth and power. It is these same distortions that are now being critiqued on the streets and in the squares. The big question before us is whether the hybrid linking of mediated and embodied exchange can ultimately help to break this entrapment.

Tactical Media: By Any Media Necessary

In their book *Digital Resistance*, published in 2001, the American artist collective Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) precede the introduction with a startling image of a man wearing a dark coat and hat, standing in the streets of a major American city, perhaps New York or Chicago. He holds a sign in front of his chest and belly that reads 'By Any Media Necessary'. In the background, on the pointed edge of a building that looks a bit like Manhattan's Flatiron Building, a billboard reads 'Fun and Games and Murder!'. This is odd; after all, murder is neither fun nor a game. A theatre in the background advertises *Stir Crazy*, which may be the title of a nightly show, or perhaps a description of the entertainment on offer.

Where are we? Is this an entertainment district? Who is this man standing in the street? What does the sign mean? Could it be a reference to Bob Dylan's iconic 1965 music video *avant la lettre* *Subterranean Homesick Blues*, shot as part of D. E. Penebaker's cinema vérité documentary film *Dont Look Back*? Was the sign actually on the street, or retroactively pasted in? Where is the medium in this picture? Is it the man as a moving billboard? Or is this a sad outgrowth of capitalist exploitation advertising, which has still not properly been recognised as a crime against humanity? Is it the sign itself? Does the sign compete with the bright advertisements in the background, or does it compete with entirety of the entertainment district?

And what, after all, is the relationship between this image and the idea of 'digital resistance'?

In the introduction, Critical Art Ensemble explain that their book is a reflection on Tactical Media as an emerging 'politicised interdisciplinary practice' that many groups and individuals from around the globe had collectively initiated, mostly through parallel invention. CAE state that the methods needed to actualise this practice are being researched and tested the world over. For a working definition of Tactical Media they refer to the description used in the run-up to the third 'Next 5 Minutes Tactical Media Conference' organised in Amsterdam in 1999:

The term "tactical media" refers to a critical usage and theorisation of media practices that draw on all forms of old and new, both lucid and sophisticated media for achieving a variety of specific non-commercial goals and pushing all kinds of potentially subversive political issues.¹¹

Critical Art Ensemble understand Tactical Media first as a form of digital interventionism. However, they do not want to limit the scope of Tactical Media to digital technology: 'By "digital" CAE means that tactical media is about copying, re-combining, and re-presenting, and not that it can only be done with digital technology.'¹² For Critical Art Ensemble the emerging political practice of Tactical Media exists foremost as the appropriation of any kind of medium, any form of knowledge or visual production, and any social or political process, challenging hierarchies and false dichotomies as it goes along.

11 | <http://www.n5m.org/n5m3/pages/FAQ/faq001.htm#1.2.%20Tactical%20Media?>

12 | Critical Art Ensemble, 2001, p. 7.

According to Critical Art Ensemble, Tactical Media is as heterogeneous in its current manifestations as it is in its roots. One can trace these roots back to the historical avant-garde, but in the process of their adaptation and appropriation these roots have been transformed beyond recognition. Most of all, the linkage to the avant-garde has been freed from the weight of its designation as Art, as well as Art's often insular existence within its own circuits of circulation, disconnected from the rest of the social and political body. On the 'media question' Critical Art Ensemble write:

The tactical media practitioner uses any media necessary to meet the demands of the situation. While practitioners may have expertise in a given medium, they do not limit their ventures to the exclusive use of one medium. Whatever media provide the best means for communication and participation in a given situation are the ones that they will use. Specialisation does not predetermine action. This is partly why tactical media lends itself to collective efforts, as there is always a need for a differentiated skill base that is best developed through collaboration.¹³

It is this transversal move, cutting across not only different disciplines and fields of professional practice, but also established hierarchies of knowledge production and their valuation systems, that makes these 'digital' interventions truly political. Access is understood here not simply as access to the means of production, but as access to the very systems that define what counts as knowledge, and how and where value is created. Not surprisingly, Critical Art Ensemble put specific emphasis on the value of amateur practice:

In conjunction, tactical media practitioners support and value amateur practice – both their own and that of others. Amateurs have the ability to see through the dominant paradigms, are freer to recombine elements of paradigms thought long dead, and can apply everyday life experience to their deliberations. Most important, however, amateurs are not invested in institutionalised systems of knowledge production and policy construction, and hence do not have irresistible forces guiding the outcome of their process such as maintaining a place in the funding hierarchy, or maintaining prestige-capital.¹⁴

Interestingly, these comments seem to foreshadow the intense debate on affective labour that has recently gripped much of critical network theory. While amateur practice might have been seen as a relatively marginal practice, operating largely outside the economic value chain, the situation has shifted dramatically in recent years. The phenomenal rise of self-produced media expressions distributed via the internet has moved these amateur practices from the sidelines to centre stage, through blogs, video blogs or 'vlogs' released via video portal sites such as Vimeo, YouTube and others, and most prominently at this moment, via social networking platforms.

Nobody will dispute the place of amateur practice in the economic value chain of current networked media production these days. While amateur practice still challenges established hierarchies of professional knowledge production, and with that the defini-

13 | Ibid, p. 8.

14 | Critical Art Ensemble, 2001, p. 8 – 9.

tion of what constitutes valuable knowledge, it has now become strangely encapsulated by professional market machines and monetising mechanisms. They have successfully commodified the love, *amor*, at the root of the word 'amateur'.¹⁵

The second remarkable aspect of Critical Art Ensemble's observations is their deliberate and almost complete denial of strategic professional devices such as 'institutionalised systems of knowledge production', 'policy construction', and 'funding hierarchies'¹⁶. The critical interdisciplinary practice they envision can exist precisely because it denies all of these institutional mechanisms and reverts back to the amateur's *amor*, the vital source of energy.

In 1997, media scholar and activist Deedee Halleck arrived at quite the opposite conclusion in regards to this critical interdisciplinary media and political practice, although she does not directly refer to it as Tactical Media.¹⁷ Halleck reflects on a two part television program produced for Paper Tiger TV, documenting the March against the Moguls, held in conjunction with the 1997 'Media and Democracy' congress in New York. This protest march, staged in opposition to the increasing marginalisation of the public broadcast system, highlights the growing awareness that the appropriation of media structure alone is not enough to bring about the desired balance of strategic and countervailing power. Halleck recognises that a sustainable infrastructure for contestational public broadcasting and public access media production is profoundly missing, a realisation that had been curiously absent from other members of the media democracy movement.

Felix Stalder's echoes this observation in his essay 'Thirty Years of Tactical Media', produced for Public Netbase's 2009 book *Non Stop Future*. Stalder notes that while these tactical projects were geared towards quick interventions that could be realised with low budgets and high ingenuity, they were not geared towards setting up or maintaining long-term infrastructures. According to Stalder, such a short range approach was well-suited to experimental exploration of the new media environment, which was rapidly emerging but still largely unstable. While marginal, these projects played an important role in 'experimentally establishing media practices adapted to the new conditions of open networks'.¹⁸

While the loose nature of such tactical projects, and the coalitions that supported them, was particularly well-adapted to the rapidly evolving technological and social conditions of global communication networks, globalisation of markets and new forms of global politics, the task of providing sustainable infrastructures for such projects quickly overburdened these networks. Stalder observes that the demise of Tactical Media as a more or less coherent movement was in part due to the absence of consolidation, whether deliberate or not. In his view, however, Tactical Media as a practice continues to flourish,

15 | See also this interview with Amateur Enterprises' CEO, Peter Blegvad: www.believmag.com/issues/200911/?read=interview_blegvad and: www.amateur.org.uk.

16 | See also: Critical Art Ensemble, 2001, Chapter 4, 'Observations on Collective Cultural Action', p. 59 – 73.

17 | Deedee Halleck, 'Putting the Demo Back in Democracy: March Against the Moguls', *Afterimage* (1998), www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=46407.

18 | Felix Stalder, '30 Years of Tactical Media', in *Public Netbase: Non Stop Future New Practices in Art and Media*, Novi-Sad and Vienna: New Media Center_kuda.org and World-Information Institute / t0, 2009. Available at: www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=42801.

catalysed by the radical dispersal of digital media tools and internet-based distribution infrastructures that have become available to basically ‘everybody’ in the last five to ten years. Stalder concluded that ‘increasingly people were doing tactical media without thinking about Tactical Media.’¹⁹

Halleck writes about a similar dynamic in the radical video movement she had been part of:

From my vantage point as a participant/observer, there was an assumption by us “video freaks” that authentic radical video would alter the vision of the viewing public, in the way that many of our own heads were changed by our home-grown stashes or dried mushrooms. There was a belief that the revelatory video of Woodstock consciousness would convince people not to put up with the “vast wasteland” of commercial television, as FCC commissioner Newton Minow pronounced it in 1962. There was no doubt in our own expanded minds that sooner or later everyone would become conscientized. It was only a matter of time before video would change the world. It has, but not quite in the way we envisioned. It is a sign of our naivete, our faith in the power of McLuhanesque aphorisms and perhaps our impatience with boring meetings that most did not spend much time thinking about concrete strategies for changing the world - even that part of the world that most concerned us: media policies.²⁰

The hopes placed on the value of amateur practice mirror the failing belief in the efficacy of radical video to restore the balance between civic engagement, media production and democracy, and to challenge the dominant wasteland of commercial television. Tactical Media exists in a far more complex space of coercion and strategic power. Its greatest strength lies in its refusal to become strategic. However, this also denies the efficacy of strategic action. In a truer sense, Tactical Media must always remain tactical, on the move, and on the lookout for opportunities, as French philosopher Michel de Certeau has observed in regards to tactics and the tactician.²¹

19 | Stalder, 2009.

20 | Halleck, 1998.

21 | Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984.

Tactical Media: A Non-Movement without a Definition

While a great number of characterisations have been ascribed to Tactical Media, I have so far avoided a definition. It is a recurrent question, even critique of the concept, whose answer remains strangely elusive. Tactical Media never was and has never become a movement. Even though Critical Art Ensemble claims that the act of naming Tactical Media gave it a roughly definite form, wildly heterogeneous and often contradictory characteristics are still given to Tactical Media, a number of which have been described above.

This is no reason to despair. There is no true founding manifesto of Tactical Media, no ultimate place of birth, but merely a rather temporary convergence of disparate practices that would in a few years just as easily diverge again. However, one important point of convergence that galvanised the wider adoption and circulation of the term has been the series of Next 5 Minutes festivals and Tactical Media conferences, irregularly organised in Amsterdam four times between 1993 and 2003.²² Significantly, these events have always been collective efforts from a network of local institutions and singular actors acting together as a loose temporary alliance, without a fixed organisational form, let alone an institution.

Within the context of this series of events some of the most important writings about Tactical Media and its principal concerns have appeared. They have proven to be extremely influential in shaping critical thinking about the relationship between media, radical politics, dissident culture, and emerging technologies. The text that comes closest to a Tactical Media manifesto was also written in the context of these events, following the second edition of the Next 5 Minutes in 1996, and before the third edition that would eventually take place in early 1999.

This text, 'The ABC of Tactical Media', written by David Garcia and Geert Lovink in May 1997, provides the most accurate description of what this emerging field of interdisciplinary political practice entails. In the opening sentence of the text, Lovink and Garcia write:

Tactical Media are what happens when the cheap 'do it yourself' media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture.²³

Garcia and Lovink distinguish Tactical Media from other media genres primarily through their participatory character: 'Tactical Media do not just report events, as they are never impartial, they always participate and it is this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media.'

A specific conjunction of activism, art, media, and technological experimentation has always been a defining characteristic of Tactical Media. Garcia and Lovink point towards

²² | www.next5minutes.org/about.jsp.

