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Table of Contents

Notes on Contributors	1
Introduction Editor, James Rowlin	3
Interview with Martin Wood: A Filmmaker's Journey into Research Questions by James Rowlin	5
Theorizing Subjectivity and Community Through Film Jakub Morawski	15
Sinophone Queerness and Female Auteurship in Zero Chou's <i>Drifting Flowers</i> Zoran Lee Pecic	22
On Using Machinima as "Found" in Animation Production Jifeng Huang	36
A Story in the Making: Storytelling in the Digital Marketing of Independent Films Nico Meissner	53
Film Festivals and Cinematic Events Bridging the Gap between the Individual and the Community: Cinema and Social Function in Conflict Resolution Elisa Costa Villaverde	63
Semiotic Approach to Media Language Michael Ejstrup and Bjarne le Fevre Jakobsen	77
Revitalising Indigenous Resistance and Dissent through Online Media Elizabeth Burrows	90

Notes on Contributors

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Dr. James Rowlinson is Editor of the IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film, as well as a Lecturer at the Singapore University of Technology and Design, partnered with MIT, where he is Course Lead for Film Studies. He holds a doctorate from the University of Southern California. His research interests include cinematic realism, politics and aesthetics, the legacy of the French New Wave and digital technology's impact on contemporary filmmaking practice. He has directed several short films that have been screened at international film festivals.

Dr. Martin Wood is a teacher, researcher, theorist and filmmaker. In 2011, he was appointed Professor in the School of Management at RMIT University, Australia. Prior to assuming his role at RMIT, Martin served at leading public universities in the UK. In his research, he pursues a philosophy of process and his outputs include publications in highly rated journals, as well as other types of media presentations. His short film *Lines of Flight*, which was co-produced and co-directed with Sal Brown, received exposure and prizes at international film competitions and was a category winner at the IAFOR Documentary Film Award 2014.

Introduction

The IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film (JMCF) is associated with IAFOR's MediAsia, FilmAsia and EuroMedia annual conferences. JMCF is committed to publishing peer-reviewed scholarship that explores the relationship between society, film and media — including new and digital media, as well as to giving a voice to scholars whose work explores hitherto unexamined aspects of contemporary media and visual culture.

This third issue of the IAFOR Journal of Media, Communication & Film has a truly international scope, featuring contributions from authors of eight different nationalities. Our ambition has been to create, to adapt Benedict Anderson's term, an "imagined community" of international scholars, brought together, virtually, by the impulse to deconstruct the texts and images that shape our understanding of the modern world. The notion of community is, moreover, the overarching theme of this issue's articles.

JMCF continues its series of interviews with the filmmaking community. Martin Wood is one of an increasing number of researchers to use the moving image, enhanced with philosophy, poetry and a documentary aesthetic, to invite spectators to reflect on and to feel his subjects' issues and plights. Dr. Wood stakes a claim that the film *Lines of Flight* (Wood & Brown 2009) constitutes in and of itself research. JMCF supports this claim by embedding it within our online journal, and we hope to see more of such initiatives in the future.

The first traditional research paper of this issue, "Theorizing Subjectivity and Community Through Film," examines film theory from the perspective of subject and forms of community, with a focus on the post-postmodern concepts developed by Jacques Rancière. The second article, equally theoretical, demonstrates how Zero Chou's *Drifting Flowers* (2009) rejects "global gay" narratives of identity formation and how this points to new directions in New Queer Sinophone Cinema and queer cinema globally. The following article shows how the animation and gaming community are using the machinima platform to make installation art, and how these appropriations have parallels with the "found art" practices of artists such as Marcel Duchamp.

"A Story in the Making: Storytelling in the Digital Marketing of Independent Films" relates the financing, production and distribution of the Spanish feature film *The Cosmonaut* (2013), resulting from a revolutionary crowdfunding operation. While the story of the "making of" turned out to be more compelling than the film itself, this case-study has significant implications for the future of independent productions. The next article takes a look at the arguably neglected social function of the film festival, showing how festival events can bridge the gap between individuals and the community and facilitate conflict resolution. This theory is illustrated in the context of the Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Film Festival and the local population's opposition to migration.

Conflict and community attitudes towards newcomers are also topics treated by "Semiotic Approach to Medial Language." This article uses linguistic theory to analyse the polemic

surrounding unlimited free speech in the media, arguing that media practitioners might be advised to embrace language's complex capacity for ambiguity. The final article is an inquiry into the exclusion of the Aboriginal community from the mainstream Australian media. The paper considers, nevertheless, ways in which online media can overcome the silencing of dissenting Indigenous voices and broaden public sphere access and engagement.

The JMCF Editorial Board owes a debt of gratitude to our external peer reviewers, notably Dr. Anna Vibeke Lindø (Syddansk Universitet, Denmark), Dr. Katie Moylan (University of Leicester, UK), Dr. Alfonso J. García Osuna (City University of New York, US) and Dr. Bruce Dennett (University of Notre Dame, Australia). We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to the IAFOR Publications Desk, our authors and dedicated readership.



Dr. James Rowllins
Editor-in-Chief

June 1, 2016



Sal Brown and Martin Wood

Interview with Martin Wood: A Filmmaker's Journey into Research

Questions by James Rowlin

A line of flight is something that pushes back or constitutes a form of resistance against the confines of modern life, be it social, psychological or physical. *Lines of Flight* (Brown & Wood 2009) teases out a relationship between twentieth-century economic labour in England's metropolitan north, the world of mass-culture that people inhabit today, and solo rock climbing – ascending a rock face without using any ropes, harnesses or other protective equipment – on the outcrops and crags at the margins of what are now termed the inner cities.

The film is punctuated by quotes from poetry, literature and philosophy. Footage explores the industriousness of modernity and asks critical questions about the postmodern present. Shots of mills and works and an out-of-town retail park with its familiar “brand-scape,” counterpoised with the wild upland countryside, urge an embodied spectator to engage individually with the film and reflect on the same subject matter the filmmakers are musing about. Climbing then becomes a political act and soloing its purest expression. *Lines of Flight* has received exposure and prizes at international film competitions and was a category winner at the IAFOR Documentary Film Award 2014.

Keywords: Film essay, university research, Henri Louis Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, Albert Camus, Félix Guattari, postmodern, industrialisation, globalisation, North of England, form and thought

Watch *Lines of Flight* by Sal Brown and Martin Wood



1. Please tell me about the concept of film essay and – as you envisage it – of *Lines of Flight*.

According to Laura Rascaroli (2008), film essays can encompass all the functions that written text can display: to record, reveal and preserve; to persuade or promote; to present arguments; and to analyse or interrogate. One way to think about the film essay is as a new type of intellectual activity, one that is able to express thought through fostering bodily sensation.

In *What Is Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994) demonstrate that art – and to me the concept of film essay – is concerned with the “force of sensation” (216). In this sense, art/film thinks with sensations. Of course, this does not mean that written language is not “active,” intellectually and emotionally.

In his brief history of *Lines*, Tim Ingold (2007) provides us with some useful insights into the aural power of writing. He explains that while we might read musical notation, the intention is always to “experience the music as such” (Ingold 2007: 11). He describes how poets exploit “the sonority of the spoken word” (12) to achieve precisely the same effect.

If it is the case that we read with our ears, then we can also feel with our eyes. In fact, this multisensory experience is why certain film essays produce in the spectator the immediacy of social intercourse, in the present tense. The emphasis on producing an intellectually and emotionally active relationship challenges the very notion of representing experience using facts, logic and reflections made possible by the literary essay.

An important dimension of the film essay is therefore to remind each spectator that they are engaging with the filmic materials so as to interact with the work. They are supposed to do more than simply gaze upon on-screen “reality.” As an example, *Lines of Flight* gives the audience both cognitive and emotional information to help or challenge them to think about

broader principles than the concrete instance that the film depicts. It also expresses possibilities and forces that an individual spectator can link up with, become part of.

Following Nigel Thrift (2008: 12), our aim was to go “into” the moment and work outwards from there, and as a force to “inject a note of wonder” back into research. Our idea was to evoke a reality effect, one that plays between rationality and physical reactions, to enhance the insights and knowledge gained from research. Grounded in an aesthetic sensibility, the film invites the viewer as an individual to think, to feel and to question the experiences of the people on screen in the light of their own; taking in the meanings that it is trying to illuminate and create.

2. Can you discuss the research component in detail? Is a “plot” or narrative akin to an argument? What value do moving images, affect and emotion have to empirical research?

Can films, videos and other types of media presentation embody research? I believe that a good many forms of output, whether physical or virtual, textual or non-textual, visual or sonic, static or dynamic, digital or analogue, may properly be thought to be doing research. Why then are there so few cases of films and videos counting as research? One answer is that, if the narrative carries the burden to work out some reasoned line of discourse on a problem, then, it can be argued, it is not the film itself that is imparting a point of view but what is filmed—the narrative content.

I concede that a film cannot do research merely by recording arguments being stated on-screen but I would say that it can present arguments by virtue of its plot or narrative. I admit that this does not distinguish film from the form or the content of any novel, play, or other narrative art, but, just as written text encompasses everything from rough notes taken on the hoof to meticulously transcribed interviews, to wonderfully evocative accounts to laser-like theory and analysis, I think film can and should occupy the same range. We should integrate it into our research practice just as we have integrated well written and interesting text (Rascaroli 2008).

Accepting the widest range and types of research output helps us to recognise and employ a different kind of narrative, one which we do not need to textualise because it engages with what is outside the frame of text. Where we judge certain film outputs to embody research in an independent manner – independent of a separate written text – we can say that, following Bergson and Deleuze, we are already processing the world cinematically and that this is thinking (e.g. Sinnerbrink, 2011).

Drawing on Deleuze’s (1989: 151) claim that film can enact a “shock to thought” provides us with a basic explanation of cinematic thinking. What interests Deleuze about film is that it adds something to ideas so that they come to take us over, or move us (Deleuze and Parnet 1987). Films evoke senses that trigger emotional or cognitive responses. For Deleuze, visual sensations constantly enter into, or in some way merge in a direct fashion with the film world, so that the visual image and the viewer’s experience become exactly the same (Deleuze 1986). It is this pre-cognitive level of sensations that gives certain (cinematic) films their power, a power that makes demands different to the linguistic, whether written or verbal, but that are no less demanding.

Bergson (1991: 58) also explains the correspondence between sensation and understanding when he writes that “there is no perception without affection,” no event without experience.

This can be understood easily in reference to *Lines of Flight*. Its expressive qualities produce emotional or cognitive responses that viewers experience as a result of direct sensory engagement. As a film doing research, it thus comes close to Deleuze's "shock to thought."

3. What claims, specifically, are made in this film?

It is important to note that the idea of film as research does not end in a univocal work. It is not a question of what can be gleaned from our film or what specific claims it makes. Film as research is not confined to the expression of an explicit intention on the part of its makers (Wood and Brown 2012).

Claims perpetually exceed their own limits, especially when these are imposed *from without*. Whatever our film's evaluative intentions, it needs a viewer to engage individually with it using non-verbal thinking/feeling *from within*. In a certain sense, if we characterise a claim as being focused on a single authorial point of view that everything gets sucked in towards, *Lines of Flight* is anti-claim.

In much the same way, Roscaroli (2008: 35) writes that film adopts:

a certain rhetorical structure: rather than answering all the questions that it raises, and delivering a complete, "closed" argument, the essay's rhetoric is such that it opens up problems, and interrogates the spectator; instead of guiding her through emotional and intellectual response, the essay urges her to engage individually with the film, and reflect on the same subject matter the author is musing about.

Roscaroli, like others who claim the film has its own mode of research presentation, understands that it is not enough for the genuine film essay to offer "clear-cut answers." The filmmaker must "ask questions" that call upon a spectator to participate in the reflection.

Of course, the design elements or the visual devices a film deploys to communicate ideas and engage active responses in the viewer are undeniably important. For example in *Lines of Flight*, one does not need to be a free soloist or even a rock climber, or indeed a participant in any one of the interesting proliferation of lifestyle sports that nowadays display the same fluid "streaming" (Kwinter 2001), to be intoxicated by on-screen depictions of climbing as a "release" or a "fantastic", "almost an aesthetic", or "meditative" feeling or "way out" of "the normal run of things". The viewer need only identify as someone who suffers the perennial psychological, social or somatic distress of bearing with a 40 hours a week job that has been drained of its content or otherwise requires them to complete their work tasks energetically, or to display a cheerful expression during service transactions, to be able to recognise themselves. Hence, while the text is an open field, our provocation and evocation is clear.

However, in order to make it convincing, this qualitative feeling should not only be found in the film but must also be "read" or interpreted by the viewer. Our sequencing of shots and use of narration and music invites the spectator to go beyond specific claims and to wonder about imaginary or actual lines of flight elsewhere. Thus in the film, we strive for immersion rather than mere appraisal or contemplation on the viewer's part. The more we enable this involvement, the more we succeed in the self-reflexive perception, like that described by Bergson and Deleuze.

- 4. The film is punctuated with lines and striations, both literal and figurative. After seeing the imagery recorded for the film, did you discover any lines (of flight) that you had not previously perceived? If so, did this offer any unexpected insights into the relationship between the forms of the landscape and the city, and subjects' attempts to escape?**

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) start by saying that in our attempts to negotiate with the world around us, we have to be careful. They warn us there are no absolute escapes and that in this pursuit we might fail and simply destroy ourselves, turning the line of flight “into a line of death” (229). *Lines of Flight* offers insights here because it concerns the various prospects for freeing ourselves and the threat of falling back, both literally and figuratively.

Practically speaking, we wanted to get a suggestive set of discussions going about lines of flight that have the potential to disrupt, by slipping out of the categories established by the world, the relations of local traditions to a more general history, and to foster abstract thinking to concrete and material realities. We can look at each of these connections from the point of view of “assemblages.”

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that everything is an assemblage—in a nutshell, the fluid connections between things. The relationship between these connections can be an assembly in the vaguest sense, as in the incorporations of the capitalist phenomenon or the social roots of globalising processes. Alongside this, the assemblage can also be corporeal or bodily (“material” or “machinic”, in Deleuze and Guattari’s language).

For instance, the social structures and the geography of production portrayed in the film are rooted in European industrial politics from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which led factory owners to re-examine craft-dominated trades, and, above all, to specify clearly the rational conditioning of labour that continues even today. But the assemblage is also capable of putting these relationships “to flight” in new and unexpected ways. Let’s say, the stone mined from quarries was formed into the buildings people now toil away in, toil that burdens them, and toil that compels them back to stone of the quarries.

From the point of view of *Lines of Flight*, a corporeal or bodily assemblage is both an intermediary and a stopper for the intermingling of very different kinds of things. These concretise at a given moment but can be realised differently under a changed state of affairs. Therefore, the question becomes what forms of escape did *you* find in the interplay between horizontals and verticals—including, most spectacularly, the bodies themselves climbing and going both up and across? What passions and compassions did the visuals (especially the lines themselves) evoke? What “intensities” ran from the film to your own life? What “lines of flight” did you, as a viewer, follow?

- 5. Philosophy. A narrative seems to emerge that free solo rock climbing is not about danger or “thrill seeking” but ritual, repetition and even routine. To what extent is this analogous to Camus’ *Myth of Sisyphus*? Climbers, conscious of the absurdity of modern existence, revolt against societal norms yet ultimately find happiness in repeated action?**

Existentialists might describe the revolt against societal norms as a situation in which someone asks why there is being, why something exists. People agonise over how to progress from absolute emptiness to universal fullness, imagining that the human condition has some inherent

purpose or underlying design, rather than an irresolvable view of existence that writers like Camus describe as “absurd”.

Camus talks, sceptically in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, about the perpetual effort to give life a meaning, but eventually to accept the fact that it completely lacks significance. Camus's understanding of absurdity is best captured in the image of Sisyphus condemned to push his rock up the mountain, watching it roll down, and then descending after it to begin all over again, in an endless and futile cycle.

From one point of view, the same problem informs the debate on the role of free-soloing in *Lines of Flight*. While reflecting on their experiences as individual spectators, some viewers describe the free-soloists in negative terms. Like Sisyphus, the actions of the climbers to ascend the rock face and then descend to begin all over again, in an endless cycle, lead some to question whether their behaviour already implies the idea of absence, or of nothingness.

Seen from another perspective, I think the source of the problem is false. When we encounter the “absurdity” – some call it the insanity – of free-soloing, the impulse is to see the activity merely as it looks: selfish “thrill-seekers” trying and failing to lead and sustain a full and genuine life in a way that seems to necessitate a sort of “flight” in an attempt to escape who they are. But I see the climbers less pessimistically. I interpret the free soloing as a way to understand a life that is genuinely “lived” rather than as a representation of absolute emptiness.

Camus writes at the beginning of *The Rebel* (1984: 6) that, “To say that life is absurd, consciousness must be alive.” In effect, his recognition that consciousness must be alive, “amounts to saying that life has a meaning” (101). In the same way, what makes life worth living is a question that concerns Bernhard Stiegler (2013). He points out that “being alive” means passing through, and that mindfulness is only constituted by the qualitative links attaching one transitional spirit to another.

Stiegler elucidates this link, not as purposive-rational activity, essentially the arrangement and rearrangement of a definite number of stable elements, but as “an immediate area of experience” (20); a space which is in them and where “an art of living” (21) is developed. He argues that contemplating a world that exists independently of us always carries with it the possibility of self-destruction, associated with the idea that nothing matters (an inauthentic life). By contrast, the notion of a spirit of internalisation implies that we can invent a new way of life, one where living means taking care (living authentically).

I think we can liken the extrinsic relationship of separate numerical or physical existents to the whole array of traditional sports, in which the task is “to ‘master’ in the macho, form-imposing sense” (Kwinter 2002: 31). In contrast, the process of artful internalisation is without a doubt what characterises free-solo rock climbing. In the language of Sanford Kwinter (2002: 28):

Unlike more traditional (hunter-warrior model) sports, free-soloist climbers do not conceive of themselves as exclusive or “prime motors” at the origin of their movements; they rather track from within the flows, a variety of emerging features, singularities, and unfoldings with which they can meld.

This is the precise point to which the soloists in *Lines of Flight* draw attention when they reflect on the meditative, almost trance-like sense of sustainment, a ritualistic kind of performance art, that free-soloing can offer. They resist the suggestion that it is simply a “thrill-seeking” escape

from real life, or behaviour that emulates a consumerist model. While the system of production and consumption inscribes climbing in many respects: the criteria for “doing” the route, “fixing” the coordinates of the correct line; this exteriorisation doesn’t often convey the interior mood, the feel, the moment, the texture or the time of day that engages free-soloing’s “wild and free unfolding” (Kwinter 2002: 31).

A constantly renewing life is one of the ideas behind *Lines of Flight*. In contrast to the anxiety that, for existentialists, issues from the nature of our being-fixed, which ultimately starts from our extrinsic relationship with a ready-made world, we wanted to express, more or less satisfactorily, the intensive continuity that constitutes authentic human existence. In the end, perhaps, it not just *thinking* I exist that is important, but that I *feel* alive.

6. The film’s full title makes mention of “everyday resistance along England’s backbone.” By referencing Deleuze and Guattari and your interviews with subjects, you make a critique of capitalism’s stranglehold on local communities. It struck me, nonetheless, that there is a wistful, almost nostalgic charm in the representation of these market towns – which owe their existence to industrial revolution-era capitalism. Could it be that film’s poetry softens its “intended” Marxist critique?

The first thing to say is that we were interested in the ways in which lines and movements are opened up or blocked. Philosophically, we were concerned with becoming, change, movement, and being in our contemporary world – put simply, we wanted understand a local society by looking at the lines that compose it and the ways in which change is structured in it. I suppose the actual form this took was, broadly speaking, the Marxist account of society, as the dialectical relation between opposites.

The narrative explores the connections between people and landscape in the Pennines region of northern England – a low-rising mountain range, generally known as the “backbone of England,” which covers much of the counties of Derbyshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire, as well as encroaching upon the edge of Staffordshire, the north-east corner of Cumbria and western flank of County Durham, before sinking down to the north to merge ultimately with the lowlands of Scotland. It operates under the tension between the grinding toil of working life in the industrial-era, the profound alteration of urban spaces and the social consequences of what appears as globalisation in the present-day. It juxtaposes these with the activity of rock climbing, which, at least for much of the twentieth century, contrasted with the logic and economic flows of late capitalism (Wood 2016).

In the face of such a clash, why should we conclude that the vision behind the film is of a wistful or nostalgic experience? Doing so belies a much drearier reality in a world to which, although places still exist, we cannot return. Work and life in the region, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, was brutal and unrelenting.

At the end of the 1940s there was hope and expectation for a better world but many people still worked extremely long hours – eight till five, Monday to Friday, eight till two-thirty on Saturday. Cars were not widely available until the 1960s and it would have remained a major task to go climbing, even to the outcrops and crags almost on the doorstep. And by the 1980s, much pre-twentieth century building was run down or demolished. My own persistent memories, as a teenage job-seeker in the mid-Thatcher years, are of a particular social context

characterised by a struggle over work, the spirit of hopelessness for industry and striking miners and their communities in brutal confrontation with the police.

So, in our attempts to weave our memories and historical accounts into dreams, I don't think we should get sucked into the past. In the pursuit of this line, using Deleuze and Guattari's language, we might simply fall back on the structures and codes of society and ultimately destroy our passion for creation.

7. How do you see the film essay developing in the future? Do you think universities will be willing to credit such works as research?

Recently, Australia's chief scientist sent out a clear message to university researchers: "give us ... stories that illuminate". He added, we "should paint vivid pictures. They're worth a thousand words." (Finkel 2016: 20).

Granted, he was talking to fields such as physics and medical science. But, in a world where visual cultural materials are constantly being (re)produced, he reminds us of the importance of practice-based/artistic research that will include, but not be limited to film and video, as a way of bringing powerful ideas to life. However, beyond the recognition factor, making films and videos as research raises a wide variety of contemporary issues, particularly those relevant to questions about its perceived worth and academic value.

The question of *form* seems to me crucial. According to Roscaroli (2008: 25) a scholarly film is a "form that thinks and thought that forms," holding us fast and daring us to think serious thoughts. As a multisensory method of communication, film has different affordances to written text and an effective use of the medium should take advantage of these. While film is not the answer to every research question and context, its significance in better understanding the full spectrum of human experience is hard to argue with.

Among film's key markers is the central role of "sensation," which is largely inaccessible to established research methods (Thrift 2008). Film's photographic qualities underpin its ability to communicate non-, or perhaps better, pre-cognitive experience. This ability is, of course, constructed through framing, lighting, editing and many other tools of the trade, but the temporal and spatial richness of what can be recreated as a sensation offers great potential to researchers.

A second term to designate film's dramatic quality is the focus on "affect." Thrift (2008) maintains that affect is a form of thinking in action: a different kind of intelligence about the world, but it is intelligence nonetheless. Likewise, Berkeley et al. (2016) argue that affect is an important part of the cinematic experience because it effaces the distinction between the image and thought. This connection lies at the core of the affective encounter that can give us a cerebral shock (Deleuze 1989), without which there is no research communication.

However, these indicators are a problem for the text-based economy of universities. They confound the traditional way of disseminating academic research in the established format. The risk in this situation is that academic researchers, even though they have become film and video makers – I note that more and more academic journals and events are now opening to films, videos and other types of media presentations–, are requested by their institutions and by national evaluations for career promotion to prepare and write good quantitative and qualitative

papers that reflect strong beliefs pushed by editorial boards of highly ranked journals, or risk scholarly excommunication by being declared “research inactive.”

Another reason that scholarly filmmaking is still in a state of flux is that, unlike the relatively standardised measures for assessing the quality of published papers, judgements about whether films and videos meet the definition of research are not fully developed. However, academics have already begun to develop a “critical visual literacy” (Belk and Kozinets, 2005: 134), which may assist them to evaluate film essays as easily as they now critically review a written discussion.

All in all, film presents distinctive challenges to researchers and a range of benefits for audiences and users at just the time when calls for research to have reach and impact have increased greatly. This, I believe, is not a minor task of science. It is our ethical responsibility to try to expand the possibilities of where we might encounter research, what that research might be made of, or be about, and improve the quality of expression to enhance public engagement and understanding. Things can only get better if we see it through.

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Theorizing Subjectivity and Community Through Film

Jakub Morawski

Abstract

This paper discusses the relation between film theory, subject and the idea of community building. I will give a detailed understanding of how both theoretical perspectives in film studies as well as the artistic practice of film making try to rethink new ways of possibility of being together. I will argue that the current approach of contemporary political film studies is to reconstruct/redefine the concept of subject and community building that was either deconstructed, mistakenly or wrongly rejected, by the modern and postmodern theorists. In my studies I will not only rethink the possible political and philosophical approach to new theoretical studies of film from the perspective of subject and forms of community, but also show how the history of film theory (or art theory in general) should be rewritten in such a manner. For my methodology I will be using a combination of concepts coined by contemporary philosophers that question historical divisions of Modern/Postmodern, High Art/Popular Art, Reality/Fiction, etc. This paper is primarily concerned with the theories of Jacques Rancière but is also inspired by Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Lacan and Alain Badiou. All of these theorists have offered new approaches to understanding how art expresses political concerns about the notion of subject and community, and while not all of them focused on art, film or aesthetics, their ideas can be easily applied to this domain.

Keywords: Film theory, art theory, history of art, subject and community, postmodernism, Jacques Rancière, political aesthetics

Between Politics and Aesthetics

The question of the relation between cinema, production of subjectivity and the idea of community building is the question of potential meetings between art, and in a broader sense, aesthetics, ethics and politics. In the time of critical evaluation of postmodern legacy and rebuilding Metaphysics, rethinking and redefining the connections between them is – I believe – a matter of urgency. I would like to introduce and narrow down this very broad philosophical topic by specifying and outlining possible ways of talking, thinking and looking at cinema and its mode of production from the perspective of creating new forms of subjectivity and idea of the common. I will underpin my theoretical arguments by making direct references to the philosophical work of Jacques Rancière.

