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Online Video Activism and Political Mash-up Genres

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Abstract

This article situates contemporary forms of video activism in online environments within a historical trajectory of radical film recruited for Left thinking and action. Focusing on the remix ethos and aesthetics of political mash-up videos, the article suggests how revisiting the analogue precursors of digital video may help contextualise and understand new forms of video activism, and politically committed media practices more generally. In the first part of the analysis, I engage with some of the principal conceptual themes and aesthetics that shape the various hybrid genres of the kind of visual activism we see emerging in YouTube and similar video platforms today. For these purposes, I propose a typology for understanding the motley array of video documentary and documentation available online as a hybrid and diverse range of media forms for political investigation and portrayal. The second part of the analysis demonstrates how such mash-up practices play out on three distinct levels when digital videos are put in circulation online. First, political mash-up is understood as a set of material practices in which online content is mixed and repurposed, second, in terms of a convergence between different styles, genres and modes of address, and finally, the concept of mash-up opens up for an understanding of the blurring of boundaries between different political actors and motives in online media environments.

Contributor Note

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Introduction

Convergence, hybridity, and found footage re-appropriation are defining features of contemporary online video activism and political discourse in a digital age more generally. The practices of remixing and re-framing moving images for political purposes have however been around since the invention of film. Over time such media practices have been given many names: media jamming, détournement, found footage filmmaking, avant garde film, television hacking, guerrilla television, telejusting, political remix, subversive remix, scratch video and fan vidding, along with more stagy designations such as cultural terrorism or cybernetic guerrilla warfare (McIntosh 2012). The political use and critical potency of such remixes is thus not fundamentally new in itself or confined to the qualities of what we today understand as new media. The same applies to the subversive practices of (illegally) distributing non-licenced video and film material at the heart of current controversies over intellectual property, which have a long history in Left-leaning communities formed around the ethical frameworks of remixing and sharing cassette bands, bootlegging tapes in underground distribution channels, community film screenings or post order mail lists (see e.g., Hilderbrand 2009).

Yet something remarkable and unprecedented is taking place in terms of the magnitude of the phenomenon, the speed by which these memes and remixes travel online and the motley range of different actors who engage in political video practices today. Contemporary forms of video activism are increasingly situated within the market logics of social media and remix ethos of online user-generated cultures. This has profound implications for the set of longstanding political practices formed around the ethical frameworks of watching and sharing tapes and to how we understand and critically examine such practices. One arena where these developments are particularly evident is YouTube , the world's largest audio-visual repository and video-sharing platform.

This article proposes an understanding of contemporary forms of video activism as *political mash-up* genres emerging in a 'post-broadcast media ecology' (Merrin 2008). By situating digital video practices on YouTube within a historical trajectory of video activism recruited for Left thinking and action, the study suggests how revisiting the analogue precursors of digital video may help contextualise and understand contemporary modes of video activism, and politically committed media practices more generally.

In the first part of the analysis, I engage with some of the principal conceptual themes that shape the various stylistic genres and aesthetic forms of vernacular political video we see emerging in YouTube and similar online environments. For these purposes, I propose an exploratory, typological scheme for understanding them as distinct genres that, despite their variations, are united by purpose, practice and to some extent form. Rather than an exhaustive inventory, I consider the proposed typology to be a point of entry into a broader discussion of how we might understand these 'genres' in relation to an increasingly complex set of media flows and circuits of distribution and consumption across intertwined and hybrid communication networks (Chadwick 2013).

The second part of the article further extends the terms of the analysis by placing political mash-up genres on

YouTube within the broader history of amateur video production and DIY cultures. I argue that contemporary mash-up practices play out on three distinct levels of the texts and their extra-textual circumstance. First, political mash-up is understood as a set of material practices in which visuals and sound are cut and mixed, second, in terms of a convergence process between different styles, genres and modes of address, and finally the concept opens up for an understanding of the multiplicity of and blurring of boundaries between different political actors and motives in online video activism today. Unfolding these three facets of the notion of political mash-up, I link the history of radical film and video to contemporary digital practices and genres. In doing so, a call is made for a historically grounded conceptualization of online video activism urging scholars and media practitioners to 'reclaim what happened before YouTube' (Jenkins 2009: 125).