²³ | Garcia and Lovink, 1997.

this aesthetic moment in Tactical Media practices, identifying it as a media-verité specific to the 1990s:

A distinctive tactical ethic and aesthetic that has emerged, which is culturally influential from MTV through to recent video work made by artists. It began as a quick and dirty aesthetic although it is just another style it (at least in its camcorder form) has come to symbolize a vérité for the 90's.

As a convergence of art, media, and politics, this aesthetic moment introduces its own specific poetics. It derives its power not from a disinterested position as an observer, as in the Kantian formula of the aesthetics of beauty, but from its rootedness in contestational politics and dissident lifestyles. David Garcia has observed that from this precarious and complicated position Tactical Media articulates 'a political poetics for the media age'.

Rather than understanding Tactical Media as a preconceived formula, it can now be understood as the result of the availability of new potentialities, and the methods primarily nonprofessional media producers use it to meet their desires. Tactical Media then is regarded as matter of fact, and not as a movement that requires a manifesto or institutional form. Given the deeply sensitive, contradictory and precarious terrain onto which Tactical Media ventures, it is logical that the organisers of the Next 5 Minutes series shied away from any attempt at a final definition, or the creation of a movement with definite shape. Tactical Media was understood mostly as a moment to be seized, after which it would be time to move on, as Geert Lovink has repeatedly asserted.²⁴

ON 'THE TACTICAL' IN TACTICAL MEDIA

The notion of 'the tactical' in Tactical Media is indebted to Michel de Certeau, mentioned earlier, and his influential ideas in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. The incorporation of dissident or contestational media practices with De Certeau's understanding of the tactical was introduced during the first edition of the Next 5 Minutes in 1993, when the event was still focused on 'tactical' forms of TV making. Bas Raijmakers in particular advanced this connection in the *N5M Zapbook*, the reader produced in preparation for the first Next 5 Minutes. In his introduction to the book, Raijmakers writes:

N5M is about the individual media-activists trying to get their message across via public access channels but also about small production companies testing the limits of mainstream tv from the inside, about tv-art projects using television techniques to develop a new kind of poetics, community tv fighting for the right to access and people within big tv institutions developing radical new program concepts. The richness and diversity that all these initiatives bring to the world of television is too often overlooked.

This richness consists of tv-makers as different as New York's Paper Tiger Television, who made "the Gulf Crisis Project", Budapest Black Box who is piling up tapes with recordings of Hungary's main political and cultural events in the Szech-

24 | Geert Lovink, 'Tactical Media, the Second Decade', preface to the Brazilian Submidialogia publication, (October 2005) Sao Paulo, www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=49512.

enyi Library, Amsterdam's Staats TV Rabotnik who bring to local cable interviews with independent Yugoslavian journalists working under war conditions, Bangkok's Media on Society and Culture who buys a weekly independent half-hour on commercial tv and finally all the people that are in possession of a camcorder, ready to shoot the next "amateur video".

What these tv-makers have in common is a social and cultural position. An important aspect of that position is that they have no fixed institutional or discursive relationship with the world of television. What they do have are tactics; tv-tactics depending on very specific circumstances in space and time. The positions that result from their tactical status give them the freedom to experiment with the medium and to express their own ideas and opinions. Since we feel that this use of tactics is something that cuts straight across the marginal-mainstream dichotomy, we decided to use this word to describe which part of the tv-world caught our interest.²⁵

De Certeau is notable for utilising the distinction between 'the tactical' and 'the strategic' to identify a space of agency for the 'weak' in opposition to strategic power. De Certeau remarks that it is a defining characteristic of strategic power that it invariably attempts to claim a space of its own and then to keep it by any means necessary. Those who lack power cannot claim a territory or define a space of their own, but they can operate in the strategic spaces defined by others. Obviously such operations are always temporary incursions. The only way in which the weak can expect to hold such territories, after all, is for them to become strategic brokers of power themselves, at which point they are no longer operating in the tactical mode.

Tactics, de Certeau writes, have no base at their disposal from where they can capitalise on their advantages, prepare their expansions, or secure their independence from circumstances. Instead tactics insinuate themselves into the places of others. They operate on the terrain of strategic power, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety. Whatever gains these tactics win they cannot keep.²⁶ Therefore, tactics are inevitably nomadic. The space of the tactical is always precarious. This mobility and precariousness is exemplified by the movements of the current squares and the occupy movements, which also show how disadvantaged parties can effectively contest strategic power. This nomadic quality is the simultaneous strength and weakness of the tactical moment.

TACTICAL MEDIA ECOLOGIES

Art historian Andreas Broeckmann offers a slightly different account of Tactical Media practices. Broeckmann mainly refers to the work of Felix Guattari to develop his 'points of departure' in an attempt to pinpoint Tactical Media's elusive character.

Broeckmann references Manuel De Landa's military analysis of the notion of tactics in his book *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*. For DeLanda, a War Machine is composed of

25 | Bas Raijmakers, 'Introduction' in Amsterdam Cultural Studies (eds) N5M1 Zapbook, Amsterdam: Paradiso, 1993. Available at: www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=46490.

26 | De Certeau, 1984, p. xiv.

distinct levels: The hardware of the weapons, its material underpinning, the tactics that integrate men and weapons into formations, the strategy that directs these formations towards political goals, and the logistics that provision the War Machine with agricultural and industrial resources.

Broeckmann feels that borrowing this analysis from a military scenario can ‘help us understand at which operative level media tacticians are engaged – whether their cause is the dissident struggle against an oppressor, or the attempt to create a new social form at a juncture of need and possibility.’²⁷ He then applies De Landa’s reading of the War Machine to the Media Machine:

The media ecology is a machine composed of several distinct levels: the levels of media and related tools and instruments; the level of tactics, in which individuals and media are integrated into formations; the level of strategy, in which the campaigns conducted by those formations acquire a unified political goal; and finally, the level of logistics, of procurement and supply networks, in which media practice is connected to the infrastructural and industrial resources that fuel it.²⁸

While such an analysis runs the risk of becoming purely functional, or even utilitarian, a point which Broeckmann readily acknowledges, it nonetheless suggests a crucial space of possibility for Tactical Media practices. Broeckmann argues that

What I regard as crucial for the assessment of tactical media practice as it is being attempted by the Next 5 Minutes, is the realisation that the relative structural weakness of a tactical approach and the absence of a unified political goal among media tacticians has its strengths in the flexibility, in the compatibility with other initiatives, and in the ability to form alliances notwithstanding political and ideological differences.²⁹

Broeckmann emphasises an ecological reading of the media environment, particularly of the emerging environment of the internet in 1996. For him, ‘ecological’ means regarding the media environment as a social space, as well as encompassing the concerns over the sustainability of the media environment, and indeed of the entire planet. Broeckmann writes:

Media ecology as I understand it describes an interrelated series of material, practical and theoretical trajectories which constitute a ‘formation’, a stratum, a spatial and temporal machine which is driven by other machines, as much as it helps to drive them. If this definition is accepted, the contentious issue is whether we should use the eco- prefix for something that is unrelated to the natural environment. I believe it is worth recovering a wider meaning of the notion ecology where it denotes not so much the relation between humans, animals and plants and their

27 | Andreas Broeckmann, ‘Some Points of Departure’, introductory essay for the second edition of the Next 5 Minutes Festival of tactical media, Amsterdam and Rotterdam, 1996, www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=37894.

28 | Ibid.

29 | Ibid.

natural environment, but the knowledgeable engagement with, as Félix Guattari calls them, the three ecological registers, that is the environment, the social relations, and human subjectivity.³⁰ It has become virtually impossible to think nature without culture: “We have to learn,” writes Guattari, “to make our thought traverse the interrelations and mutual influences between eco-systems, the material world, social and individual relations.” The critical understanding of the media ecology, which Guattari calls ecosophy, is a way for media activists and artists of enabling themselves to conduct their social and political lives in a considerate and responsible way.³¹

He returns to the idea of a media ecology at the end of his paper, and observes that a ‘new regime’ for this area has been taking shape in the 1990s. Electronic networks and the internet are particularly influential in opening up a huge field of interaction in which generating, distributing, accessing and deploying information all take on novel forms and trajectories. Broeckmann argues that ‘We first need to learn what the structures, the possibilities and the limitations of this new ecology are, in order then to be able to understand the agency of information which we are dealing with.’

For Broeckmann the question of how power functions in this ‘socio-mediatic environment’ is of great importance, as it challenges established understandings of how power is supposed to operate. Broeckmann writes that ‘The question now is in how far such power structures are being changed through the formations of the electronic networks, how power concentrations are reconfigured, and how institutions and structures are reorganised.’

Ultimately, the activities of Tactical Media operators in this emerging media ecology should be understood as a subset of attempts to deal with the ecological crisis in a more ‘productive and differentiated way’ than the indifferent or violent reactions it has mostly invoked. Guattari identifies this crisis as the principal threat not only to human existence on this planet, but also to that of many other species. Across Guattari’s three ecological registers, the environment, the social relations, and human subjectivity, technology plays an integral role in intensifying the crisis, but simultaneously constitutes the arena where new solutions must be found.

TACTICAL MEDIA: FINISHED OR NOT?

While Felix Stalder suggests that Tactical Media as a movement and self-aware network of people and projects dissipated around 2005, the first ever academic publication devoted entirely to Tactical Media did not appear until 2009. Stalder points to the fact that although much of the political and cultural practices initiated by Tactical Media operators continue to the present day, and will likely continue for a long time to come, they are no longer consciously named or understood by these new practitioners as Tactical Media. Rita Raley’s book, simply called *Tactical Media*, does not treat Tactical Media as a dead phenomenon. Rather than a post-mortem examination, Raley situates the practices she identifies as Tactical Media unequivocally in the present, as a vanguard activity projecting

30 | Félix Guattari, *Les Trois Écologies*, Wien: Passagen Verlag, 1994, p.12.

31 | Broeckmann, 1996.

or premeditating things to come rather than as a restorative practice. In this sense Tactical Media really does seem to live up to that famous creed borrowed from the avant-garde: 'Tactical Media is Dead – Long Live Tactical Media!'.³²

Raley's book focuses quite decidedly on digital media practices. She bases her argument primarily on Critical Art Ensemble's notion of digital resistance, that argues that 'the streets are dead capital' for social resistance, despite the recent spectacles of anti-globalisation and immigrant rights protests. Raley argues that 'the fact remains that the doxa about the value, cultural significance, and efficacy of the streets has changed.' This is less an objective truth than a subjective impression of a shared sensibility, which the politically engaged new media art projects that she investigates negotiate.³³

Raley agrees with CAE's analysis that this shift in 'revolutionary investments' away from the streets, 'corresponds with a shift in the nature of power, which has removed itself from the streets and has become nomadic. Activism and dissent, in turn, must, and do, enter the network.'³³ Rather than aiming at some grand revolutionary event, the Tactical Media projects Raley discusses engage in a micropolitics of disruption, intervention, and education.

In a second reduction in scope, Raley chooses to focus on politically engaged media art projects, especially those that manifest themselves in the space of networked digital media. She gives a detailed account of a series of fascinating art projects that deal with such diverse topics as immigration politics, political game worlds, virtual war, speculative capital, conflict visualisation, and financial visualisation.

However, it will not have escaped the astute reader's attention that Raley's focus on digital and networked forms of contestation and intervention, the move away from the streets, and her specific focus on media art projects runs counter to the observations about the remarkable resurgence of recent social protests in physical public space, and the engagement of emphatically nonprofessional and therefore mostly non-artistic actors in these events. This apparent contradiction is indicative of the difficulty of providing a coherent account of the multiplicity of Tactical Media practices.

Even Critical Art Ensemble itself seems to contradict its own logic by simultaneously insisting on the 'by any media necessary' dictum and on the centrality of digital interventionism. Although CAE describes 'digital' as shorthand to signify a logic of copying, recombining and re-presenting, this clarification is less than convincing. It is easy to argue that digital logic itself is reminiscent of a certain mono-technological preoccupation that is unable to see beyond its own horizons or to recognise alternative trajectories. The digital is of course not limited to electronic devices. It is first of all a notational logic that implies a certain abstraction in the engagement with the material and cultural environment. This notational logic itself, which the grand old technology philosopher Lewis Mumford would regard as the Megamachine, is an abstract construct that acts as a totalising force. It oper-

32 | Rita Raley, *Tactical Media*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p.1.