Rancière's interests in cinema can be perceived as a shift towards the practical examination of the aesthetical field with the use of theoretical tools presented in his previous works and dedicated to the study of relations between politics and aesthetics. The fundamental concept that binds his reflection in that field is "the partition of the sensible" (fr. *Le partage du sensible*). By coining this expression he urges for overpassing the dialectics of ontology and epistemology, form and matter, subject and object or more broadly the existing divisions in academic disciplines. In this sense the partition of the sensible should be understood as both continuously renewing and ongoing the process of dividing and sharing public and private space and time as well as the condition of possible configuration of material parameters within social, historical, political, artistic and academic fields.

Political and ethical implications of the above concept ought to be perceived from the aesthetical perspective, superior in Rancière's writings. This is clearly apparent in the way he defines his own understanding of politics. In *The Politics of Aesthetics* he states that: "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (Rancière 2004: 8). This definition derives inspiration from the Kantian theory of space and time as *a priori* forms of cognition and experience and also from the critical reading of Platonian notion of ideal Republic that is based on political exclusions and hierarchical organization of social field. The idea of the formulation of the political subject Rancière borrows from Aristotle, who claims in *Politics* that, "the human is a political animal" (Aristotle 1944: line 1253a). The combination of these three sources of inspirations allows Rancière to form an argument of aesthetical foundation of every political activity and that includes art, production of the subject and the common. If the human is a political animal it happens as a result of acquiring and possessing a language that can be spoken, heard and formed as statements expressing needs, desires and requests as fundamental acts for both political and community building activities. In contrast, animals possess only a meaningless voice that can express biological needs, fear and pain.

The first step in the process of forming political subject – according to Rancière – is based on including people's voice in the dominant public discourse and acknowledging it as a voice of political actors. In other words, humans become political subjects at the moment when their voice is permitted to enter space and time of political discourse that sets the stage for (re)distribution of the sensible. In an analogical sense Rancière defines aesthetics by surpassing its simple relation to art and by relating it to politics. "The word aesthetics does not refer to a theory of sensibility, taste, and pleasure for art amateurs. It strictly refers to the specific mode

of being of the object of art". (Rancière 2004: 18). This broad political understanding of art and artistic practices allows him to suppress dialectics of modern and postmodern art or, in a broader sense, autonomy and heteronomy of art, and to combine them in a united political field.

There is a mutual point of origin for both mentioned tendencies in art and it can be located in the possibilities of rethinking the subjectivity and introducing new forms of community. In this sense there is no significant distinction between modern art, its idea of autonomy, abstraction or de-figuration and postmodern art with its ludic, ironic and parodistic directives. Rancière proposes the concept of "Aesthetic regime of Art" in order to include both movements within one tendency of contemporary art and at the same time cancel the misunderstood contradiction that grounded historical periodization in the nineteenth and twentieth century art.

The aesthetic regime is a transgression from the two previous regimes that Rancière defines as ethical and representational (poetical) regimes of art. The first one takes its origins from Plato and his ideal organization of the Republic, where art did not exist in its distinctive, autonomous status. It is important to understand that art in general can only exist within a constructed discursive field that enables its organization and identification. The form of such understood discourse includes three main factors: "modes of production of objects or interrelation of actions; forms of visibility of these manners of making and doing; and manners of conceptualizing these practices and these modes of visibility." (Rancière 2002: 7).

The specific modes of conceptualization are at the same time conditions of possibility for art and its existence within social and political reality. It does not simply allow art to enter the material reality but also enables the partition of the sensible in a way that art can be socially and culturally acknowledged, recognised and perceived in its distinctive and singular form. In the first regime of art objects enter public space as images of divinity and are only possible as a visual representation of dominant ideas and imagination of religious figures. Their conditions of possibility are grounded on the ethical judgement based on the following questions: "is it allowed to make images of the divinity? Is the divinity portrayed a true divinity? If she is, is she portrayed as she should be?" (Rancière 2002: 7). Images are not considered as art in this regime as they do not participate in the process of producing and dividing the sensible within the social field but rather serve as visual forms of ideological messages whose role is to reaffirm political and social orders. In the ethical regime we cannot speak of art as such, as produced objects of representation are strictly relying on the external judgments that do not allow any art piece to circulate freely in the society and go beyond the highlighted boundaries.

The second, poetical (or representational) regime of art separates from this external ethical judgment in order to form art in its autonomy and distinctive identity. The main category that defines this regime is Aristotelian *mimesis*. This should not be understood as a practice of producing similarities but rather following and repeating the norms and conventions strictly designated to the field of art. Shaping form out of matter is based on imposed rules and standards that clearly define subjects of art and forms or styles that can be represented. Art constructs a relatively closed system where its language becomes codified and determined by the set of representational and stylistic rules.

The third regime of art, the most important for Rancière, is called aesthetical. He defines it in relation to the Romantic art theory, mainly represented by Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Schlegel. In this regime of visibility and intelligibility both Modern and Postmodern objects of

art are considered within the same partition of the sensible which means that producing autonomous art bears the same political reason as postmodern ludic or parodistic practices. Art in the aesthetic regime no longer belongs to a distinct universe where clear divisions and identities are enforced upon objects in order to enable them to exist as art works. Following Romantic theories Rancière names the evolving status of such understood art as, “free-appearance [...] meaning as a sensory form which is heterogeneous, with respect to other forms of experience. It is apprehended in a specific experience, suspending the ordinary connections between appearance and reality, form and matter, activity and passivity, thought and sensation”. (Rancière 2002: 8). In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, he further explains:

In the aesthetic regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself; a product identical with something not produced, knowledge transformed into non-knowledge, *logos* identical with *pathos*, the intention of the unintentional, etc. (2004: 18).

Film Theory and the Common

Following such understood theory of contemporary art, I would like to link the outlined definition and its relation to politics by referring it to cinema and especially to the problem of can the above understanding of the aesthetic regime of art can be transferred into the field of film theory, without losing its political potential.

There is a direct transition between the proposed idea of intersecting politics and aesthetics and the philosophical film theory introduced by Jacques Rancière in his two fundamental texts: *The Future of the Image* and *Film Fables*. Rancière builds a mode of reading film that is illustrating his concepts of aesthetics and politics by expanding it into the cinematic field. The relation between images and world are central to his understanding of how to look at films and what films can make possible and productive. His way of analyzing films is both political and aesthetical by means of highlighting the importance of productive element that relates to the formation of both subjectivity as well as community.

He begins his book on cinema, titled *Film Fables*, by quoting French director and theorist, Jean Epstein, who said that “Cinema is true. A story is a lie” (Rancière 2006a: 1). In this formulation Rancière includes his ethical view on cinema by situating it within the aesthetic regime of art and at the same time rejecting the narrative as a constitutive element of both film and its evolution as an artistic medium. The history of narrative cinema is combined and rejected together with a narrative history of cinema that originates from the Aristotelian representational regime of art. Rancière rejects the idea that the origin of film as art is the moment when it started telling stories and coined its own specific artistic language. By doing so he also denies the historical understanding of linear film evolution that follows the development of artistic forms. This is also the way to understand the title of his work in its double meaning. Film fable is both the fable existing in films as well as the fable of the history of cinema.

Contrary to this idea, Rancière believes that film will discard the Aristotelian fable. He argues that “life is not about stories, about actions oriented towards an end, but about situations open in every direction. Life has nothing to do with dramatic progression, but is instead a long and continuous movement made up of an infinity of micro-movements”. (Rancière 2006a: 2).

Discarding film fable is equal to the transition from representational to aesthetical regime of art. This movement is fundamental to release the productive power of cinema, crucial for the new production of subjectivity that leads to new ways of forming the community. In order to do so Rancière rethinks the oppositions between object and subject, film in its technological dimensions and the people that enable it in a sense of creation, perception, experience. The productive power of cinema can be enabled once the oppositions are surpassed and redefined in a similar way that Romantic theorists understood art as a combination of the conscious and the unconscious.

Film in its technological form does not possess any essence in a way that it does not want anything and has no immanent message or desire that is attached to it. It is unconscious and passive and it is up to the active and conscious intention of the subject (film maker, critic, spectator) to turn the passivity of the image into the meaning and intention of the film. It however should not be done so in a way of constructing a closed narrative structure, but on the contrary, by introducing a continual “play between the oppositions of form and matter, subject and object, the conscious and unconscious” (Dasgupta 2009: 340).

Rancière is not radical in his claims. His theory can be placed somewhere between postmodern philosophers, such as Baudrillard, whose most famous concept of *simulacrum* was introduced by him to show how everything becomes a sign without its point of reference and visual culture studies with its attitude towards analyzing world as an image. In *The future of the Image* Rancière clearly demonstrates his position by saying that “the end of images is behind us” (Rancière 2007: 17) and by introducing the concept of the “sentence-image” as an answer to it (2007: 43). Both “the end of the images” and “the future of the images” serve here not as statements of truth but rather as problematic rhetorical sentences characteristic of linear thinking of images that have their history with their goals and ending points attached to it. By introducing sentence-images Rancière becomes close to Lacanian psychoanalytical ethics whose main message is to “approach the real” (Lacan 1997, 31).

For Rancière the image (but also art in general and cinema in particular) neither can completely fall into narrative categories nor should it be perceived simply as a form of narrative. On the other hand, the image is never simply what appears in front of our eyes, it should not be perceived in phenomenological categories. This approach to images, similar to Lacanian approach to the real, is through the language and its ruptures that constitute possibility of production. This is the important moment where Rancière clarifies the similarity between cinema, subjectivity and community. By the concept of sentence-image he understands:

something different from the combination of a verbal sequence and a visual form. The power of the sentence-image can be expressed in sentences from a novel, but also in forms of theatrical representation or cinematic montage or the relationship between the said and unsaid in a photograph. The sentence is not the sayable and the image is not the visible. By sentence-image I intend the combination of two functions that are to be defined aesthetically – that is, by the way in which they undo the representational relationship between text and image”. (Rancière 2007: 45-46).

In cinema films offer us narrative forms that are the combination of – what Roland Barthes has called – *punctum* and *studium* (Barthes 1981: 25). The first one refers to the visible “truth” of the image, a trace of history in its visual form and the second represents the meaning, symbolic

layer that every image must contain in order to be grasped by the gaze. The productive power of art, images and cinema lays in their impossibility to translate symbolic into real or, in other words, represent the idea by the complete material form. Production relies here on the notion of desire that is based on fundamental lack that cannot be surpassed. Cinema reproduces desire by putting this impossibility into play on several levels – between director and film, film and spectator or imagination, desire and actual images.

The power of cinema is not simply in the idea of offering absorbing and attractive stories that we immediately become to desire. It is rather the opposite, that is the constant dissolution and reproduction of desire that can never meet with the story and stays in the conflict with itself. This is what Rancière means when he says that “cinema seems to accomplish naturally the writing of *opsis* that reverses Aristotle’s privileging of *muthos*. The conclusion, however, is false, for the very simple reason that cinema, being by nature what the arts of the aesthetic age strive to be, invariably reverts the movement” (Rancière 2006a: 9). Following Schiller’s and Schlegel’s understanding of art as the perfect identity of the conscious and the unconscious “film remains caught within this desire and its failed fulfilment – and this failure is precisely what is *productive* in film” (Dasgupta 2009: 341).

The political potential of cinema follows here the Lacanian ethical directives and relies on ongoing reproduction of this irresolvable tension between the narrative and matter, the subject and object. It does so not by trying to subsume these dialectics into one category (similar to the hegelian concept of *Aufhebung*) but rather by agreeing on their impossibility and a need for a constant search for possible common meeting points between them that are not derived from the enforced orders but rather rely on contingency, singular opportunities and non-imposed unions. Rancière borrows the Romantic concept of the art as the play and offers new ways of both producing and looking at artistic objects as free of political content or determined structure that offers one possible way of experiencing it.

Finally, what brings closer cinema, subjectivity and the possibility of producing the common is a wish to overcome any normative relations between objects and events in reality and its representation. Introducing this possible break is a political act of overcoming the representational logic of art that limits discourse to the form of representation. The effect can be called a democratization of art which is based on rejecting and rethinking the relations between knowledge and non-knowledge, form and matter, senses and forms of expressions, used to manifest them as well as visual representations of ideas.

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**Sinophone Queerness and Female Auteurship
in Zero Chou's *Drifting Flowers***

Zoran Lee Pecic

Abstract

This article investigates the third instalment of the Taiwanese director Zero Chou's *tongzhi* trilogy. It suggests that her 2009 film *Drifting Flowers* defies the “global gay” narratives of identity formation whilst remaining rooted in Taiwan's cultural and geographical space. The article argues that the inter- and intratextual elements in Chou's cinema position her as a Taiwanese queer auteur whose inclusive queerness points to new directions in not only New Queer Sinophone Cinema but also queer cinema globally.

Keywords: Zero Chou, *tongzhi* trilogy, tomboyism, *Drifting Flowers*, intertextuality

In the first instalment of Zero Chou's *tongzhi* trilogy—a designation for her three consecutive queer features *Splendid Float* (2004), *Spider Lilies* (2007) and *Drifting Flowers* (2008)—we are introduced to a Taoist priest Roy whose daytime job is to perform funeral services for the benefit of the grieving family members.¹ At night, however, Roy becomes Rose, a drag queen who puts on cabaret shows with his garishly-dressed companions on the back of their van as they tour the island of Taiwan.² The van resembles a *dianzi huache*—an electronic flower car—a Taiwanese funeral ritual where scantily-dressed young women dance as a way of entertaining the gods and well as amusing the funeral goers. This complex configuration of gender performativity, drag and localised Taiwanese ritual performances is indicative of the multifaceted and highly original cinema of Zero Chou. Whilst *Splendid Float* highlights the working classes in rural settings, the second film of the trilogy moves to the urban spaces of Taipei, as the webcam girl Jade attempts to seduce her childhood crush Takeko, who has imposed upon herself not to pursue her lesbian desires which she is convinced are to blame for her brother's amnesia.

Like the first film in the trilogy, *Spider Lilies* is deeply rooted in Taiwan's history, as the 921 Earthquake serves as a catalyst for the ensuing trauma. Yet, despite these local and cultural specificities, both films carry transnational elements that are consumed and made intelligible beyond the borders of Taiwan. In this article, I argue that the last film of the trilogy—*Drifting Flowers*—which explores decades of Taiwan's LGBT histories and cultures, signals a new direction in international queer cinema, as it remains vigilant to national historical specificities whilst defying the “global gay” narratives of identity formation. Moreover, Chou positions herself—via inter-and intratextual means—as a *female* queer auteur, distancing herself from her already-established male counterparts and in so doing signifying a new turn in Sinophone as well as global queer cinema.

In his controversial essay on the “global gay” identity, Dennis Altman argues that there exist two contradictory tendencies in the articulations of homosexuality in Asia:

On the one hand, Asian gay men, by stressing a universal gay identity, underline a similarity with Westerners. Against this, on the other hand, the desire to assert an “Asian” identity, not unlike the rhetoric of the “Asian way” adopted by authoritarian regimes such as those of China, Indonesia, and Malaysia, may undermine this assumed solidarity (418-419).

“The ubiquity of western rhetoric” in Asia, Altman notes, indicates that these men “use the language of the west to describe a rather different reality” (419). Here he not only presupposes an incompatibility of “western style” and “Asian”; he also posits that Asian gay men employ

¹ Coined by Edward Lam as part of a translation for a segment on New Queer Cinema for the Golden Horse Film Festival in 1992, the term *tongzhi* “caught on quickly in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, first as a preferred term of self-identification ... and later as a widely accepted umbrella term of reference to sexual minorities” (Leung 2008, 3).

² In fact, we may argue that as the film progresses it becomes evident that this constellation should be viewed in reverse. It is Rose, the performer, who during daytime becomes Roy, the priest.

the rhetoric of the “West” as a means of viewing themselves as a part of a global gay community that ultimately supersedes any cultural differences between them. This Western rhetoric, then, is used by the “community” to describe the encounter between the “global” West and the “indigenous” local East. Significantly, Altman not only re-constructs the dividing line between the East and the West—by emphasising the gap between Asians and Westerners, Altman fails to question the meaning and the validity of both terms.

In her seminal work *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality, and Public Culture* (2007), Lisa Rofel addresses Altman’s claims by arguing that “the emergence of gay identities and practices in China is tied, in certain critical respects, to transnational networks of lesbians and gay men” (87).³ Although “the presence of foreign gay men and lesbians in China who both create and participate in gay networks means that the transnational quality of gayness in China is both visible and visceral” (87-88), Rofel notes, this does not translate as evidence of the globality of the homogenous gay identity. Rather, she notes, “the emergence of gay identities in China occurs in a complex cultural field representing neither a wholly global culture nor simply a radical difference from the West” (88-89). Arguing against the self-evident characteristics of “the West”, Rofel notes that Altman’s claim does not account for the (im)balance of power in global gay discourses:

Asianness, or a reputed claim to Asianness, can never be more than a distraction, a power move, or a distortion from the originary truths of gayness. Gay men in Asia can be either universal or Asian but not both, even as their Asianness continues to leave them in the place of otherness to global gayness. Altman’s Western origin story of gay liberation places Asian gays forever in the place of deferred arrival. (91)

Arguing against the global gay based on the self-evident notions of the West—a view which she describes as “irresistible”—Rofel points out that Altman’s ambivalent desire to “assert cultural diversity and the need to respect it while also recuperating identification in a monumentalist history of gay identity”, turns not into a promotion of gay rights but in an erasure of “diversity, articulation, and alliance with radical cultural difference” (90). What is needed, Rofel argues, is a problematisation of the notions such as “Western”, “Asian”, “local” and “global,” as a means of not only decentralising the universalism of Euro-American notions of a “gay” identity but also of exposing the power relations inherent in such a concept. Significantly, Rofel urges scholars to reconfigure the concept of culture “not as a set of shared meanings found in a bounded space but rather as ongoing discursive practices with sedimented histories that mark relations of power” (93). I introduce here Rofel’s arguments, not because I wish to look at the imbalances of power vis-à-vis the notions of “coming out” between “Asia” and “the West” in Zero Chou’s film. Rather, I wish to explore the ways *Drifting Flowers*

³ Whilst Rofel looks at the emergence of gay identities and practices in postsocialist (Mainland) China, her arguments about the complex cultural field of non-normative sexuality in China are highly useful for my notions of queer Sinophone cinema as that which is local and global, here and there.

nuances queerness in ways that neither complies with established notions of temporal development nor proposes an “authentic” sexual identity that is “inherently” Taiwanese.

Building on numerous scholars’ questioning of the essentialised notions of “Chineseness”, I argue elsewhere that we are able to recodify Chineseness in a way that defies national unity without disregarding the close cultural and ethnic links between the PRC, Hong Kong and Taiwan (Pecic 2016). By employing the notions of the Sinophone (Shih 2007, Lu 2007) in our investigations of queer “Chinese” cinema, we are able to position a new queer Sinophone cinema in a context that takes it beyond the borders of the PRC, Taiwan and Hong Kong. New Queer Sinophone Cinema is very much global, as it depends on the markets, circuits and modes of distribution that can only be found outside of China. Yet, it is a cinema of China-based filmmakers, whose films are set in contexts and histories that require localised and regional knowledges. By arguing that New Queer Sinophone Cinema is neither inherently queer nor exclusively Chinese, we are able to position it in a transnational and translocal space that is simultaneously “here” and “there” (Pecic 2016). It is within this framework that I investigate Chou’s film, in that it displays a highly nuanced positioning of Sinophone queerness that neither unmistakably local nor inherently global.

In his review of the film for *Variety* at the 2008 Berlin Film Festival, Derek Elley notes that it “moseys along for 90-odd minutes, seemingly content to speak largely in lesbian clichés”. In particular, Elley summarises the film as being “centered on a group of femmes struggling with that old gay chestnut, ‘identity’”. Elley also remarks that the “three-parter looks to bounce into fest dates on the strength of Chou’s niche success with last year’s ‘Spider Lilies’”. Here, the reviewer positions the film as not only a recognisable product of its successful lesbian director but also an expected one, in which “femmes” go through hardships on their way to full realisation of their lesbian identity. Perhaps even more significant are Elley’s considerations as to the reasons behind the film’s apparent shortcomings: “But without Asian name leads behaving transgressively onscreen this time, theatrical biz looks far weaker, especially in the East”. Here, the lack of “transgressive” behaviour in the “East” is positioned—in the image of modern Euro-American lesbian and gay narratives of identity and gay visibility—as the film’s weakness.

Rather than identifying additional instances where Chou’s film is positioned in the impossible space between cliché (conforming to already established notions of sexual identity) and insufficiency (aspiring towards recognised standards of plot development and closure), I argue that *Drifting Flowers* employs and eschews both, as it challenges both Western transgender tropes as well as linear coming out narratives. Specifically, by employing and reworking the memorial condition and the tomboy melodrama as noted by Fran Martin (2010), Chou’s film makes a signification contribution to queer Sinophone cinema that defies the global gay narratives of identity formation. Significantly, I argue that Chou positions herself—via inter- and intratextual elements—as a *female* queer auteur, distancing herself from her already-established male counterparts and pointing towards a new turn in not only New Queer Sinophone Cinema but perhaps also in queer cinema in a more global context.

The film, a triptych of the interlinked stories of Diego, Jing and Lily, tells of lesbian and queer desires that are neither romanticised nor victimised. Before the first part entitled “May” begins, we are introduced in the coda to some of the film’s motifs, such as railways and trains travelling through tunnels. Significantly, the unsteady camera of the opening scenes parallels not only the ramifications of Alzheimer’s Disease from which Lily suffers but also its effects on our memory and the perception of time, as we realise later on that these events in fact occur later in the film’s timeframe. Thus, the film “in effect” begins with the second part entitled “Lily” (which features similar scenes), defying a clear timeline and introducing the notion of a warped temporality. This is not to say that the film’s narrative structure is merely non-linear; although some of the characters from each of the three parts appear elsewhere, the timeline does not indicate a logical temporal development. Whilst it appears that the first part acts as a prologue to the second—May, for instance, goes from being a child to an adolescent—the third part serves as a prologue to the first, as we find the young Diego working for her family’s puppet theatre business in the 1960s. However, upon a closer inspection, we realise that in the final coda, in which all three female characters appear, Lily’s ageing does not correspond to that of May or Diego. In other words, whilst May’s development from a child to an adolescent covers a timespan of approximately ten years, this period is significantly longer in the character of Lily. Likewise, Diego, who stands on the train with her accordion appears to be the same age as when May saw her for the first time as a child.

This warped temporality forecloses a simplistic viewing of the film as offering a historical development of queer cultures in Taiwan. For instance, Huang and Wang note that the third story “Diego” is “about how the *tie* T Diego comes to realize who she is. ... Diego’s experiences as she comes of age can be taken to represent the collective memories of the generation of butch lesbians who grew up in Taiwan in the 1960s” (149-150, emphasis in original).⁴ Although the film, particularly in the final story, does indeed portray specificities of local contexts, such as the puppet theatre in Kaohsiung, these elements do not always remain grounded in their own temporal contexts. Likewise, I argue that Diego’s coming of age must be not be seen solely as a narrative of development from the past to the present. Rather, the temporal warping in *Drifting Flowers* presents and imagines queer relations in/from not only the past but also those in the future.

In her study of female homoeroticism in contemporary mainstream Chinese media and cultures, Martin writes:

A dominant modern Chinese discourse on female homoeroticism has asserted the impossibility of lesbian futures: sexual relations between women are culturally imaginable only in youth; therefore same-sex sexual relations may appear in adult femininity’s past, very rarely in the present, and never in its future. (6)

⁴ For more on the *T/Po* binary, see Chao.

Martin emphasises the backwards looking—*memorial*—mode of narration, where same-sex love and desire is forcibly precluded by the heteronormative social impositions of family members or other social figures. These narratives are significant, Martin argues, in that their “mournful ... remembrance of same-sex love as a kind of paradise lost implies a critique of the social imposition of hetero-marital relations upon young women as a condition of feminine adulthood” (7).⁵ In other words, the very existence of these narratives undermines the hegemonic hetero-marriage by making explicit the personal cost upon which heteronormativity is contingent. This does not imply that there exists a wish to supplant the heterosexual marriage with a homosexual one. On the contrary, the existence of these narratives *within* the Chinese mainstream, mass-culture testifies to their *coexistence* with the dominant sexual systems. Therefore, the enforced and enforcing heterosexuality is simultaneously reaffirmed and disputed:

The idealization of women’s youthful same-sex love and desire, framed as a universal female experience, is remarkably common, and the pain caused by the renouncement of this love is frankly avowed, not simply papered over to enable an air of triumph in the stories’ heterosexual conclusions” (Martin 2010: 8).

In addition to the memorialising mode, which fastens homoerotic desires to the past as a way of excluding it from the present, Martin identifies another significant element of Sinophone mass-cultural representations of female same-sex relations—the tomboy melodrama. Whilst the majority of the mass same-sex representations feature “normatively feminine protagonists, nonetheless in both popular representations and self-understandings on the part of the self-identifying lesbians in China, Taiwan and Hong Kong today, the gendered distinction between masculine and feminine women ... is central” (Martin 2010: 13). In terms of the memorial mode, however, Martin notes that the latter category—that of “temporary” same-sex love of feminine women—overwhelmingly outnumbers the cultural representations of “permanent lesbianism” of masculine women (tomboys). Significantly, whilst the contemporary Chinese tomboy narrative typically comes in the shape of a “social problem melodrama”, it is at odds with the feminine (protagonist’s) memorial narrative. Therefore, as a particular social problem genre, the tomboy narrative “is held at a greater distance than the schoolgirl romance from sexual and gender normativity” (2010: 14). This distancing, Martin notes, precludes identification with the tomboy, or the “victim-hero”, as we the readers/viewers are encouraged to take a sympathetic, onlooker view, situated within the sphere of normativity. Moreover, the temporality of the tomboy is that of “no-future”. Whilst the feminine protagonist’s future has conventionally been defined as ending in a heterosexual marriage, the tomboy’s future “has been strictly unimaginable—a kind of blank space in the popular imaginary, commonly dealt with by the most expeditious means of having tomboy protagonists die young” (Martin 2010: 112).