Methodology and analytical framework

In order to briefly account for the analytical approach of this analysis of online video, this section provides an outline of the body of video material chosen for analysis and the analytical strategy applied to the study of YouTube as both a database for selecting videos for examination and a research object in itself.

Empirical material

The videos scrutinized in this analysis derive from a larger research project on the radical video practices that emerged around three different, yet related, political mobilisations across Europe in 2008-2009. The project combines textual analysis of videos with qualitative interviews and participant observation of the European Social forum in Malmö, Sweden in 2008, the alternative COP15 climate summit in Copenhagen in 2009, and the G20 counter summit in London, also in 2009 (see Askanius 2012). This article revisits the empirical material from the three different case studies so as to detail a taxonomy of the total population of videos and subsequently focus on one particular dimension of these digital remixing practices and aesthetic forms. The empirical material consists of a range of different videos made in the prelude to, during, or in the aftermath of the three protest events.[1] They are produced by a variety of different actors, ranging from independent filmmakers, video collectives, affinity groups, ephemeral activist networks and social movement organisations who all share having contributed to public discourse with video documentation and interpretations of the protests and their political circumstances on YouTube. In its capacity as the most dominant arena for contemporary modes of video activism, YouTube works both as a database for selecting videos for analysis and as an important part of the research object itself.

[1] In order to propose an open-ended and wide-ranging typology that captures the broader context in which the videos of the specific events are presented and consumed on YouTube, the sample of videos also includes videos that are not directly concerned with the three mobilisations. Such videos may be so called video responses that reply to videos in the core sample or videos that have been tagged with keywords relevant to the three cases (e.g. ESF08, COP15 or G20 London) so as to direct the viewer to past and future mobilisations of a similar kind.

Textual analysis and attention to media form

This study argues for the importance of close attention to the long history of so called new media. However, the primary aim of this article is not to provide a history of video activism but rather to examine video texts and their extra-textual circumstances *in relation* to their historical contexts. In this manner, the study is positioned within a tradition of media studies that gives prevalence to the analysis of media form and considers this an important entry point into understanding the social and political order of media. Such a tradition is concerned with issues of power and commits to the close micro-analysis of the languages and images of media texts located within the broader contexts of social practice and public conduct (Corner 1995). This analytical strategy poses questions of the ways in which prevalent forms of audio-visual mediation 'offer ethical positions for viewers to occupy providing possibilities for enhanced critical awareness and favourable conditions for social action' and provides insights into 'the virtues of media representations that may cultivate (or impinge on) reflexive and active publics' (Chouliaraki 2006: 5). I draw on the work of Corner (2008, 2011) to establish an understanding of media form in terms of three overlapping dynamics: organisation, articulation, and apprehension. This understanding of form, carried into the textual analysis of videos in the YouTube environment has implications for how attention is focused on different dimensions of the videos and the platform in which they proliferate. It becomes possible to extend the scope of the analysis beyond questions of what is depicted on screen so as also to induce analytical susceptibility in the various dynamics of viewers' engagement with the videos. In this manner, considering form as a three-dimensional concept reflects the various (often overlapping) ways of approaching the object of analysis as both video *texts* (their aesthetic qualities and protocols of argument) and their *extra-textual* circumstances (how they are presented online, shared, liked, 'favorited', commented upon etc.).

Contextualising radical filmmaking: the historical roots of online video activism

Online video activism should be understood in relation to a long history of political practices and traditions of scholarly attention towards these practices. The prefixes 'alternative', 'radical', 'progressive' etc. variously put in front of 'video' to designate largely Left-leaning filmmaking signal a commitment to political action and social change. As a rebuttal to dominant mainstream (mis)representations of political protests and movements, video activism is defined by a commitment to explain '*what* people are protesting' in ways that project an alternative image, especially of non-violent disobedience, and in doing so draw on a critical, political and aesthetic vocabulary largely absent in dominant culture (Juhasz 1995: 32).