33 | Ibid.

ates like a giant ‘Leviathan on wheels’³⁴, bringing the entire sociality under its unitary rule. Seen from this perspective contestation and intervention should aim exactly at smashing this abstract machine to open up a field of alternative trajectories.

In this context, the recent critiques of Jodi Dean about the entrapment of the contemporary subject in the digitally networked ‘circuits of drive’ by Communicative Capitalism become particularly forceful. If anything has been learned in recent months, it is that the streets as a theatre of the political are once again in full focus, because the streets and squares themselves have now become hybrid networks.

34 | Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine Volume I: Technics and Human Development*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1967.

Tactical Media and the Politics of the Archive

This text is not alone in its effort to trace the varying moments of intensity of Tactical Media or those activities that stand in some relation to the notion of Tactical Media. The impetus for this text derives from a deeply felt necessity to retain a memory of the ephemeral actions that constituted past Tactical Media events and practices, which may inform the present without suggesting any definite pathways for the future.

Tactical Media has always existed in an uncomfortable space between a fluidity of practice that by nature resisted or outright refused to be named, and the recognition that it is constantly saddled with designations by those who are uncomfortable with unnamed concepts. More than a simple preference, this fluidity of practice has been recognised as a vital component of Tactical Media. It enables a nomadic practice that can engage seemingly unalterable social and political conditions, avoiding capture or assimilation by the very forces that Tactical Media practitioners set out to overcome.

Tactical Media runs a double risk of co-option by the ever-present politics of the archive. The first and most obvious threat is the freezing of its iridescent fluidity into established modes of discourse. If the 'archive' is understood in Foucauldian terms as 'the general system of the formation and transformation of statements'³⁵, then this system, if left unchallenged, defines everything that can exist as a definite statement-event, and thereby defines what can be expressed in clear and definite terms, or 'enunciated'. Under this type of logic, the expression of Tactical Media would be limited to the definite statements permitted by the archive's system of rules. Every statement that falls outside these rules would then be discarded as illegitimate – clearly not what the Tactical Media practitioner wants!

The second risk is to suggest that the past and present of Tactical Media have laid out an immutable trajectory for the future. Tracing the history of Tactical Media can easily slip into what German Egyptologist Jans Assmann terms 'cultural memory', a concept he developed to critique political mobilisations of historical data.³⁶ Assmann speaks of cultural memory as a connective structure that founds group identity through ritual and textual coherence. He explains that the past is never remembered for its own sake, rather, its main functions are to create a sense of continuity and to act as a motor for development. Situated at the end of a collective path, the present becomes meaningful, necessary and unalterable. Assmann defines such cultural narratives as 'mytho-motors', which motivate change by presenting the present as a deficient reflection of a heroic, mythological past that must be restored.

Assmann's view implies that cultural memory acts far beyond the founding of group identity or the continuity of the present with the past. It presents a preordained view of the future, and provides direction for collective action in the present to move towards this

35 | Michel Foucault, 'On the Ways of Writing History', in James D. Faubion (ed.), *Michel Foucault Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Essential Works of Foucault 1954 - 1984, Volume 2*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books and The New Press, 1998 and 2000, p. 142-148.

36 | Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, Munich: Beck, 1997.

goal. The aim is to recapture the ideals that have been lost to the inadequacies of present day life. These ideals can be restored through collective action, whether this be in the form of ritual or of revolution.

Archives, museums, monuments, religious and artistic artefacts, architecture and literature are some of the typical narrative objects that are used as foundations for cultural memory. Their instrumental presence denies the discontinuity of history and experience, and can act as a catalyst for social and political mobilisation of various kinds. It is clear then that the construction of cultural memory is a strategic operation that aims to erase difference and dissent.

Tracing the sensitive legacies of Tactical Media practices requires a critical approach, deeply conscious of the complicated political entanglements of the archive. It cannot assume a 'critical practice of archiving'. The archive and its construction, at their core, monumentalise objects and events, and naturalise the mythologisation of actions that are purpose and interest driven. The archive therefore entirely counters the contestational claims of heterogeneity and multiplicity for Tactical Media, whatever guise it may take. Any tracing activity therefore needs to deconstruct the practice of archiving if it is to retain any validity vis-a-vis these claims.

In our joint text "Tracing the Ephemeral: Tactical Media and the Lure of the Archive"³⁷, David Garcia and I reflect on this complicated task as editors of the Tactical Media Files, an online documentation resource of Tactical Media practices worldwide. We started this resource in the fall of 2008 to undertake precisely such a tracing activity. The approach taken here is to perversely appropriate the notion of the archive by dissolving and reconstructing it as a 'living archive'. This is more than a merely semantical operation. The construction of the resource is a slow and virtually unfunded undertaking that builds a toolset and a methodology that eschews fixation of the ephemeral traces of Tactical Media's moments in a more stabilised form. Instead, it seeks different trajectories to open up the collection of materials to various forms of active discourse formation, as well as to practical and theoretical interventions that feed into and out of Tactical Media's evolving practices.

In the text we have stated this purpose as follows:

Our ideal has been to be able to construct a 'living archive for tactical media', a task we have as yet not achieved and one we may never be able to fully live up to. With the notion of a 'Living Archive' we aim to create a model in which documentation of living cultural processes, archived materials, ephemera, and discursive practices are interwoven, drawing on the possibilities opened up by open source online database and content management systems, and digital audio and video technologies. Documenting the ephemera of Tactical Media thus becomes a dynamic open ended process that acts upon present and future events and is simultaneously acted upon and rewritten by these events and their outcomes. The Living Archive can never become an immutable repository creating a stable foundation

37 | Eric Kluitenberg and David Garcia, "Tracing the Ephemeral: Tactical Media and the Lure of the Archive", Tactical Media Files weblog, 30 June, 2011, <http://blog.tacticalmediafiles.net/?p=175>.

for the 'production of meaning', but instead acts as an active discursive principle emphasising the contingency of historical development.³⁸

A variety of practical interventions are conceivable, including opening the resource's maintenance and extension to collaborative editorship – something less radically open than Wikipedia, but still resisting the forms of institutional closure associated with archival institutions. Collaboration with active media activists and media cultural networks is another practical avenue to expand the documentation process. A tactical media blog has been set up to allow for more subjective assessments of the resource materials and functions, and to allow non-editors to present opinions on the materials. The open ended, entirely web-based nature of the resource means that it can be used for active documentation purposes, and potentially by Tactical Media practitioners in the act of constructing events.

Media Squares, a recent seminar devoted to the new forms of social protest and their media at De Balie centre for culture and politics in Amsterdam, one of the principal sites for the Next 5 Minutes series, further opened this process to the public. In such public gatherings the online resource is literally opened up to the audience for physical encounter, discussion, critique, and exchange. Follow-up events are already planned to continue the development of documentation activity as a dynamic, open-ended process. Critique and criticism of the resource and this tracing activity is necessarily an essential part of this process as well.

Can we thus escape the lure of the archive? Hard to say...

38 | Ibid.

The Crash of the New Millennium: Culture Jamming after 9/11

What has happened is – now you all have to turn your brains around – the greatest work of art there has ever been. That minds could achieve something in one act, which we in music cannot even dream of, that people rehearse like crazy for ten years, totally fanatically for one concert, and then die. This is the greatest possible work of art in the entire cosmos. Imagine what happened there. There are people who are so concentrated on one performance, and then 5000 people are chased into the Afterlife, in one moment. This I could not do. Compared to this, we are nothing as composers [...] Imagine this, that I could create a work of art now and you all were not only surprised, but you would fall down immediately, you would be dead and you would be reborn, because it is simply too insane. Some artists also try to cross the boundaries of what could ever be possible or imagined, to wake us up, to open another world for us.³⁹

With these words the famous composer Karl Heinz Stockhausen responded to the 9/11 attacks, only a few days later at a press conference at the Hamburg Music Festival. It remains one of most impressive and outrageous responses to the attacks and the horrific suffering they caused. Stockhausen muses on the impotence of art when confronted with spectacular scenes of hyper-violence that rupture the surface of the social. I have commented on Stockhausen's remarks before, mostly in relation to the aesthetics of the sublime that Stockhausen brings into play. The sublime as a distinct category of aesthetic experience is usually connected to phenomena that can still be rationally ascertained or theorised, but that cannot be subjectively absorbed because of their sheer vastness, their sensuous overpowering of the subject, or their boundless nature.

Such overwhelming experiences give rise to an enormous tension between rational approximation and subjective experience. It would seem that Stockhausen reflected from this state of numbness, unaware of the storm of indignation his comments would unleash. When asked if he did not consider these attacks as crimes, he seemed to realise for the first time how he had slipped from the social reality surrounding him – quickly asserting that it was of course a horrible crime. Most of all, Stockhausen's remarks seemed to reflect the fact that he found himself, as an artist, powerless to respond to the breakdown of the symbolic order, hence his acknowledgement of the superior power of this event.

This inability to respond to the violence of the attacks and the threat of the terrible retaliation that would inevitably follow them, as it indeed did, was not limited to artists alone. It also triggered panic and despair among activists. Not only did they foresee that this attack would have terrible consequences – far more than a million people died as a direct result of retaliations – but they also instantly understood that this rupture of the social and communicative surface would create a new communicative environment determined by excessive strategic violence. In this new context, activists' concerns over environmental issues, human dignity, economic and political injustices would be entirely marginalised.

39 | Karl Heinz Stockhausen speaking about the 9/11 attacks at a press conference for the Hamburg Music Festival on 16 September 2001.

A further complication was the extremely mediagenic character of the attacks, which enabled them to forcefully capture and dominate public attention. The 9/11 attacks seemed to delegitimise the already habitual procedures of symbolic intervention that many media activists would follow. With their most valuable weapon seemingly taken from their hands, the activists felt left behind and almost ready to concede victory to the spectacle of hyper-violence.

Investigative journalist Naomi Klein, who had for years been something of a figurehead for activist movements that interrogated the symbolic order of contemporary capitalism, quickly observed that the semiotic landscape had been irrevocably transformed. In 'Signs of the Times', an article for Toronto's *The Nation*, she states:

Post-September 11, tactics that rely on attacking – even peacefully – powerful symbols of capitalism find themselves in an utterly transformed semiotic landscape. After all, the attacks were acts of very real and horrifying terror, but they were also acts of symbolic warfare, and instantly understood as such.⁴⁰

For Klein it seemed that the delegitimation of these forms of symbolic intervention, often referred to as 'culture jamming', was complete:

Our civil liberties, our modest victories, our usual strategies - all are now in question. But this crisis also opens up new possibilities. As many have pointed out, the challenge for social justice movements is to connect economic inequality with the security concerns that now grip us all.

These 'new possibilities' she identifies should probably be read as a cry of desperation in the face of the superior power of the violent semiotic regime that had just been unleashed on the media ecology. Even more desperate is her response to these new hostile media-ecological conditions: 'This would require a dramatic change in activist strategy, one based much more on substance than on symbols.'⁴¹ She rhetorically poses the question 'Maybe the image wars are coming to a close.' Well, yes, let's all pack up and go home! We concede our failure and defeat! Klein goes on to write:

For years, we in this movement have fed off our opponents' symbols - their brands, their office towers, their photo-opportunity summits. We have used them as rallying cries, as focal points, as popular education tools. But these symbols were never the real targets; they were the levers, the handles. They were what allowed us, as British writer Katharine Ainger recently put it, 'to open a crack in history'. [...] The symbols were only ever doorways. It's time to walk through them.⁴²

Obviously the image wars have not come to an end, post 9/11. If anything they have exponentially intensified. Symbolic contestation remains an essential instrument of media activists around the globe. So how was Klein able to call for the abandonment of these culture jamming tactics?