⁵ Some of the narratives noted by Martin include the Taiwanese author Chu T’ien-hsin’s short story “Waves Scour the Sand” (“Lang tao sha”, 1976), Beijing author Liu Suola’s novella *Blue Sky, Green Sea* (*Lan tian lü hai*, 1985), the Taiwanese TV drama series *The Unfilial Daughter* (*Nini*; Ko Yi-zheng, 2001), and the PRC’s first lesbian feature film *Fish and Elephant* (*Jin nian xia tian*, Li Yu, 2001).

In *Drifting Flowers*, we find elements of both the schoolgirl romance as well as the tomboy melodrama. Where Chou's film differs, however, is in its positioning of Diego, for although the viewer is encouraged to sympathise with the tomboy, her same-sex attraction does not become a scourge of her tragic existence and an ultimate and unavoidable end. In fact, not only does Diego not face a tragic death; we are aware—due to the film's chronology—that she will ultimately partner with Jing. More significantly, perhaps, she serves as a lynchpin of the three stories, as her character has a bearing on May's, Lily's and Yen's life. In *Drifting Flowers*, Chou does not privilege either the inside or the outside view of Diego. For instance, in "May", the optical point of view of that of the eponymous girl, who is enamoured and ultimately falls in love with her sister's accordion player. In "Diego", we are privy to the familial and societal pressures exerted onto Diego, whilst the "Lily" section hardly features her at all. Yet in each instance, Diego is present not as a "victim-hero" but as a friend and a lesbian who has had an impact and continues to effect both Yen and Lily (and May). In terms of queer affiliation, Helen Leung notes that the friendship between Yen and Lily—captured most vividly in the scene where they both sit on a train platform dressed in women's clothes—"is based not on sexual attraction but on compassion, mutual dependence, and a shared experience of living queer lives" (2012: 532). Likewise, the childhood scenes in which Diego and Yen discuss their relationship and the reasons behind their strong bonds, "provides a nuanced and finely tuned portrayal of the complex dynamics between two queer friends. While Yan is attracted to Diego's boyishness, Diego is in turn drawn to Yan's femininity. In other words, they each appreciate the other's queer gender presentation" (Leung 2012: 532).

In terms of queer desire, on the other hand, the sexual attraction between Diego and Lily, as they take shelter from the rain in a van at the concluding stages of the film, has a two-pronged effect. Whilst it codes both women's "sexual identity" as lesbian, thus paralleling a coming out narrative, the ensuing laughter seems to oppose this view, as both characters appear to be cognisant of these very expectations. Here, instead of familiarisation, the viewer experiences estrangement, as both women appear to be playing tricks with the audience's expectations. Moreover, as the scene moves to slow motion, the women appear to be looking through the windscreen as if on to a film screen (reminiscent of a drive-in cinema), replicating the role of the expecting viewer. This familiarising/defamiliarising effect evokes and destabilises the expectations of "transgressive" behaviour in East Asian queer cinema, as it makes explicit the problems of categorising the representation of queerness as either clichéd or inadequately transgressive.

Significantly, we are precluded from reading the scene as one that would position Diego on either side of the inside/outside binary, for if, as Martin argues, "the schoolgirl romance narrated by a conventionally feminine woman is a memorial narrative that looks back on youthful same-sex romance", a reversal of this would be a "same-sex attracted tomboy schoolgirl looking *forward* to potentially lesbian adulthood" (2010: 116, emphasis in original). Thus, whilst the temporality of Chou's film allows a potential realisation of a tomboy lesbian adulthood, the scene above would not be its starting point in a linear narrative, since we as the audience are aware that Diego will later find Jing, whilst Lily would partner with Ocean. In both instances, Diego is positioned as a childhood crush, a queer friend, and a sexual and

lesbian partner, forming a queer connection with all of the characters. In *Drifting Flowers*, lesbianism is neither minoritised (the figure of a tomboy) nor made universal (the figure of a feminine woman). Rather, the film evokes and subverts both readings, as it ushers in a renewed understanding of same-sex female desire.

In his chapter on the poetics of Tsai Ming-liang's queer cinema, Song Hwee Lim notes that "what is queer about Tsai's works is not the literal representation of queer sexuality but rather its metaphorical unrepresentability, intelligible only because of the conventions that Tsai has constructed in his oeuvre, from the theatrical to the cinematic" (2006: 131). These conventions include the use of symbols and metaphors as well as "intratextual practices [that] interpellate a particular kind of spectatorship that is predicated upon an established familiarity with his previous films" (2014: 50). As a consequence, Tsai's work encourages the audience to make connections between the individual films as a way uncovering motifs, recurrent themes and symbolism that make up his signature style. According to Lim, "by drawing attention to elements in his previous films, Tsai's intratextual practices serve to remind the audience of both the history and the historicity of his filmmaking, reinforcing, however unwittingly and unconsciously, the image of the director as an established filmmaker and, by implication, an auteur" (2014: 50). Whilst Tsai's refusal to be labelled as a "gay director" (Lim 2006) may stand in contrast to Chou's persona as an openly gay director, which positions her films within an identity politics framework that appears to speak to particular LGBT groups that demand higher sensitivity to issues of accurate representation, *Drifting Flowers* nonetheless establishes Chou as a female Taiwanese queer auteur whose intertextuality simultaneously references and talks back to the Taiwanese queer auteur Tsai Ming-liang.⁶

In the introduction to her edited volume *Chinese Women's Cinema: Transnational Contexts* (2011), Lingzhen Wang notes that "despite their large number and historical significance, few English-language studies have been devoted to Chinese women filmmakers or their films" (1). Whilst the majority of existing scholarship is devoted to body of work of internationally renowned male filmmakers—Hou Hsiao-hsien, Zhang Yimou and Chen Kaige—there exist only a handful of studies on female women directors such as Ann Hui, Hu Mei and Sylvia Chang. "This is particularly disconcerting", Wang notes, "considering the rapid development of Chinese film studies and the increased establishment of feminist film studies in Western academia" (1). Whilst Wang argues that the nationalist turn in film studies as well as the advent of poststructuralism in the 1980s irrevocably altered the view of feminist film discourse, I emphasise Chou's auteurship in the context of the transnationality of Sinophone cinema. For the success of Chou's films owes as much to the international LGBT film circuits as it does to the national cinema of Taiwan. In other words, Chou's position as a queer auteur is as much a local as it is a global phenomenon.

⁶ Huang and Wang note that Chou included a breast-binding scene in *Drifting Flowers* "because many lesbians said that [she] had yet to give expression to the true voice of the *tie T*", p. 153, n. 28, emphasis in original.

Despite being a cinema of a small nation, Taiwan cinema's international prestige "is disproportionate to its size and can be largely attributed to a quartet of directors with an undisputed auteur status: Hou Hsiao-hsien, Edward Yang, Ang Lee, and Tsai Ming-liang. Indeed, these four directors are collectively responsible for always all top prizes that Taiwan cinema has won at the three most prestigious international film festivals (Berlin, Cannes, and Venice)" (Lim 2014: 47). In the case of Tsai Ming-liang, Lim notes that his "self-image as an auteur is rooted in his cinephilic obsession with the European New Wave cinemas of the 1960s and 70s, which he regards as the high point in film history" (2014: 45). Whilst the inter- and intratextual elements in Tsai's oeuvre have been instrumental in augmenting and solidifying his recognition and status on the international festival circuits, the popularity of Zero Chou's production on the national *as well as* the international stage is linked to what Martin argues is the new transnational

Taiwan cinema's negotiation "between the local and the global, the particular and the general, minority and mainstream audience, and cultural deterritorialization and reterritorialization" (2007: 131). Emphasising Taiwan-based filmmakers whose output, whilst grounded in Taiwan but drawing on investment overseas, "target[s] a broader international and domestic audience beyond hard-core auteurist art-film fans" (132), Martin notes that these filmmakers mark a new direction for Taiwan cinema, as the positioning of sexuality in these films is ambiguous enough to invite various and conflicting interpretations.

One such film is Yee Chih-yen's *Blue Gate Crossing*, a three-way high school drama that incorporates art-film elements with "promotional image-making style of a multinational fast-food corporation" (Martin 2007: 136). Not only does the film contain some of the elements of a coming out story; it also taps into the aforementioned narratives of the schoolgirl romance as well as the tomboy melodrama. In addition, the film could be said to be "transnationally oriented self-translating text ... a 'flexible, adaptable, user/reader/audience-friendly cultural product'". This is not because it exoticises Taiwan. On the contrary, it is the "effacement of any strong traces of the local" that make the film appealing to an international audience, as the local viewers attempt to re-localise the film within the space of Taipei, whilst the international audiences are being drawn to the "extra-local translatability" of the film's setting in what appears to be a "generic East Asian city" (Martin 2007: 139, 140). This multicoding allows the film a "smooth passage across geo-cultural and sexual-subcultural borders in order to maximize its market ... [as] its viewers effectively 'value-add' specificity in both respects at the moment of consumption, customizing this flexible product to cater to their local, specific needs and desires" (Martin 2007: 141).

Whilst Zero Chou places much heavier emphasis on the historical and cultural specificities of Taiwan, the Sinophone queerness in her films enables them to travel in space that is at once local, (inter)regional and transnational. In addition to the flexibility of her texts, I argue that Chou's intra- and intertextual practices serve not only as a reminder of the historicity of her filmmaking but also as a device that engages her cinephilic spectators, as they are "encouraged to pore over [her] earlier films ... for retrospective enlightenment" (Lim 2014: 54-55). This way, the spectator will also learn to "anticipate that elements ... will be taken into

unforeseeable directions in the future in a seriality and circularity that concretize [Chou's] position as an auteur" (55).

One of the most visible examples of Chou's intratextuality can be seen in a scene halfway into *Drifting Flowers*, in which we find Yen wandering the city after having a row with Lily. Here, a wall is plastered with identical posters of what appears to be Chou's own film *Spider Lilies*. Clearly visible is the Golden Bear logo of the Berlin International Festival, although on the poster we see two male actors, taking the places of Rainie Yang and Isabella Leong as Jade and Takeko as per the official poster. Leung views this as more than a "sly intratextual joke", as it also "captures the inclusive spirit of Chou's queer vision ... [to produce] a 'six-color rainbow cinema'" (531).⁷ Similar to Tsai's intratextuality which, according to Lim, has been "instrumental in enhancing the international reception of [his] films and the viability of his filmmaking", Chou's reference to her own film enables her to "move from producing films in a national cinema mode to that of an international art cinema" (2014: 60).

In addition to this instance of intratextuality, I argue that the poster also serves as Chou's means for establishing herself as a Taiwanese *female* auteur, as the *intratextual* and *intertextual* elements in *Drifting Flowers* work in tandem, creating a link between herself and Tsai Ming-liang. In terms of casting, this is evident in the aforementioned opening scene featuring septuagenarian Lily, played by Lu Yi-Ching, a core actor in Tsai Ming-liang's films who would typically embody the role of the mother of Hsiao-kang, played by Tsai's regular collaborator Lee Kang-sheng.⁸ The film features a regular of Chou's, namely Pai Chih-Ying, who in *Spider Lilies* plays the young Jade and who in *Drifting Flowers* plays the Jing's younger sister May. Whilst the choices in casting do not necessarily suggest a close linkage between Chou and Tsai, they only reinforce some of the other elements that appear to connect the two auteurs. In the "Lily" section of the film, the cause of the argument between Lily and Yen was Lily's hiding his suitcase from him, in effect making him stay with her (he had placed it near the door, suggesting his impending departure).

As he searches the apartment, we notice a green rice cooker on the kitchen table. Dedicated fans of Tsai's cinema may recognise the rice cooker as the same one that is on the table in the opening shot of *What Time Is It There?* (*Ni na bian ji dian*), Tsai's 2001 film about a watch vendor and a woman on holiday in Paris. The cooker, however, is itself an intratextual element, as it echoes two of Tsai's earlier films—*Rebels of the Neon God* (*Qingshaonian Nezha* 1992) and *The River* (*Heliu* 1997)—only this time its colour has changed from red to green. These intratextual elements in Tsai's oeuvre, which re-create and solidify his status as an auteur, depend on "discourses of cinephilia and authorship, which have particular currency in the

⁷ Interestingly, the rainbow series begins with the colour yellow, which infuses the symbolism of *Splendid Float*. Here, Sunny's yellow shirt works as a symbol of love (along with the yellow rose), whilst Roy's yellow shaman robes serve as a religious symbol of authority and power. In *Spider Lilies*, Jade's green wig serves as a symbol of trauma as well as queer desire. In *Drifting Flowers*, Yen's red suitcase serves as a symbol of movement and transience.

⁸ Lu Yi-Ching's birth name is Lu Hsiao-Ling, which she changed mid-career.

institutions of the international film festival and the art house cinema” (Lim 2014: 46). This kind of authorship, Lim notes, is “performatively constituted ... so that the focus is not so much on the so-called genius of the author but rather on the discursive means by which certain kinds of cinematic agency are contingently constructed, come into being, and become visible” (46).



Figure 2: Green rice cooker on the dining table, *What Time Is It There?*



Figure 1: Green rice cooker on the dining table, *Drifting Flowers*.

In *Drifting Flowers*, Chou references visually an already-existing intratextual element of Tsai's oeuvre, in effect continuing the performance and establishing herself as an auteur in the process. In *What Time*, the static long take places the father in a scene with a dining table on the right, a corridor in the middle and a kitchen on the left of the frame. In Chou's film, the mise-en-scène is nearly inverted, as the shallow focus reverts our attention to Yen whilst he walks inside. In addition, despite being the family patriarch, the father in Tsai's film is killed off early in the film, as his widow mourns his passing by obsessing about the return of his ghost. One of the ways she displays her loss is by masturbating with his (wooden) pillow, whilst his black-and-white photograph looks on disapprovingly.

In *Drifting Flowers*, a similar scene occurs as Lily, now that she believes Ocean has returned, decides to take down the latter's black-and-white photograph. Here, Ocean's appearance is strikingly similar to that of the father. Whilst in both films a deceased partner casts a shadow over their surviving companion, in *Drifting Flowers* it is not the family patriarch but a lesbian partner who is being mourned. Given that both Lily and the mother are played by the same actress in the two films, we are here witness to a convergence and a differentiation of auteurship between Tsai Ming-liang and Zero Chou. Whilst Chou's final instalment of her *tongzhi* trilogy offers a renewed take on queer Sinophone filmmaking, she also appropriates Tsai's renowned “écriture queer”—his portrayal of male gay saunas, male pornographers, theatres as male cruising sights as well as father-son relationships—and offers a female take on the queer auteur by referencing and appropriating the cinephilic elements of the former. Chou's film, I contend, speaks to the “new” in New Queer Sinophone Cinema, in that her placing a lesbian character at the forefront in “Lily”, a tomboy in “Diego”, and an emerging lesbian in “May” (along with an AIDS stricken gay man), gestures towards a new direction in Taiwanese queer cinema that is inclusive, complex and historically and culturally specific (Pecic 2016).



Figure 3: Lily taking down Ocean's photograph, *Drifting Flowers*.



Figure 4: Father's stern look, *What Time Is It There?*

I began this article by noting that *Drifting Flowers*, whilst open to global interpretations of queerness and non-normative sexuality, remains calibrated to local and national histories. Likewise, the two previous films in Zero Chou's *tongzhi* trilogy exhibit the ability to employ and challenge local as well as global formations of culture and sexuality. In *Splendid Float*, customs intersect in a Thirdspace that combines the elements of the real and the fantastic.⁹ Staging the drag performance on a mobile float on the bank of the Tamsui River, Chou positions this transient space between the heteronormative Firstspace of Taipei City and the theatrical Secondspace of the performance. Here, the main performer Roy/Rose becomes a figure that transverse boundaries between man/woman, heterosexuality/homosexuality and shamanism/drag. By invoking the theatricality of the native rituals, Chou provincialises Butlerian notions of drag as a discursive practice and provides it with a historical and a cultural context. In the melodrama *Spider Lilies*, Chou continues the reworking of Euro-American notions of gender parody by complicating the *T/Po* (butch/femme) binary. As the element of the Internet and online presence push the plot forward, the space in-between the real and the unreal intervenes not only into the memorial condition but also into the positioning of queerness as either local or global.

The inter- and intratextuality of *Drifting Flowers* solidify Chou's status as a Taiwanese queer auteur whose renewed take on queerness suggests new ways in a global queer cinema. More importantly, this highly nuanced positioning of Sinophone queerness also speaks to the workings of New Queer Sinophone Cinema, as it allows for an excavation and interrogation of spaces that are caught between the local and the global, between "China" and elsewhere, where queerness and same-sex desire are neither positioned as an event in the queer past nor as "oppressed" in the heterosexual present. The translocal and transnational Thirdspace in New Queer Sinophone Cinema challenges both a temporal and a spatial fixing of non-normative desires in "China", unfixing the notions of global gayness and sexual freedom and coalescing the affective and the political into a space that is both hybrid and lived. New Queer Sinophone Cinema emphasises that which lies between the visible and the invisible, between the real and the unreal, where familiarity and estrangement are coalesced in a queer space that challenges identificatory mechanisms that "fix" queerness in a particular position, in a particular place and at a particular time.

⁹ I use Edward W. Soja's arguments on the social production of space. In *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), Soja argues that Thirdspace complicates material and mental spaces, breaking up the dualism of that which is "real" and "imagined". Thirdspace, according to Soja, is 'simultaneously real and imagined and more (both and also...)' (11).

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Filmography

- Drifting Flowers* [*Piao lang qing chun*] (motion picture) (2008), Taiwan: The 3rd Vision Films, Director Zero Chou.
- Spider Lilies* [*Ci qing*] (motion picture) (2007), Taiwan: The 3rd Vision Films, Director Zero Chou.

Splendid Float [*Yan guang si she gewutuan*] (motion picture) (2004), Taiwan: ZeHo Illusion Studio, Director Zero Chou.

What Time Is It There? [*Ni na bian ji dian*] (motion picture) (2001), Taiwan: Arena Films/Homegreen Films, Director Tsai Ming-liang.

On Using Machinima as “Found” in Animation Production

Jifeng Huang

Abstract

Machinima is a relatively new animation production technique that has become popular among independent animators. It is also used by installation artists to create installation artefacts in a digital space. As a form of remix and fandom culture, machinima can be appropriated for the production of readymade and found arts. However, its exact contribution to this art form has not been clearly defined, as the knowledge generated within the machinima community is usually fragmented, incomplete and poorly documented. This article examines machinima production practices and installation art with the aim of determining how machinima components can be considered as “found art” within an animation. The outcome will be of interest to both animators and installation artists who want to use machinima in their works. It also provides a lens for further study of machinima and digital installations that use videogames.

Keywords: Found works, installation art, machinima

1. Machinima as an Animation Production Practice

Machinima is “animated filmmaking within a real-time virtual 3D environment... [It is] a mixture of several creative platforms – filmmaking, animation and 3D game technology” (Marino 2002: 1). Berkeley defines machinima in a more circumspect manner: “machinima is where 3D computer animation gameplay is recorded in real time as video footage and then used to produce traditional video narratives” (2006: 66). Machinima is the convergence of videogame, cinema and animation (Marino 2002; Nitsche, Riedl & Davis 2011; Burke 2013), which absorbs the elements of all three in game production, minimizing the gap between cinema and animation.

Machinima was initially a form of fan fiction based on popular culture works, especially videogames. It is usually image-based (Johnson & Petit 2012) and not produced as “professional” (Hetcher 2009; Brown & Holtmeier 2013). Marino (2002) and Horwatt (2007) believe that machinima is an avant-garde art form that is highly experimental. As an alternative production technique, machinima can help animators to form new styles based on the original game, and to diversify animation styles. It also has the potential of being applied in major production.

Machinima is a form of remix, as it combines and manipulates cultural artefacts, including various forms of readymades, into new kinds of creative blends (Johnson & Petit 2012; Nitsche, Riedl & Davis 2011; Hetcher 2009; Cheliotis & Yew 2009; Knobel & Lankshear 2008). Machinima thus inherently has eclectic and hybrid features. This eclecticism and hybridity is reflected in the remixing (video-editing) process as well as the combination of cinematic narrative and videogame materials shown on screen. Machinima reproduces the digital world of videogame in animation, therefore is also a process of remediation, a notion defined by Lichty (2009) as the recreation of works in virtually embodied media.

Creating machinima involves appropriating readymade resources, found within the game engine, in new contexts. Therefore machinima is connected to found arts, and has been used by installation artists. The digitally appropriated components of machinima within the digital space of games are highly malleable (Howart 2007), which as Conradi states, provides “opportunities to imagine entirely new approaches to non-objective forms and to liberate the imagination of artist” (2012: 70). As a found technology, machinima provides pre-programmed scripts and visual elements that are re-arranged by the animator, from which the aesthetics of machinima emerge (Nitsche, Riedl & Davis 2011).

However the device of machinima creation is poorly documented, and the knowledge generated within the practice community is usually fragmented and incomplete (Nitsche, Riedl & Davis 2011). The appropriation of machinima is closely related to readymades and found arts. As machinima increases in popularity among animators and installation artists, an important

discussion is consideration of whether machinima components are “found”. This discussion will bolster the convergence between installation art and animation.

2. The Concept of the “Found Object”

An installation artwork may utilize any material, including people (Janson & Janson 2004), to construct the context and the content of the artefact. Based on this consideration of the materials in installation art, found objects, as Davidson & Desmond (1996) state, are varied and can consist of materials found anywhere, including the exhibition space of the installation artwork itself (1996).

Duchamp developed the use of found objects by making a series of readymades using unaltered everyday objects and designating them as art. According to Benjamin (1993), Oliveira, Oxely & Petry (1994) and He (2008), a found object as a readymade is placed in a particular context and re-designated. The connection and the distinction between the found objects and the readymade are reflected in these prior literature. A found object is firstly a readymade; a shift in context and the act of re-designation form the process of “found” which replaces the original function and meaning of the readymade with new ones. For example, Duchamp’s *Fountain* does not function as a urinal; instead in the context of museum it is an artwork that questions the status of art. Contemporary installation artists have accepted and developed this concept, and use found objects to express ideas in wider scopes and ways. Usually as a part of installation artworks, the collected found objects keep their aspect of reality, which enhances the artefacts’ attraction and potential for encountering the real (Davidson & Desmond 1996). For example, in *Rock and Bigger* (Li 2013, Beijing, see Fig. 1), all materials are collected from ordinary life. The materials (Coca-Cola and a red balloon) are so common in daily life that viewers hardly consider them as an artefact. They use the space of art gallery as the context of the artwork, which deprives these found objects of their original function (e.g. beverage) but endows the work with new meanings (e.g. consumerism or bubble economy, based on the spectator’s interpretation).



Fig. 1 *Rock and Bigger* (Li BY 2013)

Found art can also be created in the digital space using processes that include machinima. Machinima installation artists such as Annabeth Robinson, Garrett Lynch, Fortunato Depero and Tullio Crali directly create virtual installation artefacts in the digital spaces of videogames. Others, including Cao Fei and Gazira Babeli, use machinima as a cinematic/narrative media of installation artistic creation. For example, Cao Fei's machinima documentary *iMirror* (based on *Second Life*) was considered as an installation artefact at the 2007 Venice Biennale. As Lichty (2009) states: “while it might be possible to create (installation) works that exist in the virtual that do not express themselves in terms of references to the tangible, they are likely extremely subtle or outside the embodied paradigm of human experience”(2009: 8). The use of machinima as found emerges in the overlap between machinima and installation.

3. The Found Works in Animation

In an animation work, readymades can be intentionally appropriated. There are two layers of appropriation at work: the vehicle of readymades that are invoked, and the images are reproduced in the space of animation. The first layer is primarily reflected in the process of animation production, as the animator imports and works with readymade components (such as 3D digital models or images) in production (e.g. in Premier or AfterEffects). The second layer is predominantly displayed on screen as images, and audiences can visually recognize them as readymades from other works.

Furthermore based on the concept of the found object, on both levels a readymade in an animation can be considered as digitally “found” if it aligns with the following features: (1) is a readymade; (2) is combined with other materials, or is put in a new context; and (3) has new meanings or functions. The term “found work” can be used to describe those components that are not originally created for the project but are appropriated from elsewhere, as well as the two layers of appropriation reflected in found works. For example, a 3D model of a car (a digital file) can be collected and imported into a particular animation project. Simultaneously, the digital image of the car is placed in the virtual world of this animation. This process is like that of an installation artist finding and appropriating readymades in his artefact. Like an installation artwork, the image of the car that is shown on screen can be used in different ways, and represent alternative functions and meanings, depending on the context that is created by the animation.

Four existing works are discussed in the following section to illuminate the diverse forms of found materials applied in animation.

(i.) *Logorama*

Logorama (2009) is a short animation with strong features of installation art. Different logos are collected, appropriated and re-designated as other objects, the work is thus an example of the use of found objects in the digital space. *Logorama* takes advantage of the visual similarity between the logo and other images, and uses logos as characters, objects and landscapes (see

Fig. 2). In this animation, all the logos are found objects, and the designation is accomplished by visually linking the logos to the images in ordinary experiences. In the signification system of the logos in *Logorama*, the relationship between the signifier and signified is designated as visual similarity, with the original signified replaced by the object that the logo looks like. For example, in this animation the logo of MSN (Windows Live Messenger) represents butterflies rather than the MSN software; it therefore becomes an icon rather than a symbol or index. The remixing of readymades, the replacement of the signified, and the change on the signification system make all logos in this animation found objects. The focus of this work is on the re-designation of readymade logos, and the story is less important; it can be considered as an installation artefact in itself.