Juhasz (1995) argues that significant productions of political filmmaking occur when rapid changes in politics, theory and technology align. Historically, politically committed video can thus be traced through a number of film and video movements rooted in the political struggle for representation and voice. In a Western context, the American underground cinema of the 1950s and early 1960s can be seen as a direct precursor to the radical protest cinema

of the 1960s and 1970s, which documented the political activism of civil rights, anti-colonialism, anti-war protests, women and gay liberation movements (Boyle 1997; Juhasz 1995). Since the 1970s a great deal of theoretical work, as well as filmmaking practice on the Left, has been devoted to developing and analysing 'a revolutionary aesthetics – a combative form that poses the right questions in the intellectual struggle against capitalism' (Gaines 1999: 232). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s anti-systemic and critical voices continued to tap into the possibilities offered by video as the equipment and editing tools slowly became better and cheaper. Important examples of such upsurges in politically motivated video and television production include the bulk of alternative public access television projects launched in the early 1980s, also known as the guerrilla television movement (see e.g., Boyle 1997; Halleck 2005; Kellner 1990; Stein 2001) or the anti-roads movement in Britain (Harding 2001), which used video to combine environmental activism with anti-capitalist critique and critical perspectives on sustainable development – concerns that run into the global climate change activism that so urgently demands our attention today.

The 2008 meltdown of financial markets provoked an upsurge in subversive video work and a renewed incitement to contest global capitalism and the increasing hegemony of market values in all aspects of governance in liberal democracies. But we need to go back another decade to the first counter-summits and mass-demonstrations of the alter-globalisation movement against corporate power and financial globalisation in the late 1990s to fully understand the trajectory of contemporary protest politics. Large-scale demonstrations against the institutions and symbols of global capitalism and the efforts to contemplate, mobilise for, document and raise awareness of these decentralised, but 'spectacular' protest events were part of what brought about the rapid growth of video activism in the late 1990s (Harding 2001). These political issues rose to the broader public agenda right around the time of the shift from analogue to digital video. The threshold of storage, processing capacity, and bandwidth we crossed in the mid-2000s, not only opened up new possibilities for dedicated 'vidders' and radical documentary makers but also catapulted political video into mainstream consciousness and everyday media practices (Russo and Coppa 2012).

In the past decade, the struggle to contest neoliberalism and expose its consequences has been enacted in video production and theory, and inspired a large body of video work questioning the structure of institutions such as G8/20, The IMF, the WTO, corporate power, the politics of third world debt and the uneven distribution of power and resources in the process of financial globalisation. The waves of protests that currently face liberal democracies in the wake of the implosion of global markets grow out of this same matrix and a systemic critique similar to that of the alter-globalisation movement are raised today by the 15-M Indignados, the Occupy movement and the widespread austerity mobilisations across Europe. Although these movements have very different compositions, strategies and to some extent political orientations, they are united by how they contest the neoliberal mechanism by which all aspects of political and social organisation are increasingly based around the primacy

of unregulated markets and economic growth.[2]

In the following, I suggest that the motley body of political video and filmmaking concerned with the social, political and environmental consequences of neoliberalism, understood as both a regulatory force, political rationale and mode of governmentality, inscribes itself into this trajectory of intellectual and political movements that draw heavily on visual media in their struggle for voice and representation. The new generation of online video activists are thus (more or less knowingly) furthering a time-honoured tradition with roots in this prismatic array of experimental and alternative media movements (Gregory et al. 2005). While television, historically, has been considered the most challenging medium to reconstruct in an alternative mode because of the high costs of production and distribution (Hands 2009), the development of internet-enabled video in conjunction with low-cost, or even free editing tools have made video- production, remixing and commentary literally for everyone. This 'democratisation'[3] requires us to look closer at the diverse nature of politically motivated video currently in circulation and at how these digital genres are reminiscent of their analogue precursors but may also bring essentially new qualities into the mix.