40 | Naomi Klein, 'Signs of the Times', *The Nation*, October 5, 2001, www.naomiklein.org/articles/2001/10/signs-times.

41 | Ibid.

42 | Ibid.

Klein has failed to recognise two gross misconceptions on her part. These errors could have been excused as cries of desperation in response to the sensory and subjective excess of the moment, as an attempt to stay afloat in the void opened up by the social rupture that the attacks produced. However, Klein has continued the ‘symbols versus substance’ debate in subsequent publications, and so it seems relevant to address these misconceptions.

The first is a rather obvious mistake that a participant at an cultural activist seminar in Gothenburg pointed out to me one year after the attacks. We discussed Naomi Klein’s text in detail, in particular the dramatic transformation of the semiotic landscape and the media ecology after 9/11. The participant remarked that Klein’s argument failed to convince him, because although it might be true that although the semiotic landscape had been transformed by the attacks, perhaps even irrevocably so, it still remained a semiotic landscape. In other words, if an activist wants to operate in a communicative environment that actually reaches a ‘public’, he or she inevitably has to operate in that transformed semiotic landscape through symbolic forms of communication. Though the jamming of cultural and pop-cultural icons might have become incomparably more complicated, both intensely sensitive and desperately numbed, it is still the only doorway that media activists can walk through.

The second misconception is the false opposition that Klein creates between symbols and substance. She implies that there is a substance beyond the symbolic order, while the symbolic itself is inherently empty and devoid of human meaning. Now, we are content to assume that there are indeed realities that persist outside and beyond the symbolic realm and beyond systems of symbolic mediation. The question is, however, how these substances would become substantial on the social plane, given the scale and complexity of the societies in question. All messages here necessarily operate in a binary mode of presence or absence in the integrated multimedia text. In *The Network Society*, sociologist Manuel Castells describes this presence or absence as a process of social communication⁴³. According to Castells, only presence in the integrated multimedia text permits socialisation of the message, while all other forms of communicative exchange are relegated to increasingly marginal face-to-face subcultures.

To rephrase the point slightly differently: In a society so heavily reliant on electronically mediated forms of social communication, which are necessarily symbolical in nature as they essentially transcend the embodied realm of face-to-face exchange, symbols are the substance of social communication. The contestational interrogation of symbols, a practice at the heart of any media activist operation, is the entry point, or doorway, for the socialisation of alternative messages and points of view about the construction of the social, at which point the dichotomy between symbols and substance simply breaks down.

Klein is right in pointing out how the violence of the 9/11 spectacle and its remarkably swift absorption into the reintegrated multimedia text has enormously complicated media activist practices. However, she has drawn the wrong conclusions from this semiotic crisis.

43 | Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age, Society, Economy, Culture*, Volume I, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1996.

Culture jamming practices did not disappear from the face of the earth, or that matter from the screen, after 2001, but they are increasingly recognised as operating in a compromised environment. This is not limited to the terrorist hijacking of symbolic forms of intervention and their mediated fallout. New forms of collusion continuously emerge in the contemporary media ecology, where activist interventions can quickly be recognised as possible commodity vehicles in the attention economy.

A classic example of this form of co-option and neutralisation, or even reversal of critique, revolves again around Naomi Klein, in this case her highly successful book *No Logo*, published in January 2000. The book addresses a variety of culture jamming practices that aim at appropriating symbolic, often visual languages of advertising and corporate communication to enable competing claims to enter the public domain. Response to the book was so strong that it spurred something of a movement, appearing in an extensive series of regional and national editions, and turning Klein herself into something of a global brand. Similar criticisms had already been voiced about that other great protagonist of culture jamming, the Canadian and American subvertising magazine *Adbusters*⁴⁴. *Adbusters* and its parent organisation the Media Foundation have also been accused of transforming themselves into a global brand.

The vulnerability of this appropriation of branding strategies was impressively demonstrated by a feature article in *The Economist* magazine which, remarkably, ran just three days before the 9/11 attacks. The issue was adorned with startling cover appropriating the hyper-recognisable agitprop design of most editions of Klein's *No Logo*: A black background the word 'NO' in red, with a black 'LOGO' placed in a white square next to it. *The Economist* cover adopted this design for the words 'PRO LOGO'. The cover ran with a feature article called 'Pro Logo: Why Brands Are Good for You', by Sameena Ahmad, *The Economist*'s business correspondent. In the article, Ahmad fiercely attacks *No Logo*, and indeed completely reverses Klein's principal arguments. Ahmad contends that logos in fact give a face to abstract and largely invisible corporate organisations that create countless products and brands, as a result making these organisations more recognisable and accountable to the public.

In her 2001 'Signs of the Times' article, Klein herself points to the 'edgy' use of graffiti iconography and spray-can typography for clothing brands. Any corporate campaign can be appropriated or overwritten by activists, as is the case of graffiti activism, but so can each activist intervention. Each newly articulated visual or symbolic language can be turned into a corporate or strategic campaign. Culture jammers could cynically be designated as an outer-edge and wholly unpaid research and development department for the global marketing industry, identifying new ways to seize public attention in the competitive markets of the global attention economy.

44 | www.adbusters.org

MENTAL ENVIRONMENTALISM

Adbusters questions what the effect this continuous battle for public attention has on our mental ecology and health. They advocate a global movement for Mental Environmentalism in response to this symbolic violence:

If a key insight of environmentalism was that external reality, nature, could be polluted by industrial toxins, the key insight of mental environmentalism is that internal reality, our minds, can be polluted by infotoxins. Mental environmentalism draws a connection between the pollution of our minds by commercial messaging and the social, environmental, financial and ethical catastrophes that loom before humanity.⁴⁵

Adbusters also acknowledge the complicated nature of the media ecology they operate in:

Our minds are polluted by an overwhelming propaganda assault that colors our beliefs, desires and perception of reality. Fighting back is thus far more difficult than protesting in the streets or clicking a few links. [...] Breaking out of the consumer mindspace takes a fundamental shift of perspective, an epiphany, after which everything is seen with new eyes.⁴⁶

This observation is particularly interesting in light of *Adbusters'* and other affiliated activist groups recent call to 'Occupy Wall Street'. Inspired by the street protests and public square occupations of the Arab Spring and the Spanish Indignados movement, they issued their call to occupy Wall Street as follows:

A worldwide shift in revolutionary tactics is underway right now that bodes well for the future. The spirit of this fresh tactic, a fusion of Tahrir with the acampadas of Spain. [...] The beauty of this new formula, and what makes this novel tactic exciting, is its pragmatic simplicity: we talk to each other in various physical gatherings and virtual people's assemblies [...] we zero in on what our one demand will be, a demand that awakens the imagination and, if achieved, would propel us toward the radical democracy of the future [...] and then we go out and seize a square of singular symbolic significance and put our asses on the line to make it happen.

[...]The time has come to deploy this emerging stratagem against the greatest corrupter of our democracy: Wall Street, the financial Gomorrah of America. On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall incessantly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices.⁴⁷

The call has been a resounding success. The occupation has ongoing through October 2011 and seems able to resist early snow storms in New York City. The model has been

45 | Micah White. 'What is Mental Environmentalism?' Blackspot Blog, 9 December, 2010, <http://www.adbusters.org/blogs/blackspot-blog/what-mental-environmentalism.html>.

46 | Ibid.

47 | For extensive documentation see www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=53664

copied in many other cities across the United States and travelled to Europe as a working model and tactic. This movement of tactical campers already has an aphoristic name, 'occupy', which can seemingly be applied anywhere it is needed. Inspiring as the model may be for activist endeavours, its long-term significance remains to be evaluated.

The tactical camping movements in Southern Europe have achieved at least one major success by firmly putting the issue of the growing precarity of expanding circles of the general population on the political agenda, a goal that sophisticated activists, online debates, publications and academic discourse had so far been unable to accomplish. Despite this, the implications of the movement of the squares in various North African and Middle Eastern countries are far less certain.

Libya has descended into a full-scale war. Scores of protesters in Syria are killed every day while the regime shows no signs of weakening. In Egypt, the political situation remains thoroughly unclear despite the success of the iconic Tahrir Square uprising, while the forty year state of emergency still remains in effect. Religious factions in Tunisia have won elections, while in Iran, once the source of a 'twitter revolution', the old regime is still firmly in place.

Everyone is a Media Artist!

Tactical Media has always been intimately bound with the idea of do-it-yourself (DIY) media production. If Tactical Media is understood to be resolutely participatory it does not only mean that Tactical Media operators actively engage and participate in the events they mediate, but also that the practices of media production themselves are resolutely participatory. The idea that anybody can become a media producer is at the heart of what Tactical Media tries to achieve.

This idea became particularly strong with the rise of cheap consumer electronics and video equipment that put photography, film production and editing tools in the hand of ordinary citizens, which allowed for its quick dissemination via instant public screening and television distribution. The subsequent rise of the internet and digital audiovisual technology further intensified this process.

These participatory processes also gave rise to new forms of subjectivity, a concern that was particularly strong for those Tactical Media operators coming from the art world. Tactical Media producers increasingly became nonprofessional producers as the availability of the new media tools increased. Today even ordinary mobile phones have become cameras, while smart phones have become portable media studios, complete with editing suites and distribution facilities such as mobile upload or live-streaming to internet servers.

In as far as artists still play a role in these processes, they have been forced to shed their exclusive claim to constituting a singular subjectivity in the public realm. This unique position is now shared with others, ultimately to everybody. Artists can and do play an important role as facilitators in this process of cultural democratisation. The role that artists can assume as catalysts for the self-actualisation of individual citizens, whether these citizens ultimately think of themselves artists or not, predates the rise of the do-it-yourself media movement. This ideal of cultural democratisation can be connected to a range of participatory artistic practices.

SOCIAL SCULPTURE

Throughout the histories of the avant-garde arts there is a remarkable recurrence of the idea that the artists' interventions into social reality were emphatically intended to go beyond analysis and critique, and actually transform existing forms of social organisation. Such change should generally be accomplished by transforming the audience's experience of social reality, activating them in the process to become participants in the transformative change of the social itself. This practice has become quite inseparably linked to Joseph Beuys' concept of 'social sculpture'. Beuys' activities as an artist were deeply rooted in Germany's experiences during WWII, as well as his own experiences as a soldier during this time. What makes Beuys' case particularly interesting is that his ideal of a radically socially engaged and ecological art practice did not remain restricted to the realm of the symbolic, the semiotic or, for that matter, within the realm of art itself. His active involvement in the founding of Germany's highly successful Green Party, Die Grünen, meant that his actions bridged the divide between art and life and art and politics in a decidedly substantive way.

Beuys' conception of social sculpture as a direct artistic intervention to shape social reality can be elucidated by an examination of his art project *7000 Eichen* (7000 Oaks), that Beuys realised for the renowned contemporary art exhibit 'Documenta 7' in Kassel in 1982. Beuys drafted a plan that called for the planting of 7000 trees, each paired with a columnar basalt marker approximately 120 centimetres tall. One of Beuys' credos for the project was 'Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung', which roughly translates as 'foresting the city instead of administrating the city'. Beyond the immediate effect of foresting the city, Beuys thought the action would raise the ecological and social consciousness of the local population. The planting of trees would continue over the years, ideally never stopping, while the selection of suitable locations would involve the local communities in ongoing discussions.