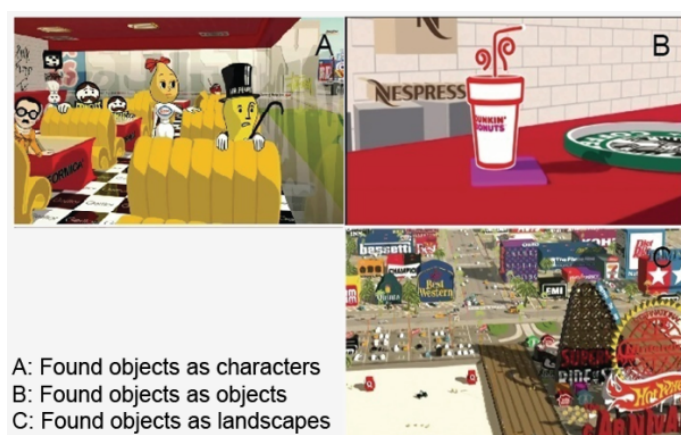


Fig. 2 The found works in *Logorama* (2009)

(ii.) *The Tatami Galaxy*

The Tatami Galaxy (2010) is a TV anime piece that combines multiple production techniques and visual styles. It uses different types of “found” materials, and merges them with 2D components (see Fig. 3). On some occasions live-action segments are also used as single empty shots (in which no main character appears). The animator filmed these shots, however the image of landscapes and objects are “found” and used to construct the virtual world of the anime, which aligns with the second layer of appropriation. Some of the landscapes and objects within the virtual space do not equate (or are connected) to reality. For example the anime uses a photo of old apartments as the background of some scenes. However the photo does not represent the same buildings in reality, instead it forms part of the hyperreal world of the anime. From this perspective, the image of the apartment is found and digitally appropriated in the anime work.

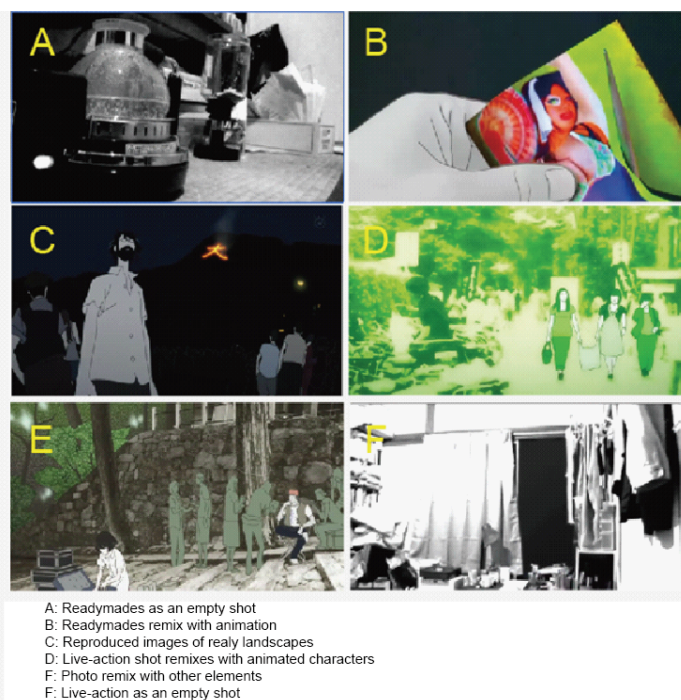


Fig. 3 The readymade works in *The Tatami Galaxy* (2010)

(iii.) *I Am MT*

I Am MT (2009) employs multiple production techniques, and appropriates the readymade digital space of *World of Warcraft* (WOW) as the setting of the story. It is a work of fan-fiction, with the machinima background directly captured from WOW. Filters are applied, but audiences can identify the landscapes of WOW. This combination of cute characters and 3D machinima backgrounds is controversial, and thus resisted by some audiences (Huang 2010).



Fig. 4 The original characters in machinima backgrounds in *I Am MT* (2009)

The main characters are not readymade models from WOW but designed by the producer. These characters are not WOW realistic but in the 2D cute style with iconic facial emotions, as shown in Fig. 4. However, all characters are designed based on the identities of WOW classes, and WOW elements are inevitably borrowed. This appropriation influences the level of visual images as well as modes of action.

As fan-fiction, the story of *I Am MT* is set within the framework of WOW. The space of *I Am MT* strictly represents WOW. For example, the Ashenvale scene in *I Am MT* (see Fig. 3) represents the Ashenvale map in WOW, and the races (e.g. tauren, orc and troll in Fig. 4) in *I*

Am MT refer to those in *WOW*. The borrowed machinima elements have not been re-designated, and therefore are not found works.

(iv.) *The Hero's Journey Project*

The Hero's Journey is the animation production practice of my doctoral research project, wherein I attempted to bring the concept of “found” from installation art into animation. This research project is a practice-based research that draws inspiration from my experience of installation art practice (*The Endangered Earth*) to the creation of a post-apocalyptic animation (*The Hero's Journey*, <https://vimeo.com/102311705> password: huangwww3boxcc). In *The Endangered Earth*, I used various found objects, and combined them with other elements. This artefact is composed of five works including *The Metal Casket*, which forms the context of the found objects in it. This space does not represent but creates its own reality in which the original functions of found objects are deprived, and the found objects are endowed with new meanings. For example, the computer cases in *The Endangered Earth* cannot function as they used to, instead they are used as caskets (see Fig. 5: *The Metal Casket*). The computer cases link *The Endangered Earth* to daily experience (in this case the experience of modern technology and digital life) in a critical way, and drives viewers to critically reflect on the abuse of technology.



Fig. 5 *The Metal Casket* (Installation artefact)



Fig. 6 The replica of *The Metal Casket* in *The Hero's Journey*

The artefact of *The Metal Casket* is to a large extent dependent on the appearances of found objects. The found objects are likewise influenced by their positions in the artefact and the relationship to others. Some of the found objects collected were further processed, but most of them were kept in their original state. In *The Metal Casket*, the computer cases of different

shapes, colour and sizes are collected. They are piled haphazardly, the process of assemblage demonstrating flexibility and a degree of randomness. The use of found objects also leads to the feature of the flawed statue, as in the process of assemblage there is no intention to create a perfected form for the artwork. New meaning is endowed by the context that is created by the artwork, as well as the designated title of the work.

This installation artwork is digitally reproduced in *The Hero's Journey*. From this perspective, the image and concept of *The Metal Casket* are found and appropriated in this animation. The digital replica is placed in the post-apocalyptic world. The scale of this artwork is enlarged and combined with other materials such as bones and doodles (see Fig. 6). Similarly, images of readymades in *The Hero's Journey* critically connect the artefact to daily experience, some used as “found” to symbolically express ideas. The forms and sources of readymades in this project are various and cover a range of disciplines, and the ways of adapting and using them are flexible. In *The Hero's Journey*, readymade are placed in the fictional world. Some scenes of *The Hero's Journey* are significantly influenced by the appearances of the readymades.

However, an essential difference between the two artworks is that the space of *The Hero's Journey* is virtual, thus the concept of “found” also exists in the virtual form. In the post-apocalyptic context of *The Hero's Journey*, some readymade images lose their original functions and meanings. For example, in a post-apocalyptic world, the image of cash may lose the function of currency and the traditional meaning of wealth. They are endowed with new functions and meanings (e.g. “cash” as “fuel” or “trash”). These readymades are combined with others, and are re-designated in this particular context. Based on the concept of found objects, these readymades are found.

4. Machinima in Two Animation Production Practices

All the machinima segments in the two artistic practices (*The Hero's Journey* and *The Corridor*) are captured directly from original videogames. The two projects demonstrate different extents to which machinima can be used as found.

(i.) Machinima Components in The Hero's Journey Project

The Hero's Journey is a non-dialogue short animation project that employs multiple production techniques. This work is additive as I have created a large number of details and imported many posters, illustrations, doodles and photos.

In this project machinima footage is combined with other components to create background and visual effects. As a production technique, machinima is not sufficient to express the complicated facial emotions required, but could be an excellent technique to make 3D based backgrounds. However, I noticed that it is difficult to find high quality videogames that reproduce contemporary Chinese urban landscapes, thus the use of machinima is limited in this project.

In order to find proper machinima components, I collected resources from several games including *Fallout 3: New Vegas* (2010), *Call of Duty 4* (2007), and *Metro: Last light* (2013). Other games such as *Grand Theft Auto 4* (2008) and *Second Life* (2003) were viewed but not used due to their inappropriate visual styles or qualities. I chose photo-realistic games that contained modern urban landscapes or post-apocalypse scenes, since these games are additive and can satisfy my requirements for the style. However, since most high quality videogames are made by Western studios, their virtual worlds were the Westerner's imagination of China rather than representations of real Chinese cities. This limited the scope that I could choose for this project. Materials from *Call of Duty 4* and *Metro: Last Light* were mostly used, since some stages of these games are ruined Russian cities, which are more similar to Chinese cities than the wasteland of USA in *Fallout*. Most machinima segments are clouds, abandoned buildings and city ruins. They are combined with other components displaying a strong Chinese style. In most occasions they are not used as major figures in the layouts but as parts of the whole; they contributed the whole visual effect and helped to shape the atmosphere of the post-apocalyptic world (see Fig. 7).

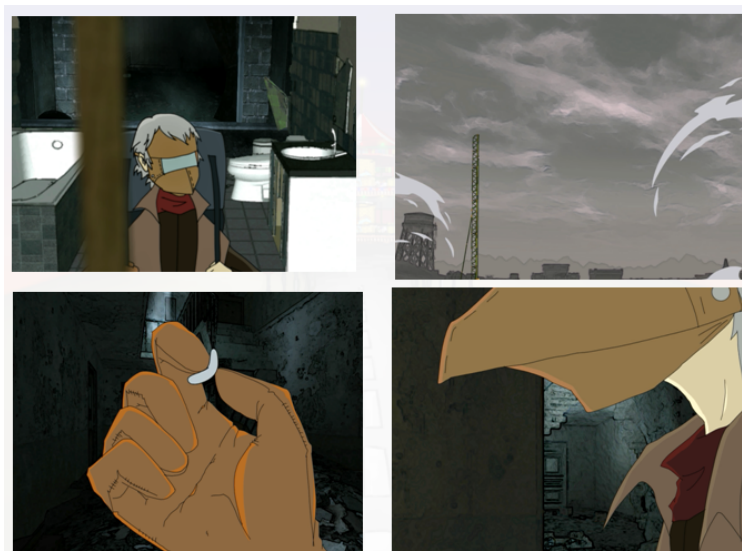


Fig. 7 Machinima components in the background of *The Hero's Journey*

I also used found footage to create visual effects. The sources varied, becoming difficult to identify after remixing with other works. Some of them are selectively exposed to express particular meaning or emotions.



Fig. 8 The found works in the segment of montage pictures

For example, in the pictures montage segment I experimented with using found footage and images of found objects to create visual effects (Fig. 8). Different works are collected and remixed in this segment for specific purposes. Some of them (the Neolithic artwork, the newspapers and my previous illustration works) are used as a single shot to link to other scenes according to the screenplay, while others are used to create visual effects.

In the process of viewing videogames for machinima production, I found many interesting scenes. They could not be used directly as scenes in this project, but provided strong impressions related to the theme of *The Hero's Journey*. I wondered whether I could use these impressions to help express my ideas. As an experiment, I added a machinima segment which was captured from *Fallout 3: New Vegas* (2010). It was a first-person shot in which the character runs in a dark narrow corridor. In this process, I found that the translucent machinima layer affected a split-second and discontinuous impression as it was overlaid above other layers, occasionally disrupting, and in turn disrupted by, the other images. Thus I tried to add more elements and made this segment even more fragmented. This segment was considered as a set of fragments of impression. I captured videos of running, shooting, killing and missile launching from different videogames, as I wanted to display fragments that related to the self-destruction of mankind. I explosively exposed the information, and deliberately overloaded fragments so that audiences could not capture all the details. The speed of shifts between images increased, and different footage overlapped with each other. This process was random, as I remixed multiple segments without a pre-designed order. Through controlling the transparencies of different layers, the fragments of impression such as running, shooting and killing were interwoven together.

(ii.) The Corridor

In order to explore the layered use of machinima as found in animation, I created an installation artwork, and reproduced it in the digital space of a videogame. The replica was represented in the form of machinima. This installation artefact was first designed in the process of creating the post-apocalypse world of *The Hero's Journey*. It was a corridor with a huge number of tableware covering the ground, through which the protagonist passed while walking down the corridor (see Fig. 9).



Fig. 9 The sketch of the corridor scene in section 2

This scene was initially designed as an alarm system set by another survivor the protagonist would encounter. Within the post-apocalyptic context, this scene expresses ideas that transcend expected functions in the ordinary world. As the tableware is “found” for characters in this virtual world, the objects lose their original functions, and adopt new functions and meanings (a part of an alarm trap, and a critical reflection on over consumption). I realized that the idea of this scene can be used to create a real or an animated installation artefact. In animation it is possible to provide the experience of interaction with the artwork through the character as avatars of audiences. As Rheingold states, “at the heart of VR [virtual reality] is an experience – the experience of being in a virtual world or remote location” (1991, cited in Bolter & Grusin 1999: 22). This interaction between artefact and character provides the experience of viewing and physically participating in the artefact in the virtual space of *The Hero's Journey*. Therefore, this corridor has double identities: a scene of this animation (an alarming system for the survivor who lives in the building); and an interactive installation art which expresses my anti-consumerist ideas.

I then created this installation artefact (a real craft). I collected empty bottles, containers, tableware, and other wasted industrial products and piled them in a corridor. This artefact was not publically exhibited, instead an actor was recruited to walk through the corridor. A recording of the interaction between actor and artwork was produced, and the video uploaded to YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLxjxpyoeiY>).



Fig. 10 *The Corridor* (real craft)

The artefact was reproduced in *Fallout 3: New Vegas* (2010) (available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vDGixsh5fE>). I found a corridor, collected a large number of tableware and bottles, and placed them on the ground (Fig. 11). The game engine provided great freedom, and the scale of the digital version *The Corridor* was significantly enlarged. In this process, I exploited the mechanics of *Fallout 3: New Vegas*, with the in-game objects were considered as “found objects.” All the digital components (empty bottles, etc.) are provided by the videogame developer were assembled in the digital space. Due to the limitation of the game engine, I could not place the objects precisely, and the remixing process created random consequences. This whole scene is significantly greater than the sum of its parts, while all components of this work are in relation to others.



Fig. 11 *The Corridor* in *Fallout 3: New Vegas* (2010)

As a part of the experience that is provided by this artefact, I used the game character to interact with this work. I controlled the player character (PC) stepping through the corridor (Fig. 12), and the experience of physical participation was created in this process. The in-game action and the ephemeral experience were recorded by machinima. I also recorded the interaction between the artefact and the non-player character (NPC) (Fig. 13). The artefact was unwillingly set in the routine of one NPC; this process was similar to that of placing an installation artefact in the routine of spectators in a museum).



Fig. 12 The interaction between the controlled game characters and the digital installation artefact



Fig. 13 The interaction between NPC and the digital installation artefact

5. The Identity of Machinima as Found

Based on the two-level system of digital appropriation in animation, the machinima in *The Hero's Journey* and *The Corridor* as found works have two identities: (1) the video segments (the vehicle of readymades) that are created by the animator; and (2) the images in the digital space of the games. The vehicle is seemingly not found or readymade in itself, yet it is closely related to found works; the use of these machinima segments is similar to that of an installation artist remixing found objects to create an artefact. Therefore, despite the fact that the vehicle of a machinima component (a digital video segment) is created by the animator, some machinima works can still be considered as found.

The Hero's Journey project illustrates how machinima segments can be used as found works in different stages of animation production. A singular shot can be directly created within the videogame engine, or through combining machinima with other materials in various ways. In this process, machinima is deployed according to the narrative and/or visual requirements of the animation. In *The Hero's Journey*, the story space breaks the connection between

machinima components and their original videogames. For example, in the photo montage segment, the appropriated machinima components lose their identities of combat in *Fallout 3: New Vegas*, *Skyrim* and *Metro: Last Light*, becoming part of the protagonist's memory in *The Hero's Journey*. In other scenes, the objects created by machinima (e.g. a collapsed building from *Call of Duty 4*) are detached from their original games and merged into the world of *The Hero's Journey*.

The machinima version of *The Corridor* is created within *Fallout 3: New Vegas*. It thus retains a visual connection with the original videogame, which also becomes part of the context. However, this does not mean that *The Corridor* represents or reproduces a space from the digital world of the videogame, nor is the machinima a recording of game-play. On the contrary it builds its own post-apocalyptic space, which highlights the independence of this particular scene. *The Corridor* does not equate to the corridor scene in *The Hero's Journey*. The visual differences can be easily perceived, but the disparity also exists on other levels. In *The Hero's Journey*, the corridor is an alarm system set by a survivor. However, this function works only in the specific context of the story of *The Hero's Journey*. When the context changes, the function of the corridor as alarm may disappear. The exterior environment of the corridor (the ruin of the amusement park) has been removed along with the function of being an alarm system.

The digital version of *The Corridor* shares fundamental idea and images of the real craft. However the two works are not equal, as they exist in different spaces and particularly as the embodiment process creates a new digital context arising from the videogame. The environment of the digital artefact (the atmosphere of the post-apocalyptic fiction) provides a dramatic context within the *Fallout* visual style. As a subgenre of science fiction, a post-apocalyptic work possesses strong post-modern features (Ostwalt 1998; Pearson, 2006; Gomel 2010; Napier 2008; Rosen 2008), which helps to link this animation to installation art. In the post-apocalyptic hyperreal space, everyday experiences are removed and audiences are forced to confront the dead world that is depicted by the science fiction genre (Fisher 2010). The daily functions of many industrial products are deprived, and their new functions collide with ordinary experience. This appropriation is similar to that of an installation artist collecting readymades and putting them in the space of the artwork. From this viewpoint, the idea of *The Corridor* as a whole is also a found work.

6. Using Machinima as Found in Animation

Based on the machinima practices in animation projects discussed above, as well as previous literature on readymades and the found object, several key principles of using (as well as identifying) machinima components as “found work” can be reached.

- (i.) The animator uses original works of the game, or other readymade resources (such as mods that are made by other players). The readymade works can be found within the game, or within the development kits such as map-editor. In this process, the animator

records the gaming experience that is provided and framed by the game developer. However, if the animator makes new models, texts, textures or other components specifically for his project, this segment should be considered as original rather than a readymade.

- (ii.) The machinima component is put in a new context through re-editing and remixing. This process is similar to that of an installation artist placing found objects in new environments and remixing them with other materials.
- (iii.) The machinima video should be re-designated and thus adopt new meaning. As a found work in an animation, the machinima segment is usually detached from its original game. It is put in a new context, or creates a specific hyperreal space, in which the machinima component is endowed with new meanings.

These three principles apply to machinima materials that are sourced from a single videogame. For machinima works that combine multiple games and/or other materials as a whole, the principles do not work, as this remixing process makes the animation an original work. However some of its materials could still be identified as found works. It should be noted that some machinima works are not strict readymades and found works. In machinima works, the animator may create new materials such as models, textures, scripts and plots. On other occasions, the contexts of the original games remain completely intact, meaning these works are more likely to be trailers or recorded gameplay videos. The former is not readymade but is created by the animator; the latter has not been set in a new context and re-designated.

In conclusion, machinima animations can constitute “found art” when they come from readymade resources and are used in other contexts to express new ideas. In this process of appropriation, the machinima segment is usually detached from its original game by an artist whose function is to collect the materials and to reassemble them in new contexts. In a broader sense, these criteria may also apply to appropriations to and from other forms of digital artworks.

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A Story in the Making: Storytelling in the Digital Marketing of Independent Films

Nico Meissner

Abstract

This article examines how the story of the making of the independent Spanish feature film *The Cosmonaut* resembles traditional narrative structures and story elements. It relates the ongoing sharing of the film's production process, and argues that this sharing provided the basis for the film's audience-building. Independent films no longer have to be standalone products that are marketed only after their creation. Related events or products allow the story of the making of a film to transcend the film's temporal boundaries and even the limitations of its medium. The paper concludes that telling the story of a film's making while it happens (a) helps to create communities and audiences, who (b) individually experience the making of a film and (c) view a film merely as an end-product while "watching" takes place over an extended period of time. Such ongoing storytelling allows continuous audience growth that helps the filmmaker to self-distribute.

Keywords: *The Cosmonaut*, independent filmmaking, storytelling, audience building

Independent films have always found themselves on the margins, most even completely outside of popular film culture. Traditionally, only a small number of filmmaking centres controlled film production, distribution and exhibition. Expensive production and exhibition equipment limited filmmaking to a select few. Digital media and the internet are often celebrated for enabling independent filmmaking on a larger scale. Making and sharing films has become almost as normal as reading and writing. This has created what some have termed “truly” independent filmmaking, with individual filmmakers not only making films but also independently distributing them to mass audiences via the internet. Such mass publishing, however, has led to an abundant amount of small-scale films available on the internet (Hesmondhalgh 2007). Findability therefore becomes a critical problem that threatens the promises of popular independent films.

This article presents the case study of Spanish feature-length independent film *The Cosmonaut*. It argues that applying storytelling principles to the communication around a film and its making in today's digital age may allow formerly niche independent films to access and nurture mass audiences, thereby crossing into popular culture and overcoming the problems of findability. The argument is presented in two parts. The first focusses on the story of the making of *The Cosmonaut* while the second considers how this meta-story is narrated using traditional narrative conventions. Given that the story of *The Cosmonaut* was told while the film was being produced and made publicly available through the film's social media channels, the article comes to the conclusion that the film's story was, in fact, extended. Through this ongoing storytelling, *The Cosmonaut* was able to slowly grow a mass audience for which the actual film was merely an end-product, while “watching” took place over time. The typical one-off campaign for a finished film was replaced by a longitudinal story of the process of its making.

The Story of *The Cosmonaut*

The Cosmonaut is the brainchild of Nicolás Alcalá, Carola Rodriguez and Bruno Teixidor of Riot Cinema Collective in Spain.¹ The three met at university, while studying marketing. After graduating, they worked together in advertising, making small video projects. They had no filmmaking experience prior to making *The Cosmonaut*. In 2008 Alcalá and Teixidor discussed conspiracy theories about lost cosmonauts; popular fictions about the Soviets only reporting successful space flights, like the one of Gagarin, but not the unsuccessful ones. These unreported unsuccessful space flights, so the conspiracy theories go, left Soviet cosmonauts alive but lost in space. In the same year, Alcalá read the book *Poetics for Cosmonauts* by Henry Pierrat. Inspired by both events, he started to work on a script for a short film about a lost cosmonaut. A short while later, he ultimately decided to turn the idea into his first feature-length movie: *The Cosmonaut*.

What do you need to make a film? You need money. And Riot Cinema Collective became almost obsessed with the theoretical opportunities the internet offers independent content creators. On their blog, the team discussed the experiences of Radiohead and John Freese, the drummer of Nine Inch Nails, who gave their music albums away for free online and asked people for donations. They celebrated this new freedom as a revolution that empowers independent producers and ends the reign of big media conglomerates. *The Cosmonaut* was

¹ The information in this section originated from an interview with Nicolás Alcalá (2011) as well as social media output of Riot Cinema Collective.

meant to follow these and similar examples and prove that films can be successfully financed and distributed in today's digital age without the help of established media companies.

Enthused by those opportunities, the team devised a document they called “The Plan,” laying out a financing and distribution approach for *The Cosmonaut* that centered on a day-and-date release, crowdfunding and making the film and all its source materials freely available to the public. When the first plan was published online, *The Cosmonaut's* budget was 450,000 Euros. This quickly grew to 860,000 Euros. The goal was to use crowdfunding, sponsorship, investors and deferred payments to raise the money. *The Cosmonaut* was supposed to be different from traditional film productions. The internet was not seen as the enemy but as an ally:

Until now it was the exhibitor or distributor who decided when and how you had access to the film. The Internet has changed that paradigm and it is now the users who decide how to enjoy the contents. But above all, they decide when. With this in mind we planned on designing a distribution system adapted to this new reality - a system that had the spectator and his needs in mind above all else. (Alcalá 2011)

Of the total budget of 860.000

AMOUNT NEEDED FOR	ACHIEVED	TO BE ACHIEVED
Salaries	82.016,89 €	220.365,46 €
Preproduction	46.491,25 €	18.810,51 €
Filming	257.802,85 €	0 €
Postproduction	69.654,79 €	110.330,00 €
Distribution	25.828,25 €	28.700,00 €
TOTAL	481.794,03 €	378.205,97 €

Achieved so far

PROVENANCE	AMOUNT
Merchandising	138.061,52 € ¹
Private investors	260.880,38 €
Awards and others	22.906,57 €
ICAA grant for the use of new technologies in Transmedia	99.595,00 €
Team members who have swapped their salary for an investment percentage	123.640,27 € ¹

Total amount obtained via crowdfunding:
398.941,90 €

Figure 1: *The Cosmonaut's* budget (Riot Cinema Collective 2012a).

One of the central elements of Riot Cinema's marketing and financing strategy for *The Cosmonaut* were individual producers and investors. Investors paid a minimum of 1,000 Euros for a portion of the final film's profits. For as little as 2 Euros, everyone could become a producer of the film. Producers would receive a batch, online access to behind the scenes information and a credit in the final film. To recruit producers, Riot Cinema organized campus parties, concerts with indie bands and space-themed promotional events such as “Yuri's Nights” (named after Yuri Gagarin, the first human in space). On 28 July 2009, *The Cosmonaut* got its first “producer” at a campus party in Madrid - Rodrigo Pineda paid 13 Euros. Three days later, the number of producers grew to 100. After another two months, *The Cosmonaut* welcomed its 1,000th producer. By 25 April 2011, 3,000 producers had joined the project. In the end, *The Cosmonaut* had over 4,500 producers.

With marketing and pre-production successfully underway, the first teaser trailer went online in January 2010. The soundtrack for the trailer was provided by Edward Artemyev, who also created the soundtrack for Tarkovsky's *Solaris*. In the spirit of openness and inclusiveness, Riot Cinema asked their fans to remix the teaser trailer. The team received over a hundred remixes. This number, as well as the fact that Edward Artemyev could be convinced to support a project of novice filmmakers, indicate how successful the marketing campaign for *The Cosmonaut* was at this point and the extent to which Riot Cinema was able to enthuse the public for their project.

Riot Cinema continued to make use of the opportunities digital media provides to independent content creators. They crowdsourced tasks like location scouting, prop acquisition, extras casting as well as identifying support services and companies through the platform Wreckamovie. Wreckamovie was developed by the people behind fan film project *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning*. The platform allows fans to participate in the production of a film, enabling collaborative filmmaking. On the financing side, Riot Cinema celebrated a huge success in the summer of 2010. After being turned down a year earlier, Riot Cinema received a grant of almost 100,000 Euros from The National Film Board of Spain (ICAA) in August 2010 for the transmedia portion of *The Cosmonaut*. In addition, in May 2011, Riot Cinema published on their blog that they came to an agreement with the Russian-Latvian co-producer Phenomena Films, supporting them with money and production services.

Three years after the idea for *The Cosmonaut* was born, Riot Cinema Collective concluded its pre-production. In May 2011, the team went to Latvia to shoot its film. Everything was ready: the production budget was raised, the actors were casted, all crew and cast were in Latvia, the team had obtained space suits, props and all the necessary equipment. Everything was set for principle shooting to start on 4 June 2011. But, on 26 May 2011, three weeks after the co-production agreement was announced and one week before the scheduled start of principle shooting, Riot Cinema announced that their Russian-Latvian co-producer had pulled out, leaving a 40,000 Euros financing gap. The crowdfunding campaign *Save The Cosmonaut* was born. Riot Cinema Collective turned to its supporters again – by now a big group of people who had either helped to fund the film or just followed it out of interest. It only took the campaign three days to raise 60,000 Euros. In another eleven days, *Save The Cosmonaut* had raised 130,000 Euros: 300% of the amount needed.

Due to the successful campaign, principle shooting began as scheduled on 4 June 2011. Once again, the team used the internet to involve their fans. It live broadcast the film shoot on a number of days through Livestream.com. Seven weeks later, on 22 July 2011, the end of principle photography was announced through a blog entry. Twenty months of post-production and increased marketing activities followed. The first official trailer was published in November 2011. On 29 May 2012, Riot Cinema announced: "We have finished the editing!" (Riot Cinema Collective 2012b). A number of magazine articles, festival screenings, conference presentations, interviews and promotional parties were announced on the project's blog and through social media.

The preparation for the world premiere was underway. The team planned a live screening with actors, acting out certain parts of the narrative, and a big party in Madrid. One day later, the same event was to be held in Barcelona. Canal+ bought the television rights and showed the film in a parallel premiere on the same day. Four years in the making, the film culminated in a

day-and-date release. On 14 May 2013, five years after the idea for *The Cosmonaut* was conceived, the film had its world premiere in Madrid in front of 1,000 people. One day later, another 1,000 fans saw the Barcelona premiere. During the week that followed, the film could be seen all over Spain, in London, Moscow, France, Canada, Kiev, Los Angeles, Ecuador. Three different VOD platforms showed *The Cosmonaut* (Filmin, Yomvi, Nubeox), in addition to the film's website. The production team had accomplished what it set out to achieve.

The Cosmonaut's story, nevertheless, did not end here. The film had to recoup its costs. Most crew had deferred their payments. Riot Cinema had planned for donations, VOD income, sales of DVDs, cinema screenings and international sales to earn the income required, not only to pay everyone but also to make a healthy profit and prove the validity of their vision of a new business model for independent films in the digital age. However, this was not about to happen. The film reviews were almost all devastating. *The Cosmonaut* received an average rating of 4.0 over 10 on IMDb (n.d.) – a disastrous result for a film that is the child of the internet and the public. Viewing figures and, subsequently, income were disappointingly low.

On 6 July 2013, Riot Cinema Collective (2013) turned to their fans through yet another blog post, somewhat apologizing for disappointing artistic expectations:

We've received savage reviews. Most of them, we understand. We've done a non-narrative film, which not everyone likes. It's also a kind of poetic movie, far from the commercial conventions. Far from it for us to want to be pretentious, as some people has said. It's a movie that comes from a personal view, which you connect with or you don't, and lot of people hasn't connected to it. We understand it and we're sorry some of you haven't liked it. [sic]

The team still celebrated their achievement, perhaps rightly so. They had built a huge audience online, raised almost half a million Euros in funding, made a feature film that did not disappoint on a technical level; it had merely failed to tell a story that the masses appreciated. The team went on in their attempt to sell the film, set up screenings, entering it into festivals, finding distribution partners, and so forth, albeit with little success.

Overall, Riot Cinema Collective had created, in addition to a feature film, 34 short films, a Facebook Fiction, one book, multiple behind-the-scenes videos, plenty of parties and marketing events. In the end, *The Cosmonaut* had eighty theatrical and semi-theatrical screenings in fourteen countries during its premiere week (most of them requested by fans). 8,000 people have seen it in cinemas. 10,000 people watched it on Canal+. The film collected almost 27,000 VOD views (through Amazon, iTunes and smaller Spanish VOD platforms), amounting to VOD revenue of 1,800 Euros (the same amount the aggregator charged to put the film on VOD platforms). 17,580 people watched the film on its website. Of these, 2.5% decided to pay for it an average of 3.55 Euros. *The Cosmonaut* had 47,000 official P2P downloads and 38,000 views for its most popular, illegally uploaded, YouTube version. 505 DVD-books and 81 USBs of the film have been sold. The transmedia episodes received 80,000 views. Despite being represented by Imagina International Sales, one of the biggest agents in Spain, the film did not get any international sales. It was officially selected for twenty-eight film festivals.²

² All numbers taken from a blog entry on 18 May 2014 (Riot Cinema Collective 2014).

The story of *The Cosmonaut* had one final episode. In early 2014, Riot Cinema Collective received a letter from The National Film Board of Spain (ICAA), the agency that gave them a grant of almost 100,000 Euros. In the letter, the ICAA asked to be reimbursed 73,000 Euros of the grant money. The agency argued that their funding rules state that a producer has to cover 30% of a project's costs himself. Riot Cinema had stated that the deferred payments for the creators of the transmedia material would account for this 30%. This was acceptable when the funding agency made the decision to award the project, but since the payments were never made, the ICAA no longer accepted this argument and asked for the money back. Riot Cinema Collective entered into a legal battle with the ICAA, using their last money to pay the lawyers. The company itself is bankrupt and had to be dissolved. To make matters worse, Riot Cinema Collective lost their court case against the ICAA, losing, as a result, their only remaining asset, *The Cosmonaut* – everything the three novice filmmakers had worked on for more than six years of their lives.

The Cosmonaut: Story Elements and Structure

The making of *The Cosmonaut* is a tale of ambition, success and failure. Moreover, on a meta-level, the production is itself a story that has traditional narrative elements and follows established storytelling structures. It features a hero, Riot Cinema Collective, who desired to make a feature-length film and to revolutionize independent filmmaking. Like most heroes, Riot Cinema Collective also has a weakness. Nobody on the team had any filmmaking experience prior to *The Cosmonaut*. Yet, they attempted to revolutionize independent filmmaking – an ambition that was too big for any hero in a similar situation. The hero's opponent in the story of *The Cosmonaut* is the traditional film industry. The hero creates a plan (Riot Cinema Collective even calls it "The Plan") to achieve her desire. Once set on its path, Riot Cinema Collective is confronted with obstacles concerning funding, marketing and the distribution of the film. The premiere of *The Cosmonaut* resolves the main dramatic tension – the film is made. The ensuing lawsuit against the ICAA presents the hero's final battle against the opponent. The story ends with a heartbreaking self-revelation that, despite the film being made, Riot Cinema Collective failed in its attempt to make back its financial investments. In the end, the hero has learned new things about the world and herself and has therefore ultimately changed (reached a new equilibrium):

This film is witness to one of the hardest things we have done in our lives. Shooting "The Cosmonaut" became a point of no return. Trapped. We couldn't come back. We couldn't not shoot. Had we done so, our careers would have ended. We would have let everyone down, our prestige down the drain. Our first and last movie... and it was almost so.

(Blurb about the behind-the-scenes documentary 'Fighting of'; Riot Cinema Collective 2012a).

To John Truby (2008), a hero's desire, weakness, opponent, plan, battle, self-revelation and new equilibrium (a changed hero in the familiar world) are the seven key elements to any story. All of them can be located in the story of the making of *The Cosmonaut*.

Indeed, the production of *The Cosmonaut* not only contains the key elements of a story but also follows established narrative structures. The 8-sequence structure is an extension of the traditional 3-act structure in storytelling. It was proposed by Paul Gulino (2004) and builds on the teachings of Frank Daniel. Following the model of the 8-sequence structure, any story starts

with an undisturbed status quo that is disturbed by the “point of attack” (sequence one). For *The Cosmonaut*, this inciting incident is discovering the *Poetics for Cosmonaut* and the inspiration it provided. The story was set on its way.

Sequence two elaborates the main dramatic tension of a story and a commitment by the protagonist to push for the set goal. In *The Cosmonaut*, it is the decision to make a feature film and with it the dramatic tension whether the film will be completed or not. The third sequence starts the second act of a story. First obstacles arise and the audience learns why things may be more difficult than they initially seemed. In the case of Riot Cinema, the audience learns about a budget of over 800,000 Euros, a crowdfunding campaign and a planned day-and-date release. This was a tremendously ambitious project, trying to reinvent independent filmmaking. The stakes were high, the obstacles plenty.

The fourth sequence builds up to the midpoint and the first culmination of the story. *The Cosmonaut* had a successful funding campaign. Riot Cinema’s plan seemed to work. The team was in Latvia, ready for principle shooting to start. But then the co-producer pulled out, creating the first real crisis and culminating in the *Save The Cosmonaut* campaign. After the intensity of the first culmination, the fifth sequence is often more romantic. It usually explores sub-plot and characters. After the successful *Save The Cosmonaut* campaign, the attention shifted away from funding to behind the scenes coverage. Riot Cinema and *The Cosmonaut* team were on an emotional high. They were making the film they wanted to make. The audience learned more about the work on set. Live broadcasts and diaries from the set allowed for viewers to develop a deeper connection with the protagonists.

Sequence six ends the second act. It is the story’s culmination, resolving the main dramatic tension. The goal is either reached, not reached or has changed. In *The Cosmonaut*, completing the film was always the main dramatic tension. Sequence six therefore builds up to the film’s world premiere. After countless little obstacles, different cuts and an intensifying marketing campaign, *The Cosmonaut* had not only built a huge following but also had its premieres in sold-out theaters in Madrid and Barcelona. At this point, the story could be over. But the main culmination of sequence six creates new tension for sequence seven. *The Cosmonaut* was now a product. It was made, had been released, but now had to make back its production money. Like most seventh sequences, the story of *The Cosmonaut* features a twist. *The Cosmonaut* was not a film audiences appreciated. It received negative reviews, low to no income and one of its funders, the ICAA, demanded its money back.

The final sequence features the final battle and a resolution. Again, both can be found in the story of *The Cosmonaut*. Riot Cinema Collective went into a legal battle with the ICAA – the final battle that would decide whether the team and their investors could hold onto the rights to *The Cosmonaut* or whether they would be transferred to the ICAA. The hero had undergone a transformation, as the following excerpt from a very long reflexive blog post indicates:

Because in the end, we feel happily frustrated. We look back and we can see how we put everything we got out there. How we were the best we could be but maybe that wasn’t enough. We haven’t managed to pay our team yet. Or give back our investors their money. And that’s hard. And makes hesitate about many many things: was it really enough? did we do enough? maybe it wasn’t the time or the project to expect a return? were we too ambitious? naïve maybe? did we dreamed too high? [sic] (Riot Cinema Collective 2014).

Conclusion

Digital media and the internet have changed many facets of film industries around the globe. Film production, marketing, distribution, story structures and copyright issues have been impacted, experimented with and debated in academia as well as by practitioners. In traditional popular filmmaking, producers could rely on pre-existing audiences and mass exhibition. Independent film could rarely afford such practices.

The Cosmonaut might be an example of a changing landscape in film marketing. The point is not just that the making of the film follows a conventional narrative structure; the production of the film itself became a story, one that was told in “real-time,” while it unfolded:

[Our fans] can live a two-year experience instead of a two-hour experience. That’s because we are telling them what we are doing every day. And they can live it with us. (Alcalá 2011)

The parallel between the production of *The Cosmonaut*, of course, and narrative techniques was unintended by the filmmakers, although the above quote seems to suggest that Riot Cinema had at least a vague idea this was the case. It is probably also safe to assume that they would have preferred the traditional happy ending over the tragedy that concluded their journey. Nevertheless, while life itself is never as clear-cut as the plot points in a screenplay, the audience-building success of *The Cosmonaut* (including its successful funding) makes its story relevant to other independent filmmakers.

The Cosmonaut demonstrates that the making of a film can be a compelling narrative. All films begin with a point of attack (idea) followed by a lock-in (the decision to make the film). All films have a main tension (will it be completed?), a plan, obstacles, ups and downs, a resolution (will the film get finished or not?) with further implications, a new goal (distribution/reviews/income) and a hero (filmmaker) that transforms throughout this journey. Independent filmmakers can tell these stories while making films, and they can actively highlight traditional storytelling elements and narrative techniques around their film’s production for a more compelling audience experience.³

The story of a film’s production is usually told retrospectively, not “live.” Riot Cinema Collective, on the other hand, blogged and used social media to update their audience on the progress of their filmmaking journey. For six years, the team was transparent. They told a story about a story, and by doing so, acquired a sizable audience over time and raised 400,000 Euros.

Sharing the story of a film's making attracts audiences, yet *The Cosmonaut* received a score of only 4.0 on IMDb, got countless bad reviews and did not break even financially. As a one-off product, *The Cosmonaut* looks like a failure. On the other hand, it was watched over 200,000 times and raised 400,000 Euros through crowdfunding. People were interested in the story of the making of the film, not the film itself. They were interested in process rather than the product. By all conventional indexes, *The Cosmonaut* is a disappointing film. The story of its making, however, was popular.

³ Not dissimilar to documentary filmmaking structuring real-life stories around traditional storytelling principles (see for instance Curran Bernard 2007).

Treating the filmmaking process as a “story to tell” changes the audience-building process from a one-off campaign for a finished product to an ongoing process. In this scenario, time and commitment can replace money as the main driver of an audience-building campaign. Extending the story of a film by telling the story of its making is one way to overcome the problem of findability among the abundance of competing small-scale film products in today’s digital age. It (a) helps to create communities and audiences, who (b) individually experience the making of a film and (c) view a film merely as an end-product while “watching” takes place over an extended period of time.

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Film Festivals and Cinematic Events Bridging the Gap between the Individual and the Community: Cinema and Social Function in Conflict Resolution

Elisa Costa Villaverde

Abstract

Out of the many roles that a film festival and other forms of cinematic events can play within the community, that of a mediating site for debate and reflection on conflict resolution is perhaps one of the most remarkable ones. Film as a medium of reflection on human nature is at its most potent when accompanied by a forum of debate that reaches the community broadly. A film showing situations of conflict and/or culture clash always involves an individual intellectual exercise for the viewer. A screening followed by a debate with the presence of some of the film agents and with wide media coverage means an even more intense intellectual exercise which usually involves a first step into the conflict resolution process: growing a collective awareness of the need for social reflection, as well as the identification of the causes of clash. The film festival can constitute a window to myriads of perspectives on conflict resolution through a collective exercise in analysis of difference and diversity. This article highlights the role that an International Film Festival can play in the inner dialogue of communities and for that purpose it refers to the particular context of the International Film Festival of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The Canary Islands are a peripheral European frontier and a strategic gate to three continents: Africa, America, and Europe. The flow of African populations migrating to Europe in the last fifteen years has become a considerable point of conflict in the social map of the region and the presence of the film festival in the islands has had its own role in changing perceptions of a situation that ultimately impacts on the whole European continent.

Keywords: Film festivals and community, cinema and social function, film and migration, the Canary Islands, cinematic events, social conflict resolution

Introduction: Background and Context

In the complex global crossroads of twenty-first-century societies, heavily marked by social restlessness, severe inequality, cultural crossings as well as many forms of conflict and violence across the globe, the international academic community should certainly feel the ethical commitment to study, explore, analyse and revise the current state of social and human sciences; but, above all, it should also feel the moral need to think social change proactively and to participate in that change by contributing engaging projects and research activities that bring significant changes for both the local and the global communities. Focusing on the audiovisual media, with particular attention to cinema and film-related events, this article highlights the significance that film festivals, and cinema events in general, can have for the development of local communities, particularly through their partial contribution to conflict resolution.

While the relation between film and cultural communities has been widely researched, practically since the onset of Film Studies as a scholarly discipline, attention to the impact of film festivals and similar cinematic events has been somewhat neglected in the literature of urban studies, social sciences, cultural studies or sociology, to name a few. Nonetheless, with the turn of the twentieth century, characterised by the development of a culture heavily focused on consumption and leisure activities, a number of authors turned their attention to shaping innovative perspectives on “the power” of cinema, the interaction between cinema-going and community, and/or the community of cinema and film screenings as indicators of urban vitality. Forsher (2003) pointed out the strong relationship between film theatres and our contemporary definition of public space, and reviewed different attempts to define community and place, from Rousseau (1968) and Tocqueville (1971) to Habermas (1974) and Arendt (1979); attempts which have been historically linked to such terms as “public sectors” and “public realm” (Forsher 2).

Academic events like the *European Cinema Research Forum*, or the IAFOR *Eurofilm Conference*, among others, represent some of the international scholarly projects engaging with countless perspectives in an analysis of the concept of cinema and the community. The existence of these events ultimately answers the question posed by Maty Bâ and Ness in their editorial presentation of the special issue of *Crossings: Journal of Migration & Culture* “Media(te) migrations, migrant(s) disciplines: contrasting approaches to crossings”: “What happens if one gathers scholars at crossroads of disciplines, theories, practices, methodologies and so on, in order to freely examine types of crossings – within or outside a Euro-American sphere – via inter-multi- and/or trans-approaches filtered through visual media?” (177). A question such as this is certainly worth asking when considering the role that filmic events can have within the community and how scholars can contribute their expertise to the community-shared act of searching for global solutions to points of cultural clash. By bringing together university scholars working throughout the globe and inviting all kinds of media professionals with the stated aim of becoming “a remarkable exercise in cross-cultural and interdisciplinary discussion, which encourages academics and scholars to meet and exchange ideas and views in a forum encouraging lively but respectful dialogue” (*Eurofilm* 2014 presentation and CFP

website), a solid ground for discussion is established. This approach to the study of film is particularly enhanced by the lively representation of multiple disciplines, theories and practices within and outside the Euro-American sphere.

Media professionals, including film and documentary-makers, have long since recognized cultural differences (ultimately, all ideologies have their root in cultural codes and values) as the inner cause of all forms of friction when they try to explain conflict through various narratives, as well as in their systematic exploration of ideas, words, and artistic expression. Of course, scholarly research has not ignored the study of cinema in relation to cultural clash, but further effort needs to be done to construct thought, reflections and analysis relevant to the twenty-first century context, as well as to contribute answers to the aforementioned questions. By analysing the role that the International Film Festival of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria plays within a local community that is highly polarised in its perception of illegal immigrants, the discussion presented in the following pages intends to draw general conclusions that can be of universal interest to studies of migration, cinema and community.

The case of the Canary Islands, a peripheral European frontier territory where the massive flow of African population migrating to Europe in recent decades has certainly become a considerable point of conflict in the social map of the Islands, serves as one of the many cases we could have chosen to illustrate cinema's social function. In that permanent system of cultural exchanges that the Atlantic has been for centuries, the Canary Islands – a strategic gate to three continents: Africa, America, and Europe, as well as a historical witness to the Atlantic diasporas – are undergoing a transformation process which has seen the place change from a port of call to a major migration arrival point, receiving migrant flows from Latin America (mainly during the 1990s and early 2000s) and West Africa (from the 1990s until the present day). The presence of the audiovisual industry and of numerous film-related events including an International Film Festival in its biggest capital city, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, have played a role, not only in the ongoing transformation of its urban space, but also in a collective attitude and position towards a conflictual situation of cultural clash, one that is ultimately mirrored across the whole European continent.

Of the many roles that a film festival and other forms of cinematic events can play within the community – e.g. as a business, economic or educational platform, etc. – that of mediating site for debate and reflection on conflict resolution is perhaps one of the most remarkable ones in terms of its social function. Film as a medium of reflection on human nature is at its most potent when accompanied by a forum of debate that reaches the community broadly. Watching a film that represents situations of conflict and/or situations of cultural clash is always an individual intellectual exercise for the viewer. A screening followed by a debate with the presence of some of the film's protagonists and creators, together with wide mass media coverage implies an even more intense, collective intellectual exercise. This often involves taking a first step into the always-complex process of conflict resolution: a collective awareness of the need for social reflection as well as the identification of the situation's underlying problems. The film festival or film event is usually a window to myriads of perspectives on conflict resolution

through a collective exercise of analysis of difference, diversity and a whole universe of related subjects.

Clear examples of this function can be observed in film festivals with a particular focus on conflict, such as those promoting human rights (see www.humanrightsfilmnetwork.org). However, the participation in conflict resolutions is not an exclusive function of such festivals, as we will see in the case of the International Film Festival of Las Palmas. The trajectory of this film festival, in its seventeenth run in 2016, has moved in many different directions and while none of them aimed explicitly at dealing with the theme of migration in a major form, the festival has undoubtedly had an imprint on the development of the urban and cultural spaces in the city, as well as constituting a massive exercise in hosting and welcoming. The birth of the festival, moreover, coincided with the beginning of an unprecedented level of immigration, both in the islands and mainland Spain.

Spain has traditionally seen more emigration than immigration, particularly during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to the political and economic instability of the nation. The three-year bloody civil war of the 1940s and the four decades of severe, fascist dictatorship likewise led to exiling and large-scale. Seen from a historical perspective, therefore, the transformation of Spain from a nation of emigration and exile into a nation receiving immigrants happened during an extremely brief period of time, essentially the past two decades. Contemporary local culture and society are still adapting to the new social patterns and the human geography brought about by this phenomenon. The significance of these rapid changes in the socio-political and cultural context is openly reflected and represented in a variety of current forms of representation in film, media and the arts; including forums of debate at cinema-related events.

Ilie (1981) referred to Spain as a country with a deeply-rooted tradition of migration and exile, claiming this as an inherent condition to the Spanish centenary culture. He even illustrated this historical phenomenon with a lexical and semantic exploration of the presence of migration and exile in the Spanish language, which has imprinted endless terms to express these conditions: “*desterrados, exiliados, emigrados, transterrados, peregrinos, despatriados, y transplantados*” (Ilie 1981: 17).¹ At the time of the formulation of his theory of inner exile, it would have been totally unconceivable that only some twenty years later, Spain would become a host country and an arrival point for thousands of both legal and illegal immigrants.

Western societies at the turn of the twentieth century and the early decades of the twenty-first century are characterised by their heterogeneity and by having lost their traditionally “innocent homogeneity” (Innerarity 2001), a term used to explain how cultures come to ignore difference, plurality and diversity within themselves. In a way, the new theories of multiculturalism are

¹ “Exiles, emigrants, pilgrims, expelled, transplanted.” Note that the semantic field for this concept in English is shorter than in Spanish and, therefore, the Spanish vocabulary expressing these and other related notions contains a longer list of words than that of the vocabulary existing in English.

nothing but the development and reaffirmation of the previous ones, such as Julia Kristeva's thoughts in her *Strangers to Ourselves* (1989), which represents a landmark in the theoretical formulations of ethnicity and gender both in cultural and literary studies. According to her psychoanalytical critical approach, Kristeva was the first theorist to postulate that the ethical and political implications of the social relation are interior to the psyche. Again, as far back as the late 1980s, multiple attempts to forge a theoretical framework for studies of ethnicity, migration and "otherness" were born, with varying degrees of success. It certainly was, and still is, a daunting task, as the literature on these subjects has been produced in overwhelming quantities since the late 1960s and early 1970s, and the study of these topics involves many secondary factors.

Ethnicity and anthropology, political interpretations, cultural translation, "otherness" and "foreignness", migration and diaspora, inner and outer exile, and many other interrelated concepts have all been framed under theoretical approaches which converge in twenty-first-century readings of the multicultural society in an increasingly globalised world. These theories generally share the same essential premise: the discovery of pluralism within what we used to consider as a homogeneous, compact social cluster. In other words, this means blurring the line between what we consider as ours and what we consider as foreign, between what we think of as familiar and what we think of as unfamiliar. In this sense, these theories offer a more sophisticated reworking of Kristeva's departure point, that we are strangers to ourselves.

Although Spain was largely unaware of all these theories and debates at a time that they were commonplace in most Western nations, such discussions have become of utmost importance in recent years. Spain is arguably experiencing, one century later, what Britain and Europe saw at the time of the first waves of mass immigration in the early twentieth century. The reversal of the immigration scenario is striking: in a little over a decade, the Canaries went from being a population that emigrated massively to Latin America, mainly to Cuba and Venezuela, to now receiving significant numbers of migrants from those two countries and from all over Central and South America. However, it is the massive African influx that has become the socio-cultural and political story of the moment. Given the desperate situation in Sub-Saharan Africa and in some areas of the Maghreb, the unsolved process of decolonisation in the Western Sahara, and the considerable level of development that the Canaries achieved in Spain prior to the financial crisis scenario, the islands ironically became the unexpected hosts to "the new slaves of the 21st century;" the term used by the Spanish mass media to denote African immigrants arriving in crowded, precarious wooden boats. It is equally ironic that, having passively observed the slave trade over centuries, the Canaries could not elude taking an active role in managing one of the world's biggest diasporas and, crucially, the most severe, humanitarian crisis in Europe since WWII.

Apart from the difference in scale, it is no exaggeration to claim that the Canaries are now experiencing a similar situation to that of the London at the time when the commodities of the empire were unloaded at Canary Wharf, named after the islands at the request of the British trade shipping companies bringing fruit and wine (among other Canarian goods) during the golden years of the English liners; or to the London of the arrival of the Caribbean migrants in

the 1950s. However, in a sudden unexpected twist of fate, after the financial collapse of Spain in the 2010s (with the resulting bankruptcies following the still unresolved, deep financial crisis), the Canaries – traditionally behind the level of development of the mainland territory – rapidly reverted to being one of the poorest regions in Europe. It registered an alarmingly-high record of unemployment (34.1% according to *El País* 15 April 2014, and up to 65.3% among the young population); poverty (39.3% of the population live under the threshold of poverty, *El País* 16 May 2014); and the highest school dropout rate in Europe (28.3% Europa Press, europapress.es accessed 14 July 2014), in addition to having a poorly-educated population in general by European standards. This sudden societal collapse thwarted what had previously seemed to be the creation of an exciting new melting pot in the Atlantic.