The project was financed by selling the double sculpture of tree and basalt column and arranging public discussions with local residents to decide where new trees and columns would be planted. The project continued for five years under supervision of the Free International University, which Beuys founded for this purpose. According to Beuys, '*7000 Oaks* is a sculpture referring to peoples' life, to their everyday work. That is my concept of art which I call the extended concept or art of the social sculpture.'⁴⁸ He conceived of the planting of trees as socially regenerative therapy: 'I think the tree is an element of regeneration which in itself is a concept of time. The oak is especially so because it is a slowly growing tree with a kind of really solid heartwood. It has always been a form of sculpture, a symbol for this planet.'⁴⁹ For Beuys, this enlarged conception of art as social sculpture meant nothing less than 'the transformation of all life, of society and the ecological system'. Of his goals, Beuys says:

My point with these seven thousand trees was that each would be a monument, consisting of a living part, the live tree, changing all the time, and a crystalline mass, maintaining its shape, size, and weight. This stone can be transformed only by taking from it, when a piece splinters off, say, never by growing. By placing these two objects side by side, the proportionality of the monument's two parts will never be the same.⁵⁰

Thus, the column and the tree act as physical markers for a social process. They are signs that point beyond themselves to the participatory process involving the local residents of Kassel in the sale, planting, and public debate of these trees. It is this process itself that is the social sculpture, not the trees or the columns. This radically widened definition of art as participatory process aimed to create a 'social organism' through a collective and entirely democratic process in which 'every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor, or architect of the social organism'.⁵¹

48 | Norbert Scholz, 'Joseph Beuys-7000 Oaks in Kassel,' *Anthos* 3 (1986): p. 32.

49 | Richard Demarco, 'Conversations with Artists', *Studio International* 195 (September 1982): p. 46.

50 | *Ibid.*

51 | Joseph Beuys, 'I Am Searching For Field Character', in Claire Bishop (ed.) *Participation*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

SCHLINGENSIEF'S CHANCE 2000

Comparable to how Beuys widened the definition of primarily visual art, German theatre director and actor Christoph Schlingensiefel aspired to expand the theatre praxis. Deeply inspired by Beuys' notion of the social sculpture, Schlingensiefel intended his role as artist and theatre maker to be a direct intervention into social and political reality, with the aim of fundamentally transforming it. His most far reaching project in this regard was *Chance 2000*,⁵² an art project and political party that Schlingensiefel founded in the run-up to the 1998 German elections.

Chance 2000 envisioned a bright new future for Germany without Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Kohl had dominated German politics for 16 years, but had announced his intention to not run for office again. Instead of voting for Kohl's successor or an opposition candidate, Schlingensiefel proposed that everyone vote for themselves: 'Chance is a real party, where everyone with any combination of names Chance Müller or Müller Chance can vote themselves.'⁵³

Schlingensiefel managed to set up chapters of the party all over Germany and fulfil the legal requirements to enter the national elections. Emphatically different from Beuys' actual engagement in the party politics of the Green Party, Schlingensiefel did not offer any program or ideological framework of his own. Schlingensiefel commented in one of many interviews he conducted at the time:

[...] about the only thing that gets people really going is to say: Prove that you exist, vote yourself, the party program are you. There isn't any better program conceivable as that what you carry inside you. But obviously one needs to know oneself. For this reason we are a party that is truly very open, and that has no particular final goal – who has a final goal in mind will be thrown out promptly. At the moment we have about 16.000 members, and we have just as many goals. Obviously I can't know all these goals, and I also do not have the desire to archive them and then to create a cross-section.⁵⁴

A recurrent criticism levelled at *Chance 2000* was exactly this absence of any clear program, an inevitable outcome as 'everyone is their own program'. Asked what Schlingensiefel or his party would do in any given field of politics or policy, he simply answered: 'You will see', expecting people to then ask him: 'What should I see there?' Schlingensiefel then responded:

And that was exactly the point – the images that are shown to us do not have any kind of truthfulness about them anymore, they are just surfaces. There's also nothing wrong about this enchantment of the surface, after all I'm a child of the media, and I grew up with that, but one should also say this explicitly. We are, I believe, at a turning point, where we all suspect, latently, the total enactment,

52 | Project documented at: www.schlingensiefel.com/projekt_eng.php?id=t014.

53 | Schlingensiefel interviewed in: *Ox-Fanzine* / Ausgabe #32, 'Schlingensiefel und Chance 2000', (III 1998) www.ox-fanzine.de/web/itv/489/interviews.212.html.

54 | Ibid.

and even sometimes in front of the mirror in the morning, we can't kick that feeling that this isn't me goggling out there. This turning point will effect something in our entire relationships to each other. Either you turn away completely, or you get a circular baldness, a nervous breakdown, or you become a megalomaniac.⁵⁵

Instead, *Chance 2000* proposed images that became an environmental container for a potentially unlimited supply of alternate and dissenting identities:

Our actions do not intend to convince anybody that they are the ultimate solution, but they are proposals for images in which one can operate to get out of the closet: I am gay, I am jobless, I am handicapped – yes. So that one also can get rid of this inertia, to say: “this is how it is – now hand over the cash.” I also know that I will die some day, but still I continue today.⁵⁶

Chance 2000 never actually made it past the hurdle of the five percent of total votes that blocks smaller political movements from entering the German parliament. However, what if the idea actually did take off? According to Schlingensief:

If we would get in the parliament, I would first of all create speaking time for handicapped, junkies, homeless, or give the floor to people who can't even speak at all, as for instance our Werner Brecht, who you really can't understand when he speaks. And when he holds a speech, then this will be maybe 16 words in 15 minutes. That is however again a great image, and I believe we need that.⁵⁷

TACTICAL MEDIA AND THE PARTICIPATORY LOGIC OF DIY MEDIA CULTURE

As Garcia and Lovink stated in their ABC text, Tactical Media never simply reports event, it actively participates. Participation is strongly enhanced by the do-it-yourself approach to media-making. The participatory logic of Tactical Media therefore works both ways. It creates frameworks of participation for everyone, for the disenfranchised as well as for the quotidian citizen, but it also involves itself in events in order to sculpt the social. Its aesthetics are therefore always to some extent defined by the logic of the event.

The culture of DIY media production has many origins. One important marker was the birth of the ‘Camcorder Revolution’ at the Tompkin Square Police Riots on August 6 and 7, 1988, in Manhattan’s East Village. Video artist Paul Garrin, returning home from a nightly visit to his editing studio, was more or less accidentally drawn into the historic events that took place only a few blocks away from his apartment. A massive police presence had built up during the preceding seven days over a public order disturbance in the Tompkin Square Park. Garrin thought he could get some fresh material for a tape called *Free Society*, which he was working on at the time.

55 | Ibid. 2.

56 | Ibid. 3.

57 | Ibid. 4.

Events unfolded according to their own logic, however. Rather than observing the action, Garrin was pulled into the crowd of protesters and police, and subsequently beaten by one of the police officers on site. After escaping the immediate action, Garrin resolved to air his video on television. At first, Garrin was only successful with a local CBS news team. Once aired, however, the shaky footage, shot on a home camcorder, was quickly copied from station to station. Garrin writes about the subsequent media frenzy:

The euphoria of scooping the media and heralding the truth was intoxicating for a time, and it felt like what I called “Reverse Big Brother -- not the state watching the people, but the people watching the state. I knew that video served as a tool, a weapon, and a witness. The Tompkins Square Riot video inspired many to pick up their cameras and record what would have otherwise been unseen. The video revolution swept across the airwaves and across the world, as communism fell in the Eastern block, and as the cops armed themselves with cameras and media. The riot became a media riot, and escalated to a media war. Then I advised: “Use your camera intelligently”. Today with internet and a shakeup in the media distribution system, that same advice applies: “Use your media intelligently”. The Tompkins Square Riot video was the spark that ignited the camcorder revolution, and it was the first wave leading up to the internet media revolution of today, 20 years later.⁵⁸

COLLECTIVE CULTURAL ACTION

In *Digital Resistance*, Critical Art Ensemble reflect at length on the participatory character of Tactical Media and the role of the amateur participant:

[...] participants are neither fish nor fowl. They aren’t artists in any traditional sense and don’t want to be caught in the web of metaphysical, historical, and romantic signage that accompanies that designation. Nor are they political activists in any traditional sense, because they refuse to solely take the reactive position of anti-logos, and are just as willing to flow through fields of nomos in defiance of efficiency and necessity. In either case, such role designations are too restrictive in that the role boundaries exclude access to social and knowledge systems that are the materials for their work. Here may be a final link to invisibility: these participants value access over expertise, and who really cares about the work of an amateur?⁵⁹

They compare the role of the Tactical Media practitioner to that of the postmodern thinker who deconstructs the given to ‘demonstrate that what is taken as privileged discourse is merely a construction that conceals power and self-interest.’ The main difference to such critical thinkers is that these practitioners do not stop at critical reading and theorising, but go on ‘to develop participatory events that demonstrate the critique through an experiential process.’⁶⁰

58 | Paul Garrin, “The 1988 Tompkins Square Police Riot - A Video Point of View”, in *The Shadow Issue #33 Tompkins Square Riot: 1988-2008* (2008), www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=51858

59 | Critical Art Ensemble, 2001, p. 3-4.

60 | Ibid, p. 8.

The nonprofessional, ‘amateur’ participant takes centre stage in this participatory logic:

Amateurs have the ability to see through the dominant paradigms, are freer to recombine elements of paradigms thought long dead, and can apply everyday life experience to their deliberations. Most important, however, amateurs are not invested in institutionalized systems of knowledge production and policy construction, and hence do not have irresistible forces guiding the outcome of their process such as maintaining a place in the funding hierarchy, or maintaining prestige-capital.⁶¹

Still, there are demands for specialised skill sets. A complex societal context demands a multiplicity of disciplinary viewpoints to solve complex problems and provide grounded analysis. In bringing forward the critical interdisciplinary practice that Critical Art Ensemble envisions there are complex economic realities to navigate ‘amateur’ and ‘expert’ practices, especially in an institutional and market context not geared towards this kind of transdisciplinary practice.

CAE therefore advocates ‘collective cultural action’ as a practice of building deliberately hybrid coalitions. As alternative forms of social organisation, these coalitions are juxtaposed with ‘communities’, which in CAE’s view contradict the politics of difference, creating closed social systems. CAE references ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power)⁶² as an example of such a hybrid coalition, which is composed of artists, activists, scientists and non-specialists addressing an unfolding health crisis through large scale collaborative and participatory actions. Beyond finding fresh approaches to urgent and intensely complex social and medical problems such as the unfolding AIDS/HIV crisis, collective cultural action offers important possibilities to address alternative forms of organising and shaping social reality itself. CAE writes:

[...]collective action also helps alleviate the intensity of alienation born of an overly rationalized and instrumentalized culture by re-creating some of the positive points of friendship networks within a productive environment. For this reason, CAE believes that artists’ research into alternative forms of social organization is just as important as the traditional research into materials, processes, and products.⁶³

INTIMATE MEDIA: SCALE AND FEEDBACK

Feedback is of prime importance to the participatory logic of Tactical Media. The possibility for reciprocal exchange is a vital part of active engagement. It is clear that mass media, by their very nature, cannot fulfil this demand. The demand for feedback relates both to the structure of the process as well as its scale. Beyond a certain scale a process cannot be properly participatory, as the participant’s action gets lost in a sea of interactions, and the process itself becomes at best reactive. However, because distribution volumes can be enormous in distributed media forms such as e-mail or social networking platforms, while still allowing for personal feedback and reciprocal exchange between

61 | Ibid. p. 8-9.

62 | For further reference see: www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=52740

63 | Critical Art Ensemble, 2001, p. 72-73

individual participant, scale alone is not a sufficient criterion to differentiate between reactive and participatory media.

Sufism scholar and radical-anarchist social thinker Peter Lamborn Wilson has introduced a useful distinction that can help to distinguish the participatory from the merely reactive. He contrasts the mass media, or what he calls 'the Media', with intimate media. Intimate media allow for close feedback loops between sender and receiver. They create a space for the articulation of singular subjectivities that eschew any appropriation by an extended form of publicness. Wilson goes so far as to state that, in an ideal intimate media setting, sender and receiver know each other personally and feedback is more or less immediate. He draws on his own experience producing neighbourhood radio in this.