That emerging melting pot had been based to a great extent in a reconfiguring of the concept of insular identity into a new social map of intercultural coexistence, brought about by a new human geography, the migrants. Already a point of friction between the local and the immigrant community, the dramatic drop in levels of development suddenly heightened tensions and took the region, to all intents and purposes, back in time by decades. Some local and national media have compared this retrogression of the archipelago to the pre-democracy/post-dictatorship economic scenario. Data, such as the gap between the rich and the poor – which has risen 25% between 2007 and 2012 (*Consejo Económico y Social*, CES) and meaning that 0.2 % of the population owes 80% of the islands' wealth (*Agencia Tributaria*, Spanish Government) – are regularly published for social debate. Professor Martínez García (2015) from the University of La Laguna (Tenerife), sociologist, principal investigator and director of a national research and knowledge transfer project on the specific subjects of economy, inequality and social polarisation, highlights the current unprecedented levels of retrogression in the Canaries, unseen since the times of the Spanish Civil War (8).

The International Film Festival of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria

Current discourses on modern Atlantic transnational migrations are often reflected in images of conflict presented at cinematic events; images in which the community can see itself reflected. The ensuing debate can prove to be a departure point towards conflict resolution by focussing on how the individual relates to that point of conflict in and with the local community. The theme of cultural clash viewed from the public perspective has been present in different cinematic events in the capital city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, with the International Film Festival having by far the biggest impact.

Founded in 1999, the International Film Festival of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is the largest in the region, one of the biggest in Spain, and certainly an outstanding example of the evolution of a festival and how context and surrounding circumstances can determine and change a festival's direction. Whether attracted by the presence of international celebrities, the extensive media coverage or by the interest in the event itself, the public participates extremely enthusiastically in the festival. Presentations and debates by film-makers, producers, or performing artists have been systematically fully booked (or nearly fully booked) for the

previous fifteen festivals (information obtained from the Film Festival organisation in unpublished interviews and supported by the publications catalogue resulting from the Festival, held at the Canarian Film Archives).

The festival's sound audience success and the community's enthusiasm has been more or less consistent. Admittedly the festival had a timid birth with a hesitant response from the public, but it rapidly attained significant success thanks to excellent organisation and large audiences. The deep financial crisis in the country led to a decline in the programming of events due to a lack of funds, but this was followed by a rebirth, renovation and recovery of its outstanding screening programme.

The 2016 edition of the festival attained a total of 14,549 spectators/participants: 10,722 people attended the screening of 68 feature films and 60 short films from across the globe, with 3,777 participating in parallel activities such as discussions with filmmakers, actors and producers presentations; workshops, lectures; concerts; Symposium/Journées; opening and closing ceremonies, and other such events (source of data: Ayuntamiento de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria official website; Las Palmas G.C. City Council online site, see bibliography). Other activities programmed during the festival include directors' retrospectives, tributes to directors and stars of classic cinema, special sections (of many different types), round tables, debates and the release of academic publications, among others. Carnero Rosell (2011) accounts for the crucial public response to the festival since its early beginnings:

Empezó titubeante, con una dispersión de las salas de proyección que hizo que el potencial espectador [...], quizás por pereza, quizás por desconocimiento, lo entendiera como una muestra más (una serie de proyecciones a lo largo de una semana, de películas más o menos interesantes).

En el momento en que el festival decidió contar con la sede de proyección única de los cines Monopol (uno de los cines más importantes por su aportación a la cultura audiovisual en Canarias) y a medida que va tomando forma el rumbo de su programación, el festival vive una nueva etapa de crecimiento. El espectador empieza a tomar conciencia de lo que significa tener un festival de estas características.

El festival se va enriqueciendo a través de actividades paralelas y de las publicaciones dedicadas al cine que cada año aportan análisis y reflexiones, creando una bibliografía única en la historia del cine en Canarias por su calidad y variedad. (Carnero Rosell 2011: 109)²

² [The festival] set off erratically, with scattered screenings across town that made the potential viewers – possibly out of idleness, possibly out of unawareness – believe the event to be just any other ordinary film exhibition (that is, just a series of more or less interesting film projections during one week). / As soon as the festival chose the emblematic Monopol Cinema (one of the most important cinemas in the Canary Islands for its contribution to the audiovisual culture in the region) as its only screening centre, and as the line ups gradually made their mark, a period of growth followed. Viewers became aware of the

The growth strategy for the festival was based on the combination of two crucial factors: on the one hand, an innovative, thought-provoking programme containing challenging content like auteur cinema, Southeast-Asian contemporary cinema, new filmic trends and languages. This programme gave the festival a unique profile and established it as one of Spain's most distinctive and prestigious. The annual presence of a prestigious jury made up of reputable names in both national and international cinema, including film stars Ed Harris, Susan Sarandon, Peter Coyote, Sofia Loren, Omar Sharif, Leslie Caron, Alberto Sordi, Manuel de Oliveira, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, among others, assured the overwhelming loyalty of the public. The festival rapidly turned into a platform for exhibiting challenging films inside and outside commercial screens and, most importantly, for dialogue and debate for the local community.

As previously stated, the festival has never had a special edition exclusively devoted to the illegal migration phenomenon in the region, and yet it is the contention of this paper that it is precisely the defocalisation and decentralisation of this subject matter that has helped to foreground and to diffuse the issue of conflict (that is, the conflict of local population rejecting illegal migrants due to xenophobic tendencies) from a different perspective than the one traditionally employed in canonical news editions by the established media (systematically presented in terms only of conflict and controversy). Indeed, among the many universal topics raised by the film exhibitions, the theme of the individual versus the community has been the most prevalent. The public participation in such a debate, from whichever of the unlimited perspectives it may take, inevitably invokes a reflection on clash and conflict. This debate is framed in such a way that does not differ much from the core of the discussion about the arrival of illegal immigration to the Canary Islands over the last two decades. These discussions constitute, therefore, one of the many chances afforded by the festival to bridge the gap between the individual and the community.

Not only is it possible to change views and attitudes towards cultural clash without focusing directly on the subject of migration, but it is indeed also effective to do so from other topical perspectives. Philosopher Claudio Canaparo observes that political approaches to the issue of migration, such as the canonical media approaches, tend to adopt a conflictual perspective:

Traditional political approaches currently treat migration issues as a newspaper reporter carries out a criminal's section of a Mediterranean media that is dealing with everyday social events or, alternatively, as part of the State's policy making activities. Classical social approaches consider migration in relation to general categories like 'society', 'culture', 'education', etc. As standard analysis these approaches prevail within the majority of authors and are grounded in a sort of

importance of having an event of this kind. / The festival keeps expanding and enriching itself through its parallel activities and yearly publications dedicated to cinema studies. Through their quality and diversity, these publications offer analysis and reflection that has helped build a unique literature in the history of film in the Canary Islands.

social determinism justified by philosophical naturalism and/or by a financial form of capitalism. (Canaparo 2012: 195)

An event like a film festival can offer room to approach and present the issue of illegal migration outside of the canonical media and political forum. The organisation of parallel activities such as debates, round tables, lectures, talks, panels with the filmmakers (actors, directors, producers, and others), as is the case in the International Film Festival of Las Palmas, offers the public a multi-dimensional space characterised by varied perspectives; the kind of forum the established media canon usually prevents from taking place. The social function of activities like these allows for a collective reflection on an issue that the individual regularly tends to perceive only as conflictual in nature. Even if the discussion is not openly about migration, by debating the issue of the individual versus the community, prevailing doxas about immigration are indirectly challenged.

The festival-going public is also invited to read images in a way that is open to different perceptions and interpretations; not simply as controversy. This differs from the way the public is fed canonical media images, such as the thousands of dramatic images, repeatedly shown in Spanish media, of African immigrants arriving in rescue boat, or much worse, adrift in inhuman conditions. Unfortunately, on too many occasions, these images are accompanied by information that means spectators can only read them as a threat to the local population, a controversial issue, as one provoking dispute, and ultimately, as a form of conflict. However, dissenting voices have emerged from different social sectors strongly criticising this one-sided presentation of images and have long advocated a comprehensive, multi-perspective analysis encouraging debate among the local and national population. The academic community has been a particularly active sector of society in the discussion of African migration to Europe, as have many visual artists (often through film and documentary). An international voice representing both communities, Roshini Kempadoo, a media artist and a scholar at the University of East London, depicts the reality of this situation in this lucid reflection:

By September 2010, agitated by the portrayal of “migrants arriving in Europe” I became familiar and numbed to the way the “irregular African immigrant arriving in Europe” had been visualised. Online, the result of keyword searches using Google’s image menu such as those found in the “*inmigrantes en España*” section only confirmed the images seen in the popular press. Online these thousands of photographs appear on the screen as if little points of light overwhelming the monitor’s surface. Search engines truly make a mockery of differentiation between types of images – discriminately presenting photographs associated with the key words in the simplest and literal way. These photographs – as documentary ‘windows on the world’ range from the most technically sophisticated stock photographs for commercial use, through to photographs posted on personal blogs taken with a mobile phone by a tourist whilst on their beach holiday caught up in the “event” of a boat landing on a Spanish coast. Whilst the techniques, quality and composition of the photographs vary, I stare wearily and blankly at the view of the thousands of homogenized images that

have somehow become endlessly repetitive, commonplace and normalized into our visual repertoire. There is a coherence and consistency of colour and shapes such as the bright red of the blankets, the danger flags, the Red Cross symbol, the black woollen scull caps worn by many of the African men as arrivants, or the bright orange paint of the “official” vessels being deployed. What is most disturbing in these commonly made, now stereotypical and repetitive photographs of the “boat people – the *cayuqueros*”, is the portrayal of the African arrivants at the centre of the event. Like a distant echo to the cumulative photography and texts in the popular press that visualised black folk arriving from the Caribbean to the United Kingdom in the 1950s, the African and Arab in Europe is at the Centre of the social problem itself (Hall 1984). This journey is of a different and exhausting kind; an arrival that for many Europeans appears unexpected, and is occurring in response to an altogether different economic moment of global inequality. As African men appear to be subjected to being photographed and filmed, official processing, charitable assistance they are made to stoop, sit, crouch, clustered together as a mass of non-entities. And the visual event thus created of the “migrants arriving in Europe,” contains a look back from those in the image. It is a non-communicative presence with not the slightest flicker of response in the eyes or in body language. The question is why would we, as those sitting on the shore, somehow expect or long for something else, some dialogue? (Kempadoo 2012: 242)

Kempadoo’s observations about the images of the migrants in Spain and the reaction, or rather non-reaction, to such images, applies verbatim to the present-day massive refugee crisis in Europe, which follows on from the appalling immigration scenarios in the West African Atlantic and Mediterranean (Gibraltar Strait, Lampedusa, Greece and Turkey). Furthermore, there is an indubitable link between the indifference of European institutions and governments before a humanitarian emergency and the commodification of images, photographs, and documentaries by both institutions and the majority of the population. Disturbingly, this may only be the preface to an even worse scenario to come.

Demonstrating the Social Function of Cinema

The thesis maintained in this paper concerning the role that a film festival can have in transforming the meaning of images distributed *en masse* within a community is supported by extended pedagogical observation and analysis. Throughout a seven-year period, samples of university students’ reactions towards the reading or watching of canonical pieces of news about illegal migration in the Canaries were collected and these reactions were later contrasted with more reactions by the same students after having attended film or documentary screening events followed by debates on a wide range of subjects and touching on individual versus collective identities.

The reactions (in written and spoken forms) to the media presentation of headlines picturing the arrival of illegal migrants were recorded at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, from local students enrolled in an English language and civilization course applied to translation studies with a major focus on cultural values and multiculturalism. The majority of these students manifested a perception of this subject as a problematic, controversial issue – and in a few extreme cases, students showed some alarming xenophobic tendencies, under no circumstances acceptable for any member of the higher education community. The overall evaluation is that students at higher education in the local community of the Canary Islands mostly perceive the issue of illegal migration as a situation of conflict and as a real threat to the normal functioning of the local community.

The same students then attended one or more of the varied types of cinematic events that the capital city of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria offers; either a screening by the International Film Festival (a favourite choice among students) or the University Film Society, screenings organised by the regional centre for audiovisual arts – *Gran Canaria Espacio Digital*, the *Casa Africa* (the national centre for international relations with Africa in Spain, located in Las Palmas), the *Filmoteca Canaria*, the Latin American Film Society (which organises the “*Ibértigo*” Film Festival), or similar. The common element to all the events was the presence of a debate between the audience and the filmmakers relating to the themes contained in the films. The number of students changing their attitude towards the illegal migration issue thereafter (either slightly or considerably) was striking and noteworthy.

It goes without saying that the case of students’ attitudes and reactions here mentioned is not intended as a scientific research result at all. For this purpose, a sophisticated methodology of research, a wider spectrum of social sectors, as well as an in-depth exposition of the results and the corresponding discussion would be required. We have no samples of other sectors of the population to compare with, nor a socio-political in-depth reading of the case. Nevertheless, an extended observation over seven years of different student generations showing a consistent trend in the development of their views and positions towards a same circumstance and context can be legitimately used to support and argue that film festivals (and film events in general) fulfil an important social function.

The International Film Festival of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria is a case in point, as it has evidently played a significant role in the cultural development of the local community, not least by helping to bridge the gap between the individual and the community. In this sense, its ethos is perhaps captured in this aphorism from theorist Jacques Rancière, that “each intellectual act is a path traced between a form of ignorance and a form of knowledge, a path that constantly abolishes any fixity and hierarchy” (2011: 11).

Conclusions

It is a statement of the obvious that action needs to be taken at an administrative, governmental and educational level against xenophobic representations of migration in the media. It is

equally clear that promoting cinema festivals, film screenings followed by debates in all local communities across Europe can contribute little – as a matter of fact, nothing immediate – to the unprecedented humanitarian refugee crisis. It is the moral and institutional responsibility of European governments, the European Union and other international governing bodies, such as the UN, to take emergency action and to assume, manage and solve the current humanitarian crisis. The institutional abandonment of the people and the failure of the European project generally are topics outside the scope of this article. Rather, this article upholds the need for events outside the educational, governmental, and economical institutions as essential additions to these major actions, as constituting agents for the awareness of conflict and cultural clash.

The analysis presented in this paper essentially draws the conclusion that cinema's primary social function remains unchanged since its inception, despite the profound sociocultural transformations and historical changes in civilization, as well the revolutionary changes to cinema's own forms of production and consumption. Forsher's (2003) description of the social function of cinema in the context of its early years in the first decade of the twentieth century, particularly in the context of New York, is perfectly applicable to the primary social functions fulfilled by the International Film Festival of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, albeit in a radically different time and place: "The community at large gathered and experienced a public space that represented a place that allowed various neighbourhoods, work places and cultures to interact. The common denominator was the civility of the gathering and the shared message that the films projected" (Forsher 2003: 4).

Forsher's (2003) study of the impact of leisure culture, particularly cinema, on the community is equally relevant: "The effects of culture and the development of community may be debatable in the philosophical sense, but the effects on society were profound" (17). The new socio-cultural map and human geography of the Canary Islands demands events bringing negotiation between individuals and the community as well as an awareness of changing cultural scenarios. Ideally, these events will proliferate and not disappear, as tends to be the case in post-financial crisis Spain. The strong presence of the audiovisual industry in the Canaries should be preserved, not merely on the grounds of its economic impact on the local community, but also in view of its paramount social function.

In this paper I have argued that it is through debating and reflecting publically with the community that we might further develop and map a response to xenophobia in popular imagery and in collective projections of foreignness by locals or "non-others." It is only by exploring social practices that we can rectify perceptions of difference as necessarily being a site of conflict. Furthermore, it is perhaps by directly addressing the real object of study, that is to say, by dealing with facts first, and relegating the theoretical, analytical framework to a later stage of the process, and not vice versa, that we can react to and intervene locally in instances of cultural clash. In this way, academics can contribute to the popular debate by making scholarly viewpoints on the illegal migration and asylum-seeking issue more explicit and accessible to the local community.

As a final point of reflection, we should note that our case in point, a society highly polarised by significant levels of migration, is representative of global patterns. Migration has become a massive twenty-first century phenomenon and is no foreign subject to any human community. All individuals, therefore, are able to debate and reflect on this subject within their own community. Such debates, through an act of collective thinking, should lead to heightened awareness and consideration: “speculating about experiences is not the same as *having* the experience” (Canaparo 2010: 196). The social function of cinematic and audiovisual events, identified in this case study, can play a key part in the process by acting as a bridging point between the individual and the community.

Twenty-first century humanity is a community in which all significant social issues affect the globality. As Canaparo observes:

Finally, the question is not only about how far academic approaches to migration have changed or not, because it is more relevant to acknowledge that all elements related to human knowledge have radically changed in recent years. Migration’s basic questions may not have changed substantially since the nineteenth century [...], but the current planetary environment is substantially different – and we cannot think [about] migration outside of this environment or ecological immediacy. (2010: 196)

The academic community must act according to the reality of the twenty-first century planetary environment. While we can agree that migration’s basic questions have not changed substantially since the nineteenth century, researchers should focus on analysing migration in relation to today’s radically different world, and avoid theoretical studies isolated from real contexts.

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Semiotic Approach to Media Language

Michael Ejstrup and Bjarne le Fevre Jakobsen

Abstract

Semiotic analyses of media language aim for a social and cultural interpretation of a given communication. “Be clear, not obscure:” this is one of four maxims (Grice) for optimal communication that teaches the necessity of being clear and concise. There are undoubtedly many contexts where it is important for mutual understanding that we be clear and concise; for instance, instructions for electronic equipment and for household appliances. The question is raised, however, whether semiotic brevity, clarity and concision is preferable in all contexts, and indeed, there is some evidence to the contrary. Culture and globalization means that media need to be very cognisant of the stringency with which they handle the advice to be linguistically clear and concise. The need to pay attention to situational awareness is highly visible and intrusive, and arguably crucial for the survival of free speech.

Keywords: Free speech, globalisation, linguistic obscurity, situational awareness

It is obvious that media and media language are becoming increasingly global and this globalization has had an impact on, not only language and communication in media, but also local languages and local culture. The same television programs and the same news footage are shown everywhere, albeit sometimes in “localised” versions. Global culture industries now produce and distribute consciousness for us all. At the same time, new forms of migration have brought more cultural diversity to the major cities of Europe. At the moment we live in a period of transition, where we have a world of nation states with their national languages and cultures and a global world with its emerging global language and culture, although this new global culture is not universally accepted. In the western world we have an idea of free speech, but not everything can be said and certainly not in the media.

We begin our analysis of media language with a review of H.P. Grice. For a number of years now, Grice’s *Cooperative Principle* has been a fundamental paradigm for media language. At the core of his philosophy is the relation between language’s *quantity* and *quality*.

The maxim of quantity:

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required;
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required

The maxim of quality:

1. Do not say what you believe to be false;
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

(Grice 1975)

The Gricean theory of cooperation is still a focal point in pragmatics and journalism, but more context-sensitive theories have been developed. One of these is M.A.K. Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics believes a semiotic approach is the most fruitful tool for linguistic analysis of media texts in transnational contexts:

A language is a complex semiotic system composed of multiple levels, or strata... The central stratum, the inner core of language, is that of grammar.

(Halliday 1985/1994)

Grammar is the level of “wording” in a language and is realized in the form of sound or writing, with the two levels of phonology and graphology “below” the grammar. But the wording also realises patterns of another level “higher than” itself: the stratum of semantics. This article will discuss whether these paradigms are still valid in the analysis of current media language, with a focus on the balance between “clear” and “obscure.”

The Interpersonal Context and Metafunction

The terms “clear” and “obscure” have to be considered from the contexts within which media language is set. Language constitutes itself exactly from the interpretive framework within which it is set and comprehended, and its interpersonal meta-functions focus on mechanisms

in the linguistic interaction between people. Language is a resource for establishing relations, including inter-subjectivity in the exchange of information between sender and receiver, or the lack thereof. Through language interaction, we create and maintain social relations with those people that we want to reach with our message, with media as a multichannel phenomenon. According to M.A.K. Halliday, there are, fundamentally, certain types of interpersonal meaning in every communication situation when one wishes to be “clear”, viz.:

- I. What is the sender’s (and thereby, receiver’s) role in the communication?
- II. What is exchanged between sender and receiver?

Regarding (I), one can play one of two roles. One can either be the giver or the requester regarding (II) with the aim of either giving or requesting some sort of message, and one can exchange information, or things and services, i.e. four expressive functions (Halliday 1985/1994 and Eggins 1996).

In connection with being “clear,” language as a resource has a number of well-defined expressive functions that can be designated “proposal” for “offer” and “invitation” and “proposition” for “statement” and “question”. These definitions are semantically motivated and see language from above, based on a philosophy that the exchange of information succeeds best through intention and collaboration. Hence, by analysing a certain amount of language data, we can fairly accurately measure whether the exchange of information has been successful. The language data dominate in meaning over the context, while for “obscure” it is precisely the opposite. Only analyses of context can lead us to an understanding what is really behind the blurred message, and whether it really was appropriate, and the intention, to express oneself that way.

We also find in the “obscure” language, three kinds of meaning that are simultaneously realized with an *experiential*, an *interpersonal* and a *textual* semiotic system. The aspects distinguish themselves, by being precisely a set of choices in a culturally-anchored semiotic context system, which falls apart when there are too many information gaps; such as, for example, between parallel societies. One hides behind the “obscure,” because one is afraid of the consequences. A novel can, as a proposition, tell a story; a drama can outline conflicts; a philosophical text can discuss existential questions or impose a proscribed interpretation; a textbook can present new knowledge; a journalistic text can deliver news from the big wide world etc. Some genres encompass, have encompassed, and potentially will encompass, more explosive messages compared to those parts of the world where diversity and tolerance are not lauded. The knowledge of generations has been lost because it has not been passed on. Much has been attempted to limit the exercising of language resources and choices, but this appears to be getting more difficult, in line with the developments in technology. On the other hand, propositions are developed to blur, but that nonetheless, elucidate the experiential message. Few people still claim that the earth is flat, or the centre of the universe, but their numbers are

hardly likely to increase. Others seek the future in past conditions, but history has long revealed that those who seek their future in the past have no future.

Both “clear” and “obscure” language are, as mentioned, semiotic constructions, where the amount of information is created through potentials in the understanding of realized as well as blurred messages in a given context. By excluding a clear form of expression in the proposition, other symbols supplant content – this could be, for example, forms of dress, items of dress, hairstyle choice, use of makeup etc. With “clear” language, the message is transformed to an amount of information, while with “obscure” language it results in an information potential that demands a deeper insight for interpretation. The balance between an experiential (experience exchange), an interpersonal (between individuals), and/or a textual proposition, results in a series of semantic dimensions and language layers in which one can orient oneself, and state what “clear” and “obscure” language draws upon in a given context. This can be illustrated by following strata:

Phonology/graphology
Lexico-grammar
Semantic
Context
(Eggins 1996).

The Relations of the Strata

The central stratum in “clear” and “obscure” media language is lexico-grammar, the engine room of media language, in which one of the two of language’s content strata is found. Lexico-grammar constitutes both “clear” and “obscure” language’s resource to “put into words, i.e. to express or underplay the semantic propositions that are realized through the grammatical structure and lexis (word choice) of any language. When blurring or underplaying lexis occurs, semantic gaps, the language potentials are circumscribed and symbols or implied contexts take over, and this is a much more dangerous, self-limiting form of interaction. Lexico-grammar leads naturally over into the semantic stratum – the second of language’s content stratum. The semantic is the “heart” of media language, “the pumping station” – a large “heart” that gives many semantic propositions and meanings resources.

The semantic media stratum connects lexico-grammar and the context, which is why the semantic propositions primarily are impinged upon by the demands that contextual factors place upon putting words to extra-linguistic realities. Hence, one must have insight in order to understand and it is precisely here that inappropriate gaps in our media language can be found that either cannot keep pace, are not allowed to be filled out, or are consciously suppressed.

Context’s meta-linguistic make-up is constituted by the global and local surroundings as a whole, i.e. the situation (situational context) in which “clear” and “obscure” media language must be able to function or fail because of a lack of resources to understand the propositions.

Three variables have an influence on the extent of semantic downplaying in the situational context; namely the following, as set out by Eggins (1996), who here adds new aspects to Halliday's work. He does not use the term "situational context," but instead refers to:

Field (= subject choice)

Tenor (= relation between sender and receiver)

Mode (=mode of communication)

For Eggins, these three variables constitute the choice of metaphoric and therefore triggered connotations. Field focuses on a social and cultural proposition around a language interaction and in the choice of topics. In many media contexts, a subject such as religious existential philosophy is defined as blasphemy, and subject to bans and edicts. Here, very many blurred expressions can be found. Field similarly includes those activities that fill out a subject with semantic meaning between interacting parties, or that make them relevant for everyone. Hence, field focuses on everything that is communicated, or the absence thereof.

Tenor puts the relations between sender and receiver into the centre, with interaction propositions for the interacting parties by defining their role functions and relations in a social and cultural perspective. There could be permanent characteristics for all the interacting parties or relations that are created between them in a specific situation. Tenor thus focuses on all the relations that the interacting parties have with one another. For instance, in the Danish educational system, the "open ended" discussions are fundamental for everyone, while a religious philosopher's interpretation of ban/edict, in many cultures, circumscribes the interaction proposition for the receiver.

Mode marks the role of media language in the proposition between sender and receiver, as mode is a variable for language potentials and special status in the given situational context. In other words, it puts under a microscope the way language as an entity is used in a given situational context. The internet encompasses many modes (for example, text, sound, music, picture, video, etc.), which is why the net is considered to be dangerous by many people globally, as it is exactly here that it becomes impossible to issue a global ban/edict. The sending tenor can no longer be totally dominant but has to accept semantic propositions directly or indirectly, for example, through an extension of the interaction on social networks.

The three contextual variables are the central situational factors that represent the social context as semiotic resources in which "clear" and "obscure" media language encompass the propositional intentions and aims. The contextual variables realise the semantic and the lexico-grammar stratum. Field has its linguistic counterpart in the experiential meta-function, tenor, in the interpersonal meta-function, and mode, in the textual meta-function. The first two mentioned meta-functions express experience and intersubjective interpretation hereof, i.e. areas that we need to put words into. Missing words trigger semantic interpretation potentials, the consequence of which is that we never manage to formulate content; for example, through

a text or expression. All levels have thus significance for which entities can be drawn upon when we need to articulate a given content or an attitude in the media.

Some Recent Examples

A number of different cultural and social situational contexts can illustrate these relations more fully in relation to semantic propositions. In a Danish media context, for instance, it can be seen how a “clear” proposition can have wide-ranging consequences. In connection with the premature death of a 16-year-old boy (Jørgen) in a road accident, studio anchor, Adam Holm, discusses the relationship between knowledge and faith in his column, “Den guddummelige tragedie” (The Dumbvine Tragedy – *play on the Danish words, dumb and divine*) in the daily newspaper, “Politiken.” He writes:

The explanations of the faithful of God’s miraculous intervention and punishment of the presumptuous, are, mildly put, confusing. When fifteen schoolgirls were burned to death in 2002, in a school in Mecca, an Imam referred to Allah’s anger over the “licentious” state of the school; and the religious police, who had failed to let the frightened girls leave the school’s ground, because they were not dressed as prescribed, received words of acknowledgement. There were no popular protests against this Wahhabi nonsense.

When people of faith thank their god for “saving” them in a situation of grave danger, it is considered natural. God takes the lives of the presumptuous and protects the pious. Comforting thoughts, but 16-year-old Jørgen, was not guilty of blasphemy or of living a licentious life. But he died just the same. The hurricane in the southern US, the school fire in Saudi-Arabia, and a fatal road accident in Norway, must have a rational explanation. This kind of thing has a methodology.

Religion does not have this, and this is apparently enticing for those who desire mysticism and seek the unjustifiable. One has to be unusually besotted with science fiction to be convinced that the Ten Commandments were delivered on stone tablets to Moses by the great builder of worlds and planets himself. (Politiken 2015)

Adam Holm expresses himself unambiguously “clear” on his atheist proposition, and this has had major consequences. He was suspended by Danmark’s Radio (Danish State Radio), even though he had written the essay as a private person and not with his “media journalist” hat on. The Union of Journalists took up the case, and it was not until after lengthy negotiations that he was re-instated. If he had been “obscure” in his media proposition then things would probably have been very different.

Art can express and illustrate semantic propositions that are difficult to define through language alone. In Denmark and Germany, for example, we can consider the furore caused by the young poet, Yahya Hassan (born Aarhus, 19 May 1995) of Palestinian background. Hassan critically examines his upbringing, which was marked by violence, neglect and criminality. He puts words to taboo “fields” against a Muslim cultural background, and puts into words his conceptualizations of social fraud, violence against children, and the lack of integration in Danish society; all intertwined with religious dogma. As “tenor,” Hassan triggered emotions “for” and “against.” Some people feel validated, while others are sceptical or become angry, as religion, to them, is dogma and is not subject to discussion.

When Yahya Hassan gives readings of his poems, this “mode” triggers bedlam, and he must be protected by an extensive security operation. He receives death threats and is assaulted in Copenhagen’s main railway station, and in Palestine. The experiential semantic complexity in religious existential philosophies is filled in by Hassan with words, in such a way that they have great interpersonal impact, but with wildly different effects. The poetic language codes (textual meta-function) open up, precisely for the many controversial interpretations and identification methods, as seen in this interview with Hassan by Berlingske Tidende:

I am not on an errand to criticize Islam. My criticism is more a criticism of religion. Those things I criticize Islam for: religious indoctrination, intransigence, and [having] a patent on the truth, are fundamental to all religions. [...]

Previously, this here was a local and family business that affected only me and my immediate circle. Then it turned into a public event and then the reactions became violent. (Berlingske 2014)

Yahya Hassan’s poems, with their transformational metaphorical and semantic consequences, show that it demands courage to stand up to these kinds of fields, tenors and modes. Media language, as a form of interaction, is constantly developing and incorporating new semantic fields, experiences, and interpretations of the world. But the fast growing media realities and the increasing number of immigrants, for example, coming into Europe, has recently resulted in an imbalance in the normal, organic development, and culture areas that were previously homogenous have become multicultural sub-segments. The result is semantic gaps at all linguistic levels; theoretical, methodological, and practical. Our cognition has quite simply been unable to meet the furious tempo of the developments, or else these developments have not been recognised, causing people to retreat into a fictional past where things were comprehensible but completely at odds with the realities of the modern world. Both conditions mean that an analysis of the field, tenor and mode of certain functions, and associated communicative meta-functions, clearly indicate that we must either keep quiet and accept that certain fields are taboo, or we must develop a number of semantic slots that can be applied to the great and the small.

Clear Enough

H. P. Grice sets out the cooperative principle, encompassed by four maxims, for all language interaction (Ejstrup 2009). One of these directs us to be brief and clear in word choice and syntax when we express ourselves through language. Others direct us to be truthful, keep strictly to what we know, and to be relevant. Are these appropriate in all situations? We should surely answer in the negative when dealing with mass communications through the media, which have to communicate news, reports and portraits from an extremely diverse and globalised world defined by a multitude of cultural norms and bonds (Grice 1975; Husted 1982).

Language is a unique and essential part of being human; we do not know of individuals or human cultures that do not possess language (Skautrup 1968, 1976). Whether it is sound or sign based, the ability to express oneself is always there. Freedom of expression is a subset, and at all times and in all societies, there have been limitations to the degree of this freedom. Subjects, words, categorizations, and, in particular, ways of expressing oneself, can regularly end up blacklisted. Expressing oneself, where there is no law to forbid it, is no guarantee against sanctions. This can be seen when a Danish right-wing politician is assaulted in the street, and a Danish cartoonist in his own home. Both of them expressed themselves on subjects they are quite entitled to, according to Danish law, but which groups of Danish society refuse to accept.

The extent to which language is both genetically and socially constructed has been debated by science, although often these debates seem to have raised more questions than they have answered. All languages allow us to articulate our ideas, but we choose not to express some of them – as simple as that. The rules on how we may express ourselves within a particular culture are as different as our languages are different. Some languages lack quite simple and common words for phenomena and concepts that societies believe should not be mentioned in a particular period; for example, we have never had a commonly used Danish word for *pedophile*, or, in fact, a more specific word for the love of a man for a child. There could be several reasons for this, but one of them is doubtless that the subject is taboo, and that we would rather not come into too close contact with its mention. Given that language is a social community that people share, it is difficult, if not impossible to introduce generally accepted and simple words that refer to phenomena and acts relating to these taboo subjects. For example, in Denmark today, it is often wise to euphemistically say that someone is *of another ethnic background than Danish*, instead of *dark-skinned*, *brown*, or *a second-generation immigrant*. To the same extent, many Western cultures since the Second World War have restricted the way in which *Jew*, *Jewish*, *gas*, *annihilation* and other common words may be combined. For example, in post-war Germany, many people were horrified when the trams in one of the larger towns carried an advert with the slogan “*Gas spart Geld*” (gas saves money); a brief, relevant, and clear message.

But it is not what one says, but the way and the context in which it is said that are crucial for whether the formulation can be accepted at that point in time, and by the society in which it is

expressed. The fact that it is brief and concise is no guarantee that the language act is optimal – now as before.

In the autumn of 2012, the same issue appeared again when a picture of “Jew-cakes” from Karen Volf was shown on the internet in an advert for the Coop, with the text, “*Jew-cakes, baked in a gas oven. Merry Xmas. 250 grams 23.95.*” A brief and concise caption read, “*here there are no superficial ingredients*” and a text gave precise details about the product. H. P. Grice’s maxims appear to have been met in this instance. Subsequently, however, the caption caused huge indignation on social networks because of the inappropriate wording and a poorly concealed reference to the Holocaust. Bisca, the Danish producer of the biscuits, was not slow to announce that the company was sorry about the picture and text, and the director of innovation stated to the Danish electronic media ekstrabladet.dk:

This is an unpleasant and grim case that can have major consequences for us. “Jew-cakes” is a Danish product that is particularly popular at Christmas, and as a result our sales could be hard hit if our product is connected with so inappropriate a message.

Furthermore, a representative for the supermarket chain, Coop, stated on ekstrabladet.dk that he had investigated the case and he considered the picture and the text to be forgeries, but that he had nonetheless informed the stores that such a sign would, of course, be inappropriate and therefore unacceptable.

Language and Thought

The functionalist approach to language holds that we perform language acts and describes how we perform these acts when we communicate with each other. It has, basically, the following four aims:

- Indicative (to describe how we think the world actually is)
- Imperative (to get the world to be as we want it to be)
- Interrogative investigation (to inquire how others think the world is)
- Optative construction (to set out thoughts on desired worlds) (Ejstrup 2009, 2012)

We can communicate about anything with all our different languages; real and unreal, in and outside the situation, and, in the majority of cases, there seems to be a degree of proximity between thought and language. This proximity we often experience and accept without, in any way, knowing or thinking any more about it. At other times there can be a breakdown in language communication precisely because the subject or the commentary is not clearly expressed, and the connection between language (act), and thought, becomes unclear and disappears. It is here that one of language’s areas of conflict clearly appears, because of how close to reality and how briefly and clearly is it acceptable to express oneself.

In actual fact there ought not to be any obstacles to saying things as directly as the language technically allows, but there are. Moreover, the greater the understanding of, and diligence shown, regarding staying on the accepted side of an often informal and unwritten norm of what a society accepts, the greater the chance for successfully getting away with almost any kind of expression. One example could be that the debate and the possibilities of expression found a more positive and less heated plateau when, in 2012, Danes went from discussing a special marriage service for homosexuals and lesbians to discussing a *gender neutral marriage service*. The words *homosexual* and *lesbian* were removed from the church's *marriage ceremony*, which gave another balance in the choice of language related to the issue. As a result, the debate gained another "framing" and the language became a little less precise and the tone and momentum in the debate changed and became more positive, even though the basis for the debate was, and is, the same.

We arrive at the exciting and controversial area *use of language*; an area in which limitations pile up, because it is decidedly neither acceptable nor safe to use language and to create images simply as one likes. It is possible, with language, to undertake acts that are actually unlawful, such as when someone makes defamatory statements about others in society. Here, use of language is potentially something we cannot accept and which can be rather dangerous. By way of an example, in 1989 in a Danish provincial newspaper (*Ringkjøbing Amts Dagblad*), Emmy Fomsgaard could state, concisely and clearly and without any apparent problems, "*gay sex is the worst form of whoredom.*" Today, such a statement would hardly be acceptable, and may even prompt an investigation from the justice system, because it contains an insult on a minority. This form of content can, of course, be given expression in 2016, but it must be expressed differently. The use of language must be different to be able relate without constraint to the same subject(s). Complete biblical quotes and references to the Old Testament are often used to express these kind of sentiments. Relevant references and language precision must be approached differently; in essence, direct references to words and thoughts, in 2016, must be made more obscure, i.e. they must be led by words and text that are acceptable to another time and culture.

Danes feel that they have freedom of expression, but words are less free; greater consideration and artifice are demanded in 2016. Danish pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, like all other languages, has changed over the course of the past twenty-five years; but the limit to what is acceptable language on homosexuality has changed even more, and even more quickly, as part of our general cultural development. The mood and level of abstraction are crucial to the kind of statements we will accept as a society.

Categorisation

Different languages place different weight on meaning. Some ideas which certain languages oblige their speakers to express because the phenomena are compulsory elements of grammar are, in other languages, optional. In other words, some languages force speakers to consider

elements of meaning that are optional in other languages. For example, English has completely lost the polite forms of “you,” while Danish has retained them as *De*, *Dem*, and *Deres*. By way of another example, Evidentialis (von hörensagen) is a grammatical form in Turkish for verbs in the past tense. In Turkish, *onu öldürdü* – *he (or she) has killed him (or her)* – means, I have witnessed it myself. While *onu öldürmüs* betyder – *he (or she) has killed him (or her)* – I have been told so, and I have not actually witnessed it myself. The example shows that, in Turkish, one is forced to state whether you have experienced an event or have just been told about it, while it is not necessary to state whether the agent is male or female. In Danish, the reverse is the case in both regards. These grammatical bound forms illustrate how crucial it is to express oneself concisely on controversial subjects (Skautrup 1968).

A third example is conceptions (unreal worlds) in Danish and French. Danish, like English, does not distinguish the unreal from the real in expressions such as, *we could make drawings of him* (something real in the past or something imagined). In French, one must distinguish between *on pouvait faire des dessins de lui* (real possibility in a real world in the past tense) and *on pourrait faire des dessins de lui* (the imagined possibility in an unreal world). All these examples show that the obligatory grammatical forms in individual languages set limitations on how deliberately unclear language users can be when they express themselves. Undoubtedly, in these obligatory forms, dangers and traps lie in wait in relation to how imprecisely one can possibly express oneself. By implication, great care and ingenuity is needed to be able to say anything about controversial subjects. These differences and dangers are specific to languages and cultures.

It is particularly dangerous when translating from one language to another. In a globalized world, it is the rule rather than the exception that we obtain knowledge of crises and dangers from other cultures with other languages through translation, and thus categorizations and grammatical imperatives different from our own Danish. As previously mentioned, this can be dangerous when translating from one language to another. The language specific categorizations and grammatical dictates gain major significance when we consider the ways in which language users are able to express themselves ingeniously on controversial subjects, with appropriate ambiguity, exactitude, and insinuation; i.e. the provisions afforded by a language to impart clear meaning without causing (too much) upset. For example, the definite noun form is obligatory in Danish and it is extremely important which of the following forms is used: *(en) kirke*, (a church) *kirken* (the church), *(en) G/gud* (a god), *G/guden* (God), *(en) himmel* (a heaven), *himlen* (heaven) etc. The inflection of each word and expression is crucial for both denotation and connotation in Danish, while, in Turkish, almost every form of the nominate is optional. For example, Lars Hedegaard stated in an interview, in 2009:

They [Muslims, ed.] rape their own children. One hears it all the time. Girls in Muslim families are raped by their uncles, their cousins, or their fathers.

Lars Hedegaard is not directly explicit about whether he means *some* or *all*, Muslims. In Danish we use the inflected form of the definite singular (for example, *løven er et farligt dyr* – the lion

is a dangerous animal) or indefinite plural (f.eks. *løver er farlige dyr* – lions are dangerous animals) to say something *generic*, i.e. something general that applies to everyone in a group. If Lars Hedegaard had elected to say explicitly *nogle* (some) instead of just *girls, families, uncles*, and *cousins* in the indefinite plural without the specifier, the case might have taken another course. On 20th April 2012, *Jyllands-Posten* could have added *some* in parenthesis instead of writing just *Muslims* without a specifier, but not, crucially, without changing the meaning. These examples show that in any language one can get away, more or less successfully, with formulations that would hardly be acceptable in another language and that there are words and expressions that could create real dangers and problems in translation. A translation from a Danish court report into Turkish could be fatal depending on whether the translation of *he killed him* becomes, that the witness testified *onu öldürdü* or *onu ölürmüs*.

In all languages, it is common to have prototypical representatives for categories; a kind of middle level including words such as *table, chair, hammer, saw, red and blue*. Above these words, there is a level of words called hypernymns – *furniture, tools and colours*. Special words and more specific terms at a middle level are called hyponyms – *stool, camping stool, jigsaw, roofing hammer, light lilac and off-white*. The divisions are culture specific, and here language users have rich opportunities to twist words in relation to the specificity of the individual language, particularly when they move into controversial areas. Language function in the form of categorization and the creation of context can contribute to a chaotic system. Language forms a part of this chaos, while simultaneously helping to lead us around it. Language, in itself, is a constituent part of society and of culture, and although words in a democracy can appear to be free, almost as a consequence of their inherent power, they can equally detract from the freedom of others.

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Revitalising Indigenous Resistance and Dissent through Online Media

Elizabeth Burrows

Abstract

Indigenous peoples continue to experience exclusion from mediated mainstream public sphere debates. In Australia, recent government funding cuts suppress opportunities for Aboriginal resistance and dissent. Long-standing Aboriginal print media have ceased publication. Public broadcasters have cancelled Indigenous news services, and a 2014 Australian Federal Government Commission of Audit recommended culling the community broadcasting sector. This is in direct opposition to Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which stresses that all people have the right to “without interference...receive and impart information and ideas through any media”.

This paper considers how online media may overcome the silencing of dissenting Indigenous voices and broaden public sphere access and engagement. Drawing on interviews with Canadian and Australian traditional print journalists, bloggers and social media producers this paper investigates how online media circulate news and information to Indigenous communities and inject Aboriginal perspectives into public sphere debates. The paper interrogates the diversity of current Indigenous online media and considers whether access to online and mobile media technologies expands or inhibits democratic participation. How successfully Indigenous media producers have upskilled to meet the demands of multimedia platforms is discussed, along with unique challenges they face in relation to funding, responsibilities and community expectations. The investigation concludes that online media are facilitating a revitalisation of grassroots media production that counters the exclusion of Indigenous voices from democratic conversations. However, while they enhance the circulation of Indigenous perspectives and information, demand for multimedia delivery results in “two-speed” Indigenous public sphere processes.

Keywords: Indigenous, democracy, public sphere, online media, communication

Introduction

The fair and equal access to democratic conversations are a cornerstone of democracy. Mass media provide the primary mechanism through which these conversations occur. However, mass media structures and processes often exclude minority groups such as Indigenous Canadians and Australians and prevent their participation in debates that may relate directly to their individual and community well-being. This paper considers how contemporary Indigenous media counter Indigenous peoples' exclusion from public sphere processes. It analyses the funding, editorial and legal challenges these media face. It also evaluates the internet and user-generated medias' potential to redress democratic inequalities and afford Indigenous media producers with greater access, control and power over communication processes and messages. Drawing on a series of interviews with Indigenous media producers across Canada and Australia, and an analysis of digital Indigenous media content this paper investigates the extent to which the internet and user-generated content are improving the access and diversity of Indigenous voices, within Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates. Overall, this paper argues online media are facilitating a revitalisation of grassroots media production that counters the exclusion of Indigenous voices from democratic conversations. However, while they enhance the circulation of Indigenous perspectives and information, demands for multimedia delivery results in 'two-speed' Indigenous public sphere processes.

Canvassing the Literature – Publics and Counter-Publics

While it may be idealised and unachievable, it is a foundational goal that fair and equal democratic processes allow all citizens equal access to democratic conversations (Poole 1989; Garnham 2000; Fraser 1990). These conversations occur within the political or dominant public sphere which is the space between society and the State where citizens debate issues of concern in order to influence public opinion, public policy and decision-making (Gerhards & Schafer 2010; Fraser 1990). Habermas (1974: 49) wrote: "a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body." He has argued (1996: 359) the political public sphere is "a sounding board for problems that must be processed by the political system because they cannot be solved elsewhere." Mass media have historically provided the main communication channels through which the State informs the citizenry, and through which the citizenry's responses are circulated (Cottle 2000). However, both Castells (2008: 90) and Dahlgren (2015: 90) argue horizontal methods of communication, including face-to-face conversations, are essential components of the communication processes through which "nonstate actors influence people's minds and foster social change." The advent of the internet and user-generated media has, to at least a degree, usurped mass media's dominance and exclusivity (Bruns 2008). Dahlgren (2015: 22) considers the internet a "boon for civil society: [since] it permits and indeed promotes horizontal communication." Likewise, Castells (2008: 90) has identified emerging "global media and internet networks" as "the new global public sphere." The notion that the internet and user-generated media may provide greater and more equal access for non-state actors, including

Indigenous people, to democratic debates affording them more influence over policy provides an important foundation for this paper.

However, even within contemporary public spheres, access to democratic debates is not equal. Habermas's (1989) original public sphere theory was criticised because of its failure to recognise the existence of alternative public spheres (Fraser 1990; Eley 1999). Fraser (1990) argued subaltern counterpublics have always existed and that there has always been conflict between subaltern and dominant public spheres. She contends (1990) subordinated groups are denied equal access to societal debates within the dominant public sphere and are excluded, silenced, prevented or inhibited from communicating using their own voices, styles and norms. Subaltern counterpublic spheres counter this exclusion and provide spaces for subordinate groups in society to "invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn provide venues in which to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990: 67). Subaltern counterpublics are "spaces of withdrawal and regroupment", "bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (Fraser 1990: 68). Stephenson (2000: 4) described the Bolivian Indigenous counterpublic sphere as "*an autonomous special or territorial arena* where oppositional cultural and political identities can be enacted and legitimated". She argues Indigenous counterpublic spheres are "arena[s] of oppositional consciousness" that locate:

...agency in indigenous peoples and challenges prevailing dehumanizing practices that would relegate them to the category of premodern Other. Moreover, the indigenous counterpublic sphere legitimizes the cultural right to difference and generates a forum for indigenous peoples to come together from different areas of the country in common interest. (Stephenson 2000: 3)

However, whether subaltern public spheres can generate change depends on their ability to influence public opinion and policymakers. Squires (1999) suggests the level and frequency at which ideas and information can cross public sphere boundaries dictates whether change can occur. And Husband (1998: 143) contends counter-public sphere effectiveness depends on their ability to privilege diverse interests and voices within "open channels of exchange." However, for Indigenous peoples, their "colonial past is not so distant and...is, in a certain way, present" (Delgado 1984: 78). The inability of "nation states and civil societies" to address this reality leads to a "clash of political interests" (Delgado 1984: 79). Indigenous peoples continue to "retrieve and decolonize" their histories and to resist (Delgado 1984: 80). Indigenous counterpublic spheres provide the arenas through which they can "seek to convince society as a whole of the validity of [Indigenous] claims, challenging existing structures of authority through political and theoretical critique" (Felski 1989: 168). The internet, as the new global public sphere, offers Indigenous peoples renewed opportunities to control communication channels and to influence public opinion using their own media.

Bruns (2008: 68-69) describes this emerging, new global public sphere as a "patchwork of overlapping public spheres centred around specific themes and communities", however, this patchwork of overlapping public spheres has always existed (Fraser 1990; Squires 1999, 2002;

Eley 1999; Avison & Meadows 2000; Burrows 2009). What has changed, as Bruns (2008) himself acknowledges, is the potentially-enhanced access subaltern public sphere constituents now have to dominant public sphere debates. In an expanding mediasphere, counterpublic constituents can control how, when and what messages are circulated, can use their own voices and can determine what communication tools and styles they will adopt.

Traditionally, journalists and editors who have operated as “orchestrators and moderators of public debate”, have dominated public sphere processes and created the “one-to-many mass media of the industrial age” (Bruns 2008: 67). However, Bruns (2008: 67) argues this one-to-many structure with its vertical information flows, has been replaced by user-generated media that open up public sphere discussions through their horizontal information flows. Using their own media, citizens can “conduct engaged and lively political discussion and deliberation away from the perceived spin of journalism’s punditariat” (Bruns 2008: 68). Citizens become active participants in political conversations rather than bystanders observing the manufactured perspectives of the political left and right (Bruns 2008: 68). Citizens can (to a greater degree) now control their interaction and moderate their contributions (Bruns 2008; Gerhards & Schafer 2010). Moreover, these changes are contributing to the emergence of a “vastly more multiperspectival debate” (Bruns 2008: 68). This paper considers how the online space has affected Indigenous media and their processes.

Counterpublic sphere constituents use culturally appropriate communication styles and techniques that facilitate debate, promote their own identity and challenge stereotypes. Milioni (2009: 419) in her analysis of independent Greek media within an alternative, counterpublic sphere found they exhibited some key functional characteristics. Characteristics she identified include: fostering of a political and competitive opposition to mainstream media, maintaining autonomy from “state control and formal political institutions”, adoption of a “non-hierarchical, non-professional and collective” news gathering operation using grassroots reporters, attempts to set the agenda and gain public attention for identified problems, inclusion of diverse sources who present “subjective and passionate descriptions of social reality”, and the “active...participation of its publics”. Milioni (2009: 419) argues these functions are used to “attain the maximum degree of ‘selfdetermination’ regarding the handling of information, bypassing the media and controlling the terms of their own representation in the public space.” This paper considers the evolving nature and communication structure of the global Indigenous public sphere, and how Canadian and Australian Indigenous media are used to communicate with publics, to breach public sphere boundaries and to contribute to global public sphere dialogues.

Research Design

The primary research question considered in this paper evaluates to what extent Indigenous media producers are using digital media and how and why they are transitioning to use the online media environment. This paper particularly focuses on print and text-based media and draws on 18 in-depth, semi-structured, interviews with Indigenous media producers across

Canada and Australia and a textual analysis of online media content. This qualitative approach allows analysis and comparison of content produced while the interviews provide a deeper understanding of the media producers and their rationale and intent (Rubin & Rubin 2012). Interviews were coded manually and using Nvivo qualitative data analysis software to extract key themes emerging from the data. Nvivo Capture software was used to collect digital data such as website content, blog, Facebook and Twitter posts and comments. Nvivo Capture gathers both original posts from the primary user, and responses from their audience. Additionally, Nvivo Capture uses the member's Twitter contact information to map commenter's locations. These maps were used to provide indicative data about Indigenous Twitter users' global audience reach.

Connections Between Canada and Australia

There are important differences between Canadian and Australian Indigenous peoples. Canada has three distinct Aboriginal groups: the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples (Government of Canada 2010a). From 1760, a series of constitutionally recognised treaties were negotiated between the Canadian Government and Aboriginal peoples (Government of Canada 2010b). Australia's Indigenous population comprises of two groups, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who originally included than 600 clans (Australian Government 2015). However, in contrast to the Canadian situation, no treaties have been negotiated. It took until 1992, for the Australian High Court to legally rule *terra nullius*¹ a fiction and established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' rights to claim their lands under common law (Broome 2010; Mazel and O'Neil 2007). Consequently, Canadian and Australian Indigenous peoples have very different cultural backgrounds, community structures and political and legal relationships with their respective governments. Nonetheless, they have much in common. Both countries share a history of colonisation, and there are parallels between the Australian and Canadian authorities' subsequent treatment of each country's First Nations peoples. Indigenous people in Canada and Australia existed under "discriminatory and genocidal regimes" that left them "transformed, displaced and marginalised" (Coombs 2006: 1-2). They "were considered inferior, scarcely human – their presence was ignored, treated as a minor inconvenience, walled off from view or physical intrusion, or made the subject of genocidal projects" (Bateman & Pilkington 2011: 1). The similarities between the two Indigenous populations continue and in 2011, only 4.3 per cent of Canadians identified as Aboriginal compared (Statistics Canada 2011) to 2.5 per cent of Australians who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2012a). Furthermore, both groups have a high percentage of young people. In Canada in 2011, the median age for the three Aboriginal groups was First Nations 26, Métis 31 and Inuit 23, compared to a median age of 41 in the non-Aboriginal Canadian population (Statistics Canada 2015). In Australia in 2011, the median age of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 21 compared to 37 for non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2013).