In his text 'Media Creed for the Fin de Siècle' Lamborn Wilson pinpoints these differences:

[...] "the Media" constructs the image of a false subjectivity, packaged and sold to the consumer as a simulacrum of his/her own "feelings" and "personal opinions" or subjectivity. And at the same time, the Media constructs (or is constructed by) a false objectivity, a false totality, which imposes itself as the authoritative world-view...' ⁶⁴

He illustrates the logic of self-produced intimate media by drawing on the example of the self-produced book:

The big difference is that anyone can produce a book. It has become an "intimate medium", one in which critical faculties are engaged, because we now know and understand the book as subjective. Every book, as Calvino remarked, embodies a personal politique – whether the author is conscious of it or not. Our awareness of this has increased in direct proportion to our access to the medium. And precisely because the book no longer possesses the aura of objectivity which it enjoyed in, say, the 16th century, that aura has migrated from the intimate media to "The Media", the "public" media such as network TV. The media in this sense remains by definition closed and inaccessible to my subjectivity. The Media wants to construct my subjectivity, not be constructed by it. If it allowed this it would become-again by definition-another intimate medium, bereft of its claim to objectivity, reduced (in Spectacular terms) to relative insignificance. Obviously the Media will resist this eventuality-but it will do so precisely by inviting me to invest my subjectivity in its total energy. It will recuperate my subjectivity, bracket it, and use it to reinforce its own false objectivity. It will sell me the illusion that I have "expressed myself", either by selling me the lifestyle of my "choice", or by inviting me to "appear" within the gaze of representation.⁶⁵

In the context of mass-scale proliferation of social media, the formula of the participatory process has become highly problematic in recent years. In Wilson's view access, intimacy and feedback, which constitute reciprocal exchange, are the prerequisites to avoid the construction of false subjectivity in any participatory process.

64 | Peter Lamborn Wilson, Media Creed for the Fin de Siècle (1996), <http://hermetic.com/bey/pw-creed.html>.

65 | Ibid.

THE SPECTRE OF AFFECTIVE LABOUR

Notwithstanding the obviously energising and to some extent empowering potential of social media platforms as temporary sites of social and political mobilisation, intense critique has been levelled at the commodification of subjectivity inherent in these platforms. The most powerful and articulate critiques frame the ceaseless investment of private time and personal energies in corporate social networking and micro-blogging platforms as 'affective labour'. This concept was initially proposed by political philosophers Michael Hardt and Antoni Negri in their book *Multitude*. Affective labour is an amateur practice, and as noted before, its appropriation by a commodified corporate logic calls into question the celebration of the amateur and amateur practice that Critical Art Ensemble advocates so passionately.

In an attempt to divert attention away from this commodifying logic, the mainstream media has staged a deeply flawed debate about the demise of professional standards in information provision and information filtering ('Leave it to the professionals!'). It suggests to the average citizen and consumer that, even if engaged only in low-level networked exchanges on social networking sites and micro-blogging clients, becoming a nonprofessional media producer means to be part of a broad popular movement that challenges established information hierarchies – something uncannily close to Tactical Media.

However, the economics of the exchange are deliberately left entirely out of the picture. What the grossly superficial commentaries of mainstream media on the social media phenomena reflect is not a lack of understanding. Rather, they should be read as a deliberate attempt at 'organised innocence'. The suggestion that the struggle is about access to and control of information merely serves to hide a bitter fight within the global media industries over revenue models, and advertisement revenues in particular. A massive shift of monetisation possibilities has gripped the global media industry, where capital is increasingly redirected away from undifferentiated mass media channels to diversified networked media services, ranging from search engines, online news filters, free mail and hosting services, to social networking service platforms, self-produced video portal sites, and micro-blogging services – in short the entire spectrum of self-mediation tools that shape the new media ecology and hold hundreds of millions if not already billions of media nonprofessionals under its spell.

Neither mass nor alternative media, neither niche nor community, this new media space requires a designation of its own. I refer to it as 'generic media'. The prime characteristic of this new space of generic media is 'self-mediation', which can best be understood as the constitution of mediated presence through the appropriation of media production and distribution tools and infrastructures by nonprofessional media producers. Its principal characteristics have been foreshadowed by the practices of Tactical Media, particularly its do-it-yourself logic of media production. However, as Felix Stalder observed, the self-awareness of a movement, or of a conscious political practice, fades from this space of activity as it massifies.

The economics of the new networked space of mass participation are absurdly imbalanced. The critique of affective labour is entirely correct in pointing out how amateur contributions, driven by love, amor, are the prime mechanism for the creation of surplus value. This value production is entirely swept up by a very few and exclusively corporate ac-

tors. It has made possible the phenomenal ascension of new global media conglomerates in the shortest space of time, of which Google and Facebook are the most obvious prominent representatives. With their rise, a disproportionate centralisation of informational and economic capabilities have taken shape that will have as yet unforeseeable political consequences.

A further problem of these new networked media hyper-monopolies is their extreme volatility. Google and Facebook can only exist in their current form because of the expectations that global capital markets have literally invested in them. This makes them susceptible to the spell of 'imaginary media'⁶⁶, machines that mediate impossible desires. If the expectations projected on these companies indeed turn out to be impossible, their collapse will be immediate, as has been the case with so many other overinflated networked media ventures before them. For the moment, these platforms primarily operate as marketing tools, gathering information, profiling and exposing consumer masses in ever finer detail through continuous interaction on their service platforms. This is simultaneously their greatest strength and their greatest vulnerability. After all, as these interactions are driven primarily by the amor invested by the users, these interactions will continue only as long as the platform allows for user identification, or until the moment when a new and more attractive space of identification comes along, at which point it is time for the user to 'move on'.

66 | Eric Kluitenberg and Jorinde Seijdel, 'Hybrid Space – How Wireless Media are Mobilizing Public Space', Open #11, Journal for Art and the Public Domain, (November 2006), www.skor.nl/eng/archive/item/open-11-hybrid-space-how-wireless-media-are-mobilizing-public-space?single=1. See also the introduction to the Book of Imaginary Media: <http://permalink.gmane.org/gmane.culture.internet.nettime/1979>

Media Squares: Tactical Media in Hybrid Space

The ever expanding forces of disinformation, commodification and co-option throughout the new media ecology underscore the necessity to rethink the retreat from the streets into the network, as advocated by Critical Art Ensemble in *Digital Resistance*. Such a re-orientation of activist tactics and strategies back to embodied space is reinforced further by the migration of the network itself from indoor screens into the streets through the dispersal of mobile wireless network technologies. The simultaneity of these two occurrences can of course not be a coincidence.

Mediagenic and media-conscious forms of intervention hitting the streets predate the current arrival of the smart phone and other multimedia wireless clients on the squares. There is some precedent for the convergence of urban public space and appropriated media space. Perhaps its most articulate and culturally and politically significant manifestation was the Reclaim the Streets (RTS) movement⁶⁷, which peaked from the late 1990s to the early 2000s, and is still active today. Its principal format is that of the street party, in and of itself not a form of urban intervention that is either uncommon or antagonistic to existing regulatory regimes. However, RTS adheres as matter of principle to the well known first rule of engagement: 'never ask permission, just appear!'. Permits negate what the movement is about.

Form and content merged seamlessly in Reclaim the Streets urban interventions against over-congested and polluted urban public spaces, specifically attacking the preeminence of the automobile. With a high-spirited dose of organised spontaneity, busy city streets would suddenly be sealed off to traffic. Music installations would be unveiled and parties would erupt, with the mission to reclaim the streets for people. Instead of regarding urban streets as logistical networks or trajectories of transportation, these activists wished to reclaim urban space as a space of encounter, a space for public deliberation, and as a space for play and communion, but also as a space for political contestation. One can almost hear the echo of Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*⁶⁸ over the thundering electronic beats that usually would accompany this Dionysian takeover of city streets.

An often overlooked but nonetheless crucial aspect in the genesis of this media-savvy street movement was its reliance on a technical protocol. Reclaim the Streets was reliant on co-ordination in space in real-time, or as close as they could possibly get to it. Too slow and the action would fail. The networks of RTS had to be simultaneously open and relatively insular – open to allow enough participants to have a real party in the streets, and insular so that its location and time would not be disclosed ahead of time outside of the participant network. SMS text messaging allowed for exactly that function. In its early inception, before it was recognised as a cash-cow for telecommunications companies, SMS permitted free messaging to a list of addresses of any length. SMS had,

67 | <http://rts.gn.apc.org>.

68 | Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999. Originally 'Das Passagenwerk', in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972.

until then, lead a rather unassuming existence in the shadow of mobile voice communication, as it had originally been conceived of as a technical protocol for testing and network maintenance purposes.

The fact that unlimited numbers of subscribers could be notified on the fly of the start of an event produced a rare tactical opportunity that RTS activists seized eagerly. The protocol thus produced a new social formation, retroactively identified as the flash mob.

The overlaying of physical public space with novel kinds of technical protocols and their wireless network capacities engenders the intensified hybridisation of embodied social spaces. All social spaces are hybrid in that they consist of material structures and immaterial flows of knowledge, culture, trade, and communicative exchange. The rapid proliferation of wireless network technologies increases the density of hybrid space with a thick layering of material substrates, cultural and social flows, and technological protocols. This densified thickness of hybrid space creates new spaces of opportunity as well as new forces of coercion.

Reclaim the Streets and the flash mob phenomenon were early markers of this densification of hybrid space. Activists must understand and occupy the new spaces of opportunity that are opened up by this expanded technological matrix of wireless network technologies. At the same time, they must be acutely aware of the new forms of coercion that operate in these densified hybrid spaces and actively resist them. Prime among these are the new methods of tracing the individual and intensified forms of electronic surveillance in public space⁶⁹.

This space of opportunity became evident in the excessive mediation of the 'movements of the squares': Tottery recordings of mobile phone video footage, live streams from occupied squares, photo-blogs, instant micro-blogging from the streets, low cost arial digital photo balloon mapping techniques⁷⁰, live streams from occupied squares, and balcony videography.

In the digital conversion of physical space, the street has literally become the network and the square the principal medium of collective expression.

EVERYBODY BACK TO THE STREET! (PRELIMINARY LESSONS FROM EGYPT)

It is obvious by now that 'Twitter revolutions' and 'Facebook revolutions' do not exist. Significant popular protests still play out in the theatre of the street. Digital networks are helpful adjuncts to deeply invested material forms of contestation that may involve physical hardship and possibly loss of life. However, separated from the street, the communicative circuits of digital networks can just as easily become traps, absorbing contestational energy while dissipating the energies of the streets.

69 | For instance, see the project i-See by the Institute of Applied Autonomy: www.appliedautonomy.com/isee.html.

70 | <http://publiclaboratory.org/tool/balloon-mapping>

In the recent turmoil in a host of North African and Middle Eastern countries the theatre of the street has become exceedingly bloody. While the worst kind of standoff in Egypt has been averted, at least for the moment, neighbouring Libya has descended into a full scale civil war. Not far away in Syria the death toll of the conflict is continuously on the rise. Many more have died in further conflict in the wider region, while progressive political aspirations have been all but squashed in Iran, the source of another failed 'Twitter revolution'. It is all the more surprising then that the popular protests staged in Egypt generated such a remarkable production of aesthetically challenging materials in which the diversity of protest voices were made manifest.