¹ *Terra Nullius* means a land that belongs to no one and is available to be claimed.

Both Canadian and Australian First Nation communities have had negative interactions with mainstream media. While mainstream media provide the primary mechanisms through which democratic debates take place with the aim of influencing public opinion and bringing about social change, both groups have experienced exclusion from mainstream media coverage that purports to cover issues specifically affecting them (Meadows 2001; Alia 2010). Canadian mainstream media have portrayed First Nation peoples as "outsider[s]" (Roth 2005: 14). Moreover, when mainstream media coverage does occur, it has been criticised for being sensationalist and for perpetuating racial stereotypes (Meadows 2001). Mainstream coverage includes few Indigenous voices apart from those the dominant group find palatable (Meadows & Oldham 1991; Burrows 2004). To counter these long-standing negative mainstream media traits, from the 19th century onwards Indigenous people have produced their own media in order to speak in their own voices, to ensure issues of concern to them are circulated in an attempt to have the perspectives they deem essential heard.

Silencing Indigenous Voices

Despite Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights stressing that all people have the right to "without interference... receive and impart information and ideas through any media" (United Nations 1948), in Australia particularly, the range of traditional Indigenous media has narrowed over the last two years. In 2014, Australian Government funding to The Vibe group, which had operated since 1997, was cancelled (Kerin 2014). The Vibe group produced and managed *The Deadly Awards*, which were the annual Australian Indigenous Awards for achievement across a range of sectors. Vibe also produced *Vibe3on3* basketball and hip hop challenge. Vibe produced *InVibe* Magazine, *Deadly Sounds* radio, *Move It Mob Style* TV and the *deadlyvibe.com.au* website (Deadly Vibe Group 2014). All these mastheads and annual events disappeared upon the withdrawal of funding. Also in 2014, the New South Wales Land Council (NSWLC) cancelled publication of the *Tracker* magazine (Brereton 2014). The *Tracker* had a circulation of 30,000 as well as an online presence (A. McQuire, personal interview, 20 February 2015). Although NSWLC blamed funding pressures, *Tracker* journalist Amy McQuire said staff had experienced editorial pressure from the land council, and the *Tracker's* closure followed the publication of a disparaging story about the Abbott (conservative) Federal government. The broadcasting sector has also faced threats with an Abbott Federal Government Commission of Audit report recommending removal of government funding for the community broadcasting sector (Gough 2014). While the government did not implement this recommendation, the suggestion was a chilling moment for the 100 Australian Indigenous community radio stations. In 2015, Australia's second national Indigenous newspaper the *National Indigenous Times* went into voluntary receivership because of its inability to pay mounting legal costs relating to defamation and an unfair dismissal legal challenge (Terzon 2015). This publication has relaunched with new ownership in 2016 (NIT 2016). In 2011, Australia's Special Broadcasting Service, the SBS, absorbed the National Indigenous Television network. However in June 2015, following Federal Government funding cuts, the SBS decided to cancel the nightly national *NITV News* program (Robin 2015). *NITV News* was Australia's only daily national Indigenous-produced television news broadcast. Threats to Indigenous media demonstrate the importance of mechanisms that can provide

Indigenous people with independent media production opportunities. As the range of legacy forms of Indigenous media dwindle, new forms of media and expression are emerging to fill the gaps. However, these new forms of Indigenous media also fulfil a unique role and provide an outlet for emerging Indigenous voices.

Conceptualising an Evolving Indigenous Mediasphere

This section provides a potted overview of the development and structure of the Indigenous mediasphere. Since the 19th century, Canadian and Australian First Nations people and communities have produced a wide-range of print media (Avison 1996; Burrows 2009). The first North American Aboriginal newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, was published in 1828 (Avison & Meadows 2000) with Australia's first Aboriginal publication, *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle* appearing in 1836 (Burrows 2014). Within the contemporary Indigenous public sphere, the *Koori Mail*, the first and only surviving national Australian Indigenous print newspaper was first published in 1991. Both Canada and Australia have rich Indigenous broadcast sectors. Broadcasts of Aboriginal produced content began in North America in Alaska during the 1930s, with the first Canadian Aboriginal broadcasts occurring in the 1960s (Alia 2003: 37). In 1999, the national Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) was launched incorporating both domestic and international content (Roth 2005). Roth (2005: 24) explains the APTN took advantage of the increasing range of international, Indigenous content and adopted an "international perspective" with a "wide optic on aboriginal issues around the world." Alia (2010:72) has described Canada as "the world leader in Aboriginal broadcasting" with several hundred radio stations, eleven regional radio networks, and six television production outlets. Similarly, Australia has a well-developed Indigenous broadcasting sector. The first Aboriginal produced radio programming was broadcast in Adelaide and Townsville in 1972 (Australian Government 2010). Since then the sector has grown to include more than 130 Indigenous radio stations and in 1988, the commercially-funded *Imparja Television* began broadcasting. This was followed by the development of the federally-funded National Indigenous Television (NITV) in 2005. The community media sector provides a "major communication outlet for indigenous voices" (Meadows 2009: 516). However, the availability of the internet and online media and funding pressures have changed the structure of the Indigenous mediasphere.

The Indigenous mediasphere now includes overlapping sectors. The "traditional" sector includes traditional print media (magazines and newspapers) and the broadcast media (television and radio - commercial, public and community). And the "user-generated" sector includes digital content such as weblogs, news and information sites and online publications. The "user-generated" sector also incorporates Indigenous peoples' use of Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Vimeo, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Google+, Tumblr and other social media sites. Indigenous people use all available user-generated media options to disseminate their individual and group perspectives. However, while there are two distinct sectors within the contemporary Indigenous mediasphere, the sectors overlap which reflects the global industry trend within news organisations to operate 'cross-platform.' Traditional Indigenous print media

producers now often duplicate their print newspapers in an online, digital format (or at least selected content) and some have opted to publish their content exclusively online. Traditional print publications may now also include audio and video content on their online site. Likewise, Indigenous broadcasters now upload print, audio and video content to their station websites. And traditional Indigenous media producers (print and broadcast), bloggers, and website producers all use various forms of social media, in addition to their primary communication method to connect with their audience. Consequently, the lines between traditional Indigenous media producers and user-generated content have converged, and the contemporary Indigenous public sphere is an increasingly complex space providing an arena for a diverse range of Indigenous communication styles, formats, voices, and perspectives.

Findings: The Effect of Online Production on Media Producers and Communities

Funding pressures and audience expectations are driving the adoption of online and multimedia platforms and a faster news cycle. Vancouver Island's *Salish Sea Sentinel* editor Mark Kiemele (Personal communication, 23 July 2013) and Manitoba publication *The First Perspective* journalist Trevor Greyeyes (Personal communication, 10 August 2013) said their publications were now only delivered online. They said the decision to move their publications to an online-only format was a cost-saving measure but had led to community criticism since older community members may lack internet access and some preferred to receive a print version of their community newspaper. Vancouver Island *Ha-Shilth-Sa* editor Debora Steel (Personal communication, 23 July 2013; Nuuchah-Nulth Tribal Council 2015) said her organisation's newspaper was published in print and online. She said meeting the needs of digitally-savvy, younger community members who wanted faster, up-to-date news had motivated this decision. Both Canada and Australia have a growing number of online newspapers including Canada's *Intercontinental Cry* that uses a network of stringers to publish international Indigenous news (CWIS 2015) and Australia's *Black Nations Rising* (which replaces *Brisbane Blacks*) (WAR 2015). It is this adoption of faster, diverse online and social media, while maintaining traditional print publications, that risks the development of two-speed public sphere processes that exclude older members of communities.

Bloggers represent an important and growing user-generated sector of the Indigenous mediasphere. Blogs provide a voice for those who want to be heard but who cannot speak through mainstream media. Bloggers Eugenia Flynn with her *Black Thoughts Live Here* (Flynn 2015) and Celeste Liddle with her *Rantings of a Female Feminist* (Liddle 2015a) use blogs to circulate their perspectives on a range of contemporary topics and to counter stereotypes and challenge government policy. Blogs also provide access to minorities within the Indigenous community. Canada's Lisa Charleyboy uses her *Urban Native Girl* blog to provide positive messages for Indigenous youth. Her blog helped her to develop a strong media profile, and she now produces and edits the online *Urban Native Magazine* (Charleyboy 2015). In Australia, Celeste Liddle and Eugenia Flynn have been invited to publish in alternative publications including the popular and influential online publication *Crikey*, and both have been offered regular commentary spots with *The Guardian* online (Flynn n.d.; Flynn 2012; Flynn & Onus

2014; Flynn 2014; Liddle n.d.; Liddle 2014; Liddle 2015b). These opportunities provide access to a mainstream audience that was previously unavailable. Axel Bruns (2008) has argued the internet has provided mainstream media access and profiles for a range of alternative voices, and this is true within the Indigenous public sphere too.

Social media has further expanded the Indigenous mediasphere. Almost all the people interviewed for this study said Facebook was an essential aspect of Indigenous communication. Canada's *NationTalk* CEO Don Barraclough (personal communication, 1 August 2013) said Facebook encouraged First Nations people and leaders to use computers. Moreover, *Ha-Shilth-Sa's* Debora Steel (personal communication, 23 July 2013) said their Facebook page participation rivalled their newspapers print circulation. Indigenous journalists Trevor Greyeyes (personal communication, 10 August 2013) and Amy McQuire (personal communication, 20 February 2015) explained they use Facebook to find sources to interview and to connect with other journalists. Blogger and photographer Steven Rhall (personal communication, 1 June 2015) and writer Eugenia Flynn (personal communication, 4 June 2015) said it was essential for them to use social media to promote their work. And some media producers such as *Black Rainbow* founder Dameyon Bonson (personal communication, 12 February 2015) and *Wiradjuri News's* David Towney (personal communication, 21 May 2015) use Facebook to produce standalone news sites. Towney uses *Wiradjuri News* to share mainstream news stories he believes will be of interest to the Wiradjuri community. One story about the water being turned off to force 12,000 people to leave their community attracted 737 shares, 225 likes, and more than 40 comments. *Wiradjuri News* Facebook statistics show the site has clocked more than 100,000 views in one week (*Wiradjuri News* 2015). Given Australia's only surviving national newspaper, the *Koori Mail* has a circulation of 10,000 and a readership of 100,000 after 25 years of operation (*Koori Mail* 2015), *Wiradjuri News's* achievement is notable. Social media are an integral element in creating horizontal information flows and relationships between media producers, their peers, and audience. However, while the interactivity of online media enhances connectedness between media producers and their audiences, it also increases pressure on production staff who may have gone from producing one newspaper a week, a fortnight or a month, to regularly having to upload digital content and to managing a number of social media sites. None of the people interviewed had received any specific training in how to use software, apps or to manage social media. Bloggers, who may work in other jobs in addition to producing a blog, must maintain a social media presence to promote their writing effectively.

Case study one: *Two Row Times* (Canada)

This *Two Row Times* case study demonstrates goals and challenges faced by Indigenous media producers and exemplifies the complexity of contemporary Indigenous media production practices. Jonathan Garlow founded the *Two Row Times* in Hagersville, Ontario in 2013, and it now has a print circulation of 23,000. The print newspaper is delivered to communities at no cost and content is shared on the *Two Row Times* website and through the online reader Issuu. *Two Row Times's* diverse social media profile and web presence are defining features. The

producers use all the major social media including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Tumblr, Pinterest, Instagram and more. The paper's target audience is the Six Nations of the Grand River, which includes all six Iroquois nations that number more than 25,000 members and is the largest First Nations band government in Canada. The paper is distributed throughout Ontario and Upstate New York (*Two Row Times*, 2015; Jim Windle, personal communication, 31 July 2013). In contrast to Vancouver Island's *Ha-Shilth-Sa* and *Salish Sea Sentinel*, the *Two Row Times* is an independent Indigenous newspaper and is not published on behalf of a tribal council or any other funding organisation. In 2013, Garlow explained his goal was "...to provide timely and relevant news and information to Native communities as well as to serve as a bridge between all nations by promoting and demonstrating the values of the Two Row Wampum" (Windle 2013).

To resolve the fledgling newspaper's financial challenges, the owners ran a crowd-funding appeal to raise CAD\$25,000 additional funding. The appeal achieved 16 per cent of its goal (CAD\$3899) (Indiegogo 2014). In the campaign video Nahnda Garlow, a *Two Row Times*, Arts & Culture columnist, highlighted the lack of "strong voice[s] in mainstream media" to "stand and speak the voice of the people." She stressed the *Two Row Times* was "Indigenous led" and was not "led by another institution that is dictating what is Indigenous or what is First Nations or is Aboriginal" (Indiegogo 2014). The Indiegogo campaign also explained they planned to use the funds to "hire Onkwehonwe journalists and correspondents, employ the distributors that keep more than 500 pickup locations stocked with papers, and to, of course, print the paper and keep our office running." Although the crowd-funding campaign enjoyed limited success, the *Two Row Times* is still published in print and digital format. The *Two Row Times* is clearly committed to maintaining autonomy and financial independence.

While Indigenous self-determination demands the right to be heard and acknowledgement and acceptance of their "world view" (Downing & Husband 2005: 127), a consideration of who is listening to their messages is an essential part of the communication process (Dreher 2009). While this Nvivo map (Figure 1) only plots the location of the *Two Row Times* 4337 Twitter followers, it does demonstrate that the newspaper's multimedia strategy is allowing the publication to reach their target North American audience and gives some indication of how many people are 'listening' – and where those readers are.

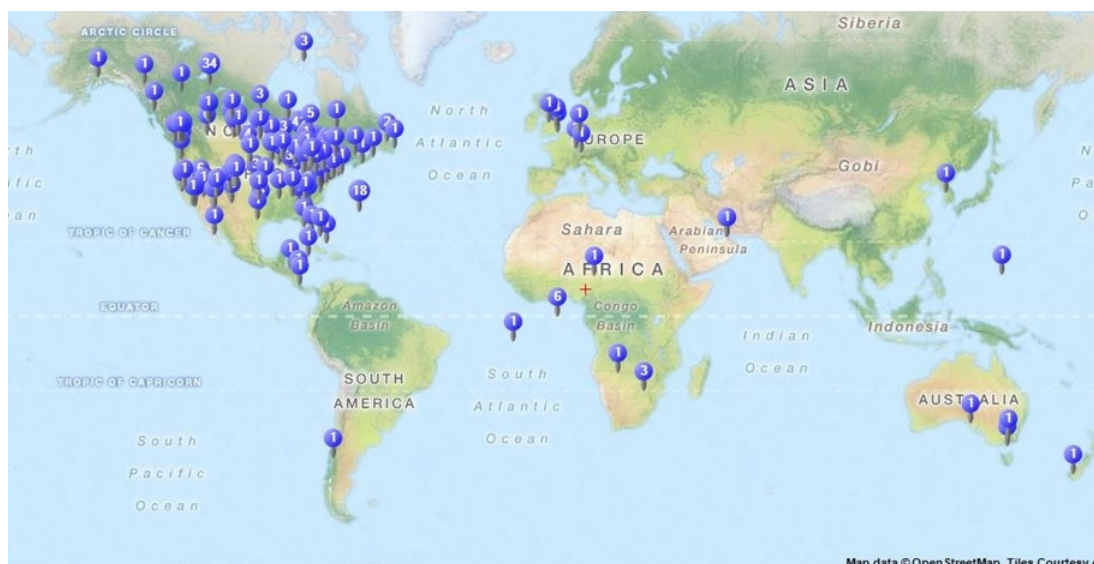


Fig. 1 Two Row Times Twitter Followers

Case Study 2 - *Indigenous X* (Australia)

This *IndigenousX* case study documents the innovative media practices Indigenous people are employing to inject diversity into Indigenous public sphere processes. Luke Pearson founded *IndigenousX* in 2012. It is a rotating, curated, Twitter account that demonstrates the unique ways Indigenous communicators use social media. Each month, the *IndigenousX* baton passes to a different Indigenous user who can tweet to the account's more than 21,000 followers about an issue of concern to them and those followers can in turn retweet that information. Since 2012, more than 180 Indigenous Australians have shared their perspectives, knowledge and ideas relating to health, education, constitutional recognition, Aboriginal culture, closure of communities, meaningless rhetoric, reconciliation, music, Indigenous literature, sport and many other topics. It is highly unlikely that most of those 180 people would have been chosen by mainstream journalists to speak on these topics.

Apart from attracting a large Twitter following, *IndigenousX* now has a permanent blog spot on *The Guardian* online website that allows monthly contributors an extended opportunity to reach a broader, mainstream audience. Also, Pearson has facilitated two Indigenous people in Canada to replicate the *IndigenousX* process using the *IndigenousX* branding, and he hopes to find an Indigenous person in New Zealand and other countries to pick up the *IndigenousX* baton.

Despite its success, *IndigenousX* struggles financially. Pearson runs the media organisation on a shoestring and in 2015 launched a crowd-funding appeal for AU\$250,000 to bolster the financial resources he requires to sustain *IndigenousX*'s production and to extend its reach. Pearson told The Walkley Foundation (2015), "We need more strong Indigenous media voices, and we need to make sure those voices reach far and wide, and with your support that's what we aim to achieve." The appeal attracted AU\$81,966 in funding. The Nvivo map below (Figure 2) demonstrates that *IndigenousX* has successfully attracted a global following that extends far

beyond Australia. *IndigenousX* has innovatively enhanced the diversity of voices participating in global Indigenous and dominant public sphere debates. Furthermore, in response to Dreher's (2009) question about who is listening to these voices, this map shows *IndigenousX* has attracted a global audience of listeners.

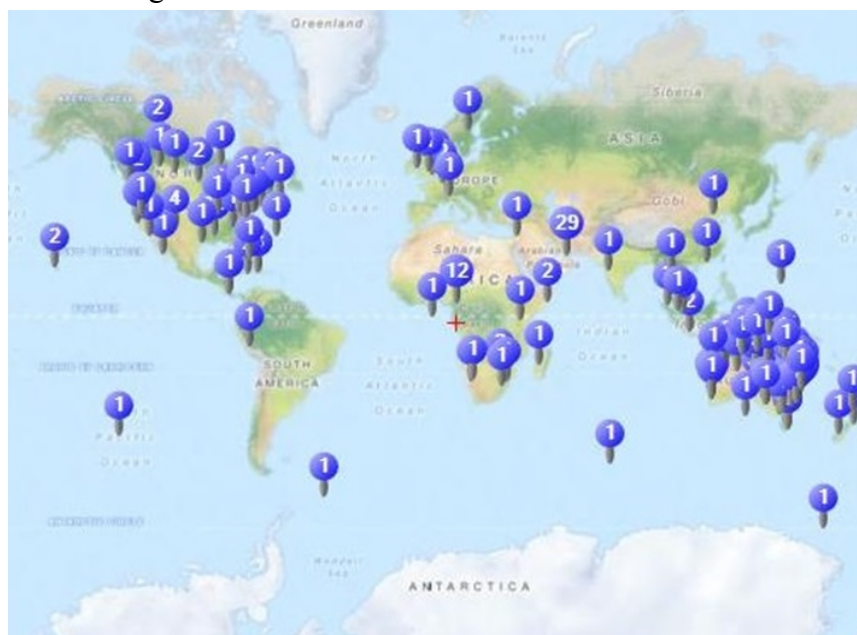


Fig. 2 *IndigenousX* Twitter Followers

Discussion and Conclusion

These media are decolonisation tools. Davidson (2005: 109) has argued there is no such thing as “post-colonialism” for Australia’s Aboriginal peoples. Rather, he writes their experience is closer to the “decolonisation of the third world” (2005: 109). Similarly, Alfred (2009: 94) presents a universal view and explains most First Nations people live their lives “in a world of ideas imposed on them by others” and for decolonization to occur, First Nations people must:

add our voices to the narrative that is history, translate our understandings of history and justice, and bring the power of our wisdom to bear on the relationships we have with others. We cannot do this from a position of intellectual weakness.

Alfred (2009: 178) further argues those who can “shape ideas, translate, and create language will be essential to the process of decolonization...”. In 1963, Franz Fanon (p.2) described decolonization as a historical process between two “antagonistic forces” that aimed to “chang[e] the order of the world”. This process includes establishing “arenas of dignity” in which to create and live “oppositional cultures” (Cowlshaw 2014: 97). First Nations people in Canada and Australia use their media to communicate their oppositional views and to challenge, educate and inform.

Analysis of the broader, contemporary Indigenous mediasphere demonstrates Indigenous peoples are employing a wide mix of both traditional and user-generated media. This finding

confirms that as Bruns (2008) and Gerhards & Schafer (2010) have suggested has occurred within the dominant, global public sphere, access to the internet, and ability to produce, control and share user-generated media has enhanced the diversity of active Indigenous media voices within public sphere debates. The structural complexity of the Indigenous mediasphere now includes traditional print newspapers, broadcast media and a growing range of online publications, blogs and social media including Twitter, Tumblr, YouTube, and Facebook. Indigenous communicators are employing a range of diverse, unique and innovative media communication styles. The downside to this expanding mediasphere is the pressure it places on Indigenous media producers, whether they produce traditional or user-generated content, in relation to workloads and funding. It also creates an environment in which there are two levels of public sphere processes. Older members of communities still want access to traditional forms of print media, but this may leave them excluded from the faster, more fluid public sphere debates taking place online through various forms of digital, social media and mobile technologies.

These digital and mobile media and technologies have facilitated access to democratic discussions for Indigenous communicators in Canada and Australia. Furthermore, in line with observations in the dominant public sphere (Bruns 2008; Dahlgren 2015; Castells 2008), Indigenous people are actively engaging in horizontal and two-way discussions and debates about issues that affect them. These horizontal information flows allow Indigenous media producers and their audiences, to debate, challenge and provide counter-discourses to government policy and practice and mass media representations of their communities. Indigenous participants can counter the mass media's exclusion of Indigenous voices and perspectives and control the circulation of messages, individual participation and challenge ideas and policy with which they support or disagree.

The internet and online media are facilitating dissemination of Indigenous perspectives towards mainstream publics. The control journalists, editors (even Indigenous media journalists and editors), politicians and government officials have had over who participates in democratic debates affecting Indigenous people has been eroded. By privileging a diverse range of voices and oscillating information across public sphere boundaries (Squires 1999; Husband 1998), writers such as Eugenia Flynn, Celeste Liddle, and Lisa Charleyboy have demonstrated the effectiveness of Indigenous public sphere processes. Through their blogs, they have gained access to both Indigenous and mainstream audiences. Indigenous media producers have adapted social media and online communication mediums for their own purposes and in their own styles. Pearson's *IndigenousX* is a unique and innovative concept that has generated a broad Indigenous and general audience and given a global voice to 180 Indigenous Australians on a range of topics. Similarly, Towney and Bonson have used Facebook to inform their audiences on topics of interest and concern to specific groups within the broader Indigenous community. As Bruns (2008: 76) contended in relation to "issue publics" the internet and online media have "...given rise to a new class of topical experts...whose knowledge may not be conventionally accredited, but who derive their authority through the community processes..." Individuals such as Bonson, Pearson, Towney and Liddle decide what content they will publish. Their audience determines what they will discuss and what content they engage with.

The audience determines whether the perspectives presented are of value or not. In turn, those who generate community interest have breached public sphere boundaries to gain access to mainstream media through sites such as *The Guardian*, and mainstream audiences through a range of alternative, online but not exclusively Indigenous, media. Roth (2005: 13-14) argued:

First Peoples self-development involves not only control over production and distribution of their own messages to their own communities but also the seeking of cross-cultural links and coalitions through program content considerations and through diffusion to populations outside of their immediate regional territories.

Online media and the internet provide opportunities to produce and distribute media content that they can share with their own local communities, broader global Indigenous peoples, and mainstream society. The willingness to adopt and adapt new forms of communication through which to interact, manipulate and challenge is not new. As far back as 1836, only 35 years after the British invaded their lands, Aboriginal people on Flinders Island, in Tasmania, Australia used letters and the first Aboriginal publication to communicate and manipulate their oppressors (Burrows 2014).

Analysis of online Indigenous media supports earlier counterpublic sphere research (Delgado 1984; Felski 1989; Fraser 1990; Squires 1999, 2002; Milioni 2002; Avison & Meadows 2000). Independent, Indigenous media are affording Canadian and Australian Indigenous people the freedom to formulate their own identities, to speak in their own voices and styles and to dictate how and when they communicate. Online media, both traditional and user-generated, are providing opportunities to challenge and resist stereotypical ideas circulated through mainstream media and to criticise and critique proposed government policy. For instance, Liddle (2015b) used her media profile to challenge notions that Indigenous women are “welfare ‘cash cows’”. Moreover, Towney curates discussions through *Wiradjuri News* that debate and challenge topics such as the closure of Aboriginal communities or domestic violence. Similarly, *IndigenousX* and Liddle’s (IndigenousX 2015) *Constitutional Recognition Survey* challenges government propaganda regarding constitutional recognition. Indigenous media, traditional, online and user-generated, are essential decolonising tools that place control over mediated information in the hands of their Indigenous producers. While it goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss whether Indigenous content and engagement results in policy change, the willingness, and ability of Indigenous media producers to use their media to challenge and indeed, make “tactical strikes into the dominant public sphere” (Squires 1999: 35) suggests Indigenous media producers have embraced the communication opportunities the internet and user-generated media present. However, the withdrawal of funding and shutting down of Indigenous voices shows Indigenous peoples’ right to engage with and produce their own media without interference is not yet a reality. Whether this growing range of Indigenous media is allowing Indigenous voices to be heard and can influence public opinion and policy is as yet unclear, but the internet and user-generated media are generating a resurgence in the production of independent Indigenous media.

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