A special issue of the online magazine *Shahadat*, 'Signs of the Times: the Popular Literature of Tahrir'⁷¹, has made a first attempt to filter and assess some of these visual and poetic public statements. In the introductory essay 'Watching a Revolution' editor Rayya El Zein reflects on the nature of this collective creative production:

Tahrir protesters expressed this culture in a variety of ways. Protesters held signs declaring identity and resistance that display an exponential capacity to riff, elaborate on, and embellish the basic articulation of political demands. They gathered in the millions, sustaining each other with song, comedy, murals, and memorials. In these creative gestures, Egyptian protesters invited others to watch them and implicitly, to join them. Creative output actualized the political revolution.⁷²

The online dimension of the protests at first mostly acted as a mobilisation tool and as a space for relatively safe discussion of politically contentious issues. Anthropologist Charles Hirschkind⁷³ for instance points out that the Egypt protests emanated from a much longer trajectory of political realignment of very diverse political and religious oppositional groups and movements. These groups chiefly communicated and debated their views in a variety of blogging websites for well over ten years before the eruption of the protests that lead to the deposing of President Mubarak. It seems then that there was a dialectic of events online and beyond the screen that ultimately produced this remarkable protest.

Once in motion, the focal point of the now famous Tahrir Square played a pivotal role in creating an image and simultaneously an experience of difference for the participants in these momentous events. From the outside, the world was watching a spectacle in many ways similar to the others that passed through the spectacle machines of global news networks. However, events were not just reported from the outside, but also mediated from within, through countless websites, blogs, and online videos posted by the protesters themselves. There was a strong sense of being watched, and simultaneously of 'staging the revolution', over and over again in a radically dispersed process of self-mediation.

Rayya El Zein observes:

71 | Rayya El Zein and Alex Ortiz (eds), 'Signs of the Times: the Popular Literature of Tahrir – Protest Signs, Graffiti, and Street Art', *Shahadat*, (April, 2011), <http://artecast.org/pages/literature/641/>.

72 | Rayya El Zein, 'Watching a Revolution', *Shahadat*, (2011), p. 4.

73 | Charles Hirschkind, 'From the Blogosphere to the Street: The Role of Social Media in the Egyptian Uprising', *Jadaliyya.com*, 9 February, 2011, www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=50916.

Assessing the framework of how the Revolution was watched becomes more grounded when we consider that both protesters and Mubarak seem to have been keenly aware of the potent politics of being seen. The regime's constant and brutal crackdowns on journalists and their equipment reflect an anxiety about the infectious power of specifically seeing resistance. And Tahrir protesters were constantly aware of the potential and the danger of being seen or remaining hidden. At night, panicked voices described what they feared others couldn't or wouldn't see. And in daylight, an outward, visual embodiment of resistance, a performance of defiance, was made apparent in cultural activity. When we – abroad and in Egypt – watched Tahrir as its peaceful occupation progressed, we were increasingly watching a particular culture of resistance.⁷⁴

Thus the protests offered the participants a rare opportunity for self-enactment as protesters, a role that for decades would have seemed unimaginable for many of them to assume.

TRANSGRESSION IN SELF-MEDIATION

Still, this political designation of the protests seems insufficient to properly account for something else that shines through in these images, especially in the images of the protesters' self-enactment. Firstly, there is this strange recurrence of the 'protester holding a sign', usually photographed in a frontal pose with the sign in front of the body and the head protruding above. It seems to reinforce the suggestion once more that 'this is my sign, my statement'. It is a curious iconographic continuity with Bob Dylan and Critical Art Ensembles' strange man-with-sign in the urban leisure space. It is not clear if this continuity of visual reference is deliberate, but the image certainly becomes iconic, even a genre.

There is an air of intense excitement that pervades the photographs and videos of the revolution, a seemingly transgressive type of ecstasy. In videos it is indicated by the excited gesturing. In photographs it is embodied in the gaze, a certain shimmer in the eyes. A gaze, often turned upward, points to some kind of 'other space', perhaps infinity. This excited gaze seems not to be directed at anything or anyone in particular, but appears to embrace something else. One might be tempted to call it 'sacred'. A connection is established to something other, not regular life, not social convention, not religious prescript. This image of connection goes beyond the existing social order to enter a potentially infinite space.

Such a transgressive experience is always temporary. Two things can be learned from Georges Bataille, the philosopher of transgression⁷⁵. The first lesson is that the transgressive experience arises when the existing social and moral order is transcended, and that this transcendence is a subjective and fully conscious act. The build-up towards this conscious transcendence of the existing order, never without risk to the individual, heightens a tension between what the order imposes on the subject and the subject's deepest desire to reconnect to its own 'sovereignty' – to discover what is of sovereign importance to

74 | Rayya El Zein, 'Watching a Revolution', 2011.

75 | George Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume II and III: The History of Eroticism and Sovereignty*, trans. Robert Hurley, New York, Zone Books, 1993.

the subject. This build-up is followed by an enormous release of energy, an absolution in the actual act of transcendence, simultaneously accompanied by an absolute existential anxiety in confrontation with the void that is opened up by moving beyond the existing order. It is this mixture of absolution and anxiety that produces the intensity specific to the transgressive experience.

The second lesson from Bataille is that transgression does not aim to merely transcend and negate the existing social and moral order. This would leave the subject with nothing but the existential void and its inherent suicidal anxiety. Instead transgression serves to emphasise the existing order, to reconfirm and intensify it. The transgression is a temporary transcendence of the existing order by the subject, after which this subject recedes once more behind and inside that order, so that social existence, without which survival would simply be impossible, can continue. Politically, this reconfirmation and intensification of the existing order is highly significant, as it prepares the subject for the collective transformation of the social and moral order. In more mundane terms, it prepares the subject for social and political change.

The tactical appropriation of media tools by the Tahrir protesters heightens the tension between what the social order has imposed on them for forty years, and the protesters' self-determination, which is of sovereign importance to them. The feeling of watching and being watched in the act and enactment of transcendence of the oppressive order culminates in an ecstasy of self-mediated transgression. The moment of reconnection to what is most sacred is embodied on the streets and squares and is simultaneously shared with a network of billions. This ecstatic experience is truly a *jouissance*. More than a bliss, it is a 'coming' in public. The breaking of the bonds of servility and utility reconnects the subject, the protester, to that which is politically and subjectively of supreme importance. It explains why in this moment of transgression everything is willingly put at risk, and why these self-mediating protesters are prepared to put their very lives at risk for this 'sacred' moment.

A NEW SUBJECTIVITY?

The intensity of the images of Tahrir and other recent protests signals the formation of new political subjectivities, especially in the context of societies dominated by military rule or a perpetual state of emergency. The important question here is what kind of subjectivity this is, and how it can be evaluated.

Critical theory has taught us that the political and historical subject is *vacuous*⁷⁶. It does not have a coherent form or structure. It is composed of countless influences that are largely incommensurable, incomparable because they lack a common standard. As critical theory tells us, the sense of a coherent self, the meaning of the word 'I', is an illusion. The subject is in fact little more than a roughly accidental intersection point of heterogeneous spheres of influence, powers of coercion, and accidental personal experiences. If the subject is a mere byproduct, why waste time and energy on it?

76 | Michel Foucault has repeatedly emphasised this point in his writings, but also in various public interviews and statements, which prompted the development of his archaeological method to 'excavate' the forces constructing the subject rather than ascribing any significance to the idea of the subject.

We should instead look at the material practices that this subject is embedded in and what constructs or produces it – the real world ties, and the forces of coercion and control themselves, not their arbitrary assemblage into a singular subject. Typically within this perspective the urgency of political conflict, economic strife, suppression, and human rights abuses tend to take the foreground, blinding out other concerns and other spaces of opportunity. For one, it makes the space of action extremely difficult for artists to navigate. In its most dogmatic form, critical theory might actually deride the artist's preoccupation with artistic subjectivity simply as a bourgeois mystification. It may be clear by now that I do not agree with this assessment. The concept of Tactical Media does not accommodate this vacuous subject, instead asserting that the artist's subjective interrogation of the symbolic orders of society and politics is at the heart of its critical practice.

More importantly, with the excessive self-mediation of the recent protests discussed here, we have decidedly moved into a new terrain. The predominant image of the protests is no longer that of the distanced media professional, or even of the artist, who is after all still a professional of sorts. It is not even clearly the perspective of the 'activist', as most of the protesters do not regard themselves as activists. They are much rather ordinary citizens longing for some form of meaningful social and political change, and new modes of expression and self-determination to recapture their sovereignty as political subjects. Within this radically enlarged constellation it becomes increasingly impossible to avoid questioning exactly what kind of subjectivity is produced here.

The popular revolts and their media extensions in North Africa and the Middle East can be compared to the situation in Eastern, Central and South Eastern Europe around the fall of the communist regimes in the later 1980s and early 1990s. At that time, a frenzy of media production and media occupations also played a prominent role in the staging of the revolts. However, since then the media landscape has dramatically changed. What was at the turn of the 1980s a mostly marginal and vanguard activity for experimental cultures has now become an absolutely mainstream pursuit. Literally hundreds of millions of people participate in the current profusion of nonprofessional networked, generic media production. The question about what kind of subjectivity is at play here becomes even more crucial because of this radical shift. This shift signals the emergence of a new set of cultural and political conditions that point beyond the immediate urgency of the moment and beyond the popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East. Most of this activity operates outside of traditional political institutions or groupings, and it certainly operates outside of established professional frameworks for information provision, and outside of traditional questions of representation. However arbitrary, a new type of political subjectivity is at work here, and its constitution remains as yet highly indeterminate.

We cannot assume that a naive idea of subjectivity can capture the new cultural and political conditions, which the formation of this new type of subjectivity implies. We have learned too much from critical theory for that. This inevitably brings up the issue of how to deal with these new formations of subjectivity.

My suggestion is to assume a deliberately perverse understanding of the emerging formations of subjectivity engendered by the excess of self-mediation. Such a perverse subjectivity is entirely conscious of its own illusory character, of its own constructed nature, of its incongruity, of its essential contradictory and incommensurate make up. It understands

that the apparatuses underpinning the new media ecology guide and control it as much as it guides and controls them. It understands all this and still delights in an excess of mediation, embracing it and relishing it.

This perverse subjectivity allows for something important: It can embrace present conditions marked by an excess of electronic mediation and mass participation. At the same time it is able to understand and critically question the material conditions that control and shape its environment and ultimately itself. Through the perspective of a perverse subjectivity it is then possible to assume both positions at once, to embrace and critique the prevailing social, political, and technological conditions, and see what we may find from this double perspective in the coming years.

Conclusion: Tactical Cartographies for a Hybrid Reality

The aim of this expanded essay has not been to capture the fluidity and multiplicity of the practices and concepts linked to the idea of Tactical Media and draw them towards some overarching conclusion. My aim has rather been to heighten and intensify this multiplicity and resist a singular capture of what in my view needs to remain an essentially nomadic activity.

My analysis so far has been primarily spatial in nature. While visual means of mapping are not employed, I see the description of the spaces of engagement and action discussed here as a continuation of a practice of 'tactical cartography'.⁷⁷ It seems therefore relevant to conclude by charting a number of possible trajectories that tactical media operators can use to navigate the hybrid realities in which they find themselves immersed. These suggestions should be read as primarily subjective impressions drawn from what has been discussed so far, not as prescriptions for necessary paths to follow. Hopefully they can still be useful as navigational tools.

Venturing into Quotidian Space

More or less concurrently with the wave of popular street protests in North Africa in the first half of 2011, a series of popular protests on the other side of the Mediterranean occupied the streets and squares of Greece, Italy and Spain. These protests were, however, of a far more quotidian nature. Largely centred around resistance against austerity measures, the voices heard on the street were chiefly those of ordinary citizens, dissatisfied with the general state of their democracies. Illustrative of this is the opening sentence of the "Manifesto for Real Democracy" that the Spanish protesters, *Los Indignados* (The Outraged), published on May 15th, 2011: 'We are ordinary people. We are like you: people, who get up every morning to study, work or find a job, people who have family and friends. People, who work hard every day to provide a better future for those around us.'⁷⁸

If anything, the protests in Spain were marked by their nondescript nature, their radical lack of particularity, which links them intimately to the space of generic media. Communication patterns in this generic space are thoroughly different from established activist practices. Outside of the broadest framing of protest and dissent over increasingly precarious living conditions, no shared political agenda can be assumed. This quotidian space requires an understanding of and respect for its inherently unparticular character and the communicative forms it employs.

77 | For instance, see: Tactical Cartography: Diagrams of Power, at Next 5 Minutes 4, Amsterdam, 14 September, 2003, www.next5minutes.org/article.jsp?articleid=749.

78 | "Manifesto of the association Real Democracy Now", May 2010. www.democraciarealya.es/manifiesto-comun/manifiesto-english.

A Tactics of Camping

Online networked media played an important role to co-ordinate actions, exchange information, news, and manuals for how to set up a protest, or how to react in the event of an eviction.⁷⁹ The actions manifested themselves physically in the squares, not online, appropriating strategic urban spaces through a 'tactics of camping'.⁸⁰ The logic of these tactical camping spaces is essentially hybridised. Their physical location in public space manifests its undeniable public presence. It makes it possible for the protest and the protesters to become present vis-a-vis the public and vis-a-vis each other. This physical co-presence enables the construction of new social relations that transcend the inherent virtualisation of online gatherings and their entrapment in insular networks of circulation that Jodi Dean has critiqued so forcefully.

However, these physical presences are permeated by electronically mediated flows that both construct and capture them. These mediated flows connect localised protests translocally and transversally, enabling powerful mechanisms of replication. At the same time, they immerse the local camping sites in dislocated flows of dis/information that are outside of the control of local campers, which invites problems of representation and public relations management.

#Occupy the Global City - Wall Street and Beyond

A worldwide shift in revolutionary tactics seems underway right now. The replication of the tactics of occupation and camping are not only plainly visible across a variety of locales, they also consciously link and refer to each other. This is as yet the clearest embodiment and acceptance of the new hybridised logic of public space that is local, translocal, situated, embodied, and mediated and networked at the same time.

The #occupy meme creates a continuous nomadic movement that links up a bewildering variety of places, contexts, movements and non-movements, individuals, groups, cultures, collectives and singularities. While the occupation of the global city's financial district is symbolically highly significant, the calls for structure and orientation, for clarity, or for a 'message' should be actively resisted. Heterogeneity should be cherished and embraced.

Beyond the Moment

The tactics versus strategy debate has also gripped the #occupy movement. The call for a strategic perspective for the tactical in Tactical Media⁸¹ now seems to be replicated in mainstream media discussions aiming to seize the political moment. Indicative of this

79 | See: <http://takethesquare.net>.

80 | Eric Kluitenberg, 'The Tactics of Camping', Tactical Media Files weblog, 20 June, 2011, <http://blog.tacticalmediafiles.net/?p=106>.

81 | See McKenzie Wark's text 'Strategies of Tactical Media' (1999), www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=46245 and more recently the call for 'Organised Networks' (2010) by Ned Rossiter and Geert Lovink, <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/geert/urgent-aphorisms-notes-on-organized-networks-for-the-connected-multitudes/>

is Naomi Wolf's recent call for leaders as 'simple representatives' in the British Guardian newspaper.⁸² It is Wolf's contention that a certain strategic emboldening of the #occupy movement is necessary to carry it beyond its current moment.

Within the confines of Tactical Media, the division between the tactical and the strategic, and the question of whether it is possible or even desirable to overcome it, has been the subject of continuous and intense debate. In the #occupy movement this will certainly be no different. However, if #occupy is to stand for a generic, everyday populous, it seems difficult to imagine a viable and legitimate strategy for representation. Reaching consensus for seven billion people minus one percent certainly seems a daunting task! Anything less falls prone to the same deficiencies that hamper current politics of representation.

Escaping the Corruption of the Semiotic Landscape

Anchoring tactical media in embodied practices, close encounters, and situated linkages offers the best protection against the corruption of disembodied semiotic regimes. The symbols versus substance debate can be put aside by grounding the semiotic transformations and symbolic mediations in situated localised material practices that can connect transversally with other localities.

The Question of Visibility

The great absence so far in this examination of Tactical Media's legacies has been WikiLeaks. It constitutes a universe of its own, too vast to cover in such a limited space. However, recent developments around WikiLeaks and its public visibility, ongoing as this is written, do suggest a series of navigational markers that the Tactical Media operator must certainly heed.

WikiLeaks operates in the ambiguous terrain of media transparency and untraceable power. The mere opening of archives and disclosure of formerly secret source documents from the confines of global politics proved insufficient to establish its political efficacy. For WikiLeaks to have a transformative effect on public opinion and become a significant political force, as it intended to be, it had to enter the realm of broader public visibility, engage in mainstream public relations offensives and forge 'strategic' alliances with highly established mainstream media outlets with global reach. It is exactly in this space of intense public visibility where WikiLeaks has now ground to a halt.

Even more intractable is the problem posed by WikiLeaks' insistence on radical transparency, which, for clear operational reasons, can only be achieved by creating a maximum opacity of its own operations. However, because of its entry into the global public limelight, this radical opacity has become increasingly untenable. Even if the current blockages of donations and shady court cases can be overcome, it is unclear how this more fundamental conundrum for WikiLeaks can be resolved.

82 | Naomi Wolf, 'How to Occupy the Moral and Political High Ground.' The Guardian, November 6, 2011, www.guardian.co.uk/commentis-free/2011/nov/06/naomi-wolf-occupy-movement.

WikiLeak's insistence on radical transparency invites another complicated problem: in a situation of ubiquitous visibility the traceability of the citizen becomes absolute, and privacy becomes a remnant of the past. With this ultimate demise of the private sphere it is hard to imagine any form of autonomy will still be feasible. However, without some degree of autonomy, subjective agency also becomes impossible. Rather than insisting on a radical transparency, it therefore seems more sensible to strive for a practical transparency.

Submission to a Perverse Subjectivity Against the Perversion of Subjectivity

In the era of online commodification of the social and the willing participation of a mass of affective-labour-slaves the question is justified how to undo these organised forms of innocence?

Simply leaving the network behind hardly seems an attractive or sensible approach. Perhaps the migration towards new social networking systems might be a step in the right direction, of the creation of a multiplicity of alternatives to the new networked media conglomerates. Still, it will be difficult to escape the winner-takes-all effect of networked economies, best explained through this tautological Q&A session:

Q: 'Why is everybody on Facebook (or using MS Word)?'

A: 'Because everybody is on Facebook (or uses MS Word).'

A more effective strategy might be to abandon innocence itself. Embrace your shattered self. Indulge in a lovers' impurity. Enjoy your co-option, relish your commodification. Play the game of simultaneous singularisation and heterogenesis. Infect the network. Submit knowingly to your perverse subjectivity in order to escape the perversion of subjectivity.

Don't Communicate – Mark Your Presence!

Not the medium, but the social relation is the message. The urgency of transversal networked and translocal connections is not in the specific content of message – at some basic level we all know what are the issues at stake. However, before addressing the myriad social and ecological problems threatening our existence on the planet, a new social relation must be constructed. This is what people are gathering for in the media squares.

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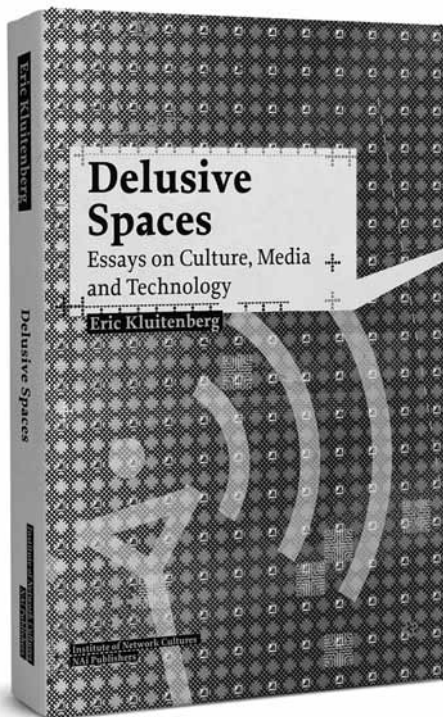
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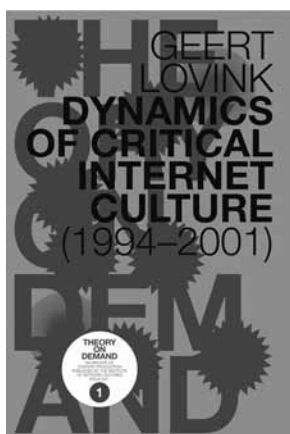
Eric Kluitenberg is a Dutch media theorist, writer and organizer. Since the late 1980s, he has been involved in numerous international projects in the fields of electronic art, media culture and information politics. Kluitenberg heads the media programme of De Balie, Centre for Culture and Politics in Amsterdam. He is the editor of the *Book of Imaginary Media* (NAi Publishers, 2006) and the theme issue 'Hybrid Space' of *OPEN*, journal on art and the public domain (2006).

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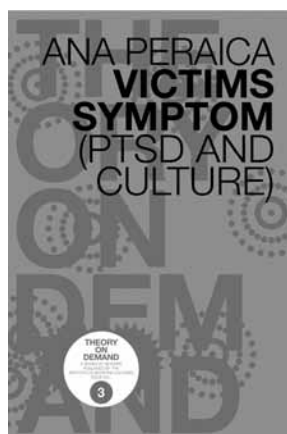
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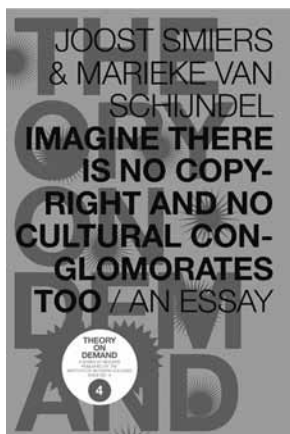
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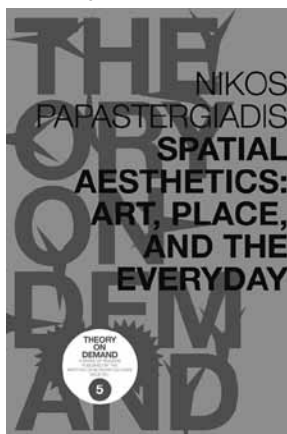
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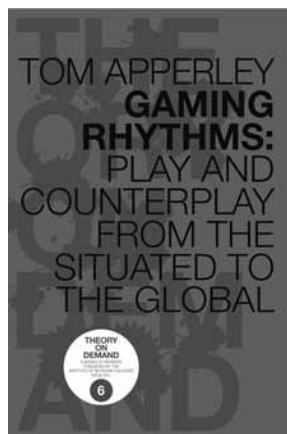
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Tactical Media employ the 'tactics of the weak' to operate on the terrain of strategic power by means of 'any media necessary'. Once the rather exclusive practice of politically engaged artists and activists, the tactical appropriations of media tools and distribution infrastructures by the disenfranchised and the disgruntled have moved from the margins to centre stage. The explosive growth of mass participation in self-mediation in countless blogs, video sharing platforms, micro-blogging, social networking has created an unprecedented complexity in the info-sphere.

While this frenzy of media activity has been heralded as the catalyst of the new democratisation movements in North-Africa and the Middle-East, the anti-austerity/ precarity movements in Southern Europe and the UK, and the recent #occupy movements in the US and Northern Europe, its increasingly intransparent complexity combined with the post 9/11 'crash of symbols' has thrown its political efficacy into question. The demise of WikiLeaks as the crown jewel of on-line whistleblowing has added to a thoroughly opaque picture.

More than ever tactical media operators require effective instruments to create tactical cartographies they need to navigate the hybrid realities they are immersed in. This notebook traces the legacies of tactical media to begin creating these hybrid cartographies.

Eric Kluitenberg is an independent theorist and writer on culture, media and technology. He is editor in chief of the Tactical Media Files - an on-line documentation resource for tactical media practices world-wide.

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