'New' forms of video activism rooted in 'old' political struggles

As a first analytical effort, I start by offering a typology of the prismatic body of different videos mobilising for, reporting from, and reflecting upon the three political mobilisations across Europe and anti-capitalist struggles more generally. These include the *mobilisation video,* the *witness video,* the *documentation video, the archived radical video* remediating historical work and finally, the political mash-up video. By detailing five broad-brushed types of radical online video, I provide a framework to contextualise the analytical efforts of the second section, in which I turn to a more detailed analysis of the *political mash-up* as a particularly prevalent category of video recruited for Left wing thinking and action today. Needless to say, this is no exhaustive categorisation. Not only would such an undertaking be relatively useless, it is also not possible to make any empirical generalisations about universal patterns and categories on the basis of the empirical material. These are hybrid genres within a chaotic and staggeringly abundant sea of online videos. Hence, in the proposed typology, I engage with some, but not all, of the different forms of politically committed video one can encounter on YouTube today.

Mobilisation videos

The term mobilisation video is used, by practitioners and activists, to refer to the short videos disseminated prior to a pre-scheduled demonstration or direct action event (for a few examples of this

[2] For an extensive analysis of the lines of continuity between the alter-globalisation protests of the 1990ies/early 2000s and the recent wave of political mobilisations in the Occupy movement and beyond, see Fominaya and Cox (2013).

[3] Democratisation is put in brackets to indicate the ambiguity of such a claim. The inherent promise of YouTube as a democratic platform from which everyone can raise their voice and broadcast themselves is obviously undercut by the realities of commercial interests and censorship that saturate the social media industry today.

genre see appendix 1-4). Other labels used to describe this mode of video are 'protest trailers', 'demo-teasers', protest promos', 'call out videos', or 'riot porn'. Explicitly calling for political action, the mobilisation video urges viewers to take action by joining a protest in the streets, or to engage online by further spreading the call for action in personal networks. These are short, piecemeal, bite-sized slogans most often adapted to the time frame of a television advertisement. As a flexible genre, guiding rather than determining styles and strategies, mobilisation videos follow a set of shared dramaturgic rules. They bring together discursive resources and historical genres to stage injustice as a spectacle that requires action and set up a given space of action for the viewer. This is often done by drawing upon footage and photographs from previous demonstrations and actions that are re-appropriated and given new meaning in new calls for action. Mobilisation videos end with concrete directions for how to act upon what is witnessed on screen, usually by providing a link to a website where the viewer can get additional, more detailed information on the promoted event (see fig. 1).

Figure 1. *Pay-off in a mobilisation video for the ESF2008 (see appendix 1)*

Characterised by a stark visual contrast between evil-doers and benefactors, a problem and its solution, the condensed narrative of the mobilisation video seeks to reduce complex political issues to a feasible space of action. The story told in order to 'rally the troops' (Gregory et al. 2005: 10) obviously differs from mobilisation videos intended for a broader audience of non-activists. A fruitful distinction can therefore be made within this genre between the videos, re-educating and re-solidifying solidarity among the already converted, and the videos used to 'initiate, convert or recruit new adherers' (Gaines 2007: 87). Yet another useful notion for understanding the dramaturgy of these calls for action is the idea of 'body genres' used to describe the commonalities of works that make us want to do something and are designed for the 'production of outrage' to galvanize 'body works' (Gaines 2007). In an online context, 'body genres' aim to physically move the body of the spectator away from the screen into the street.

Witness videos

The witness video is a label used to designate videos documenting specific unjust conditions or political wrong-doings/doers, police brutality, human rights violations etc. These caught-on-camera snapshots are often recorded on mobile cell phones and uploaded without much editing (for an example, see appendix 5). While these videos dominantly apply strategies of realism, using the bumpy handheld aesthetic to induce authenticity and a sense of 'being there', others rely on more performative strategies, setting the footage to music and adding on-screen graphics, voice-over or text. In these videos, the space of action is often implied rather than explicated (as opposed to the mobilisation videos that provide much more explicit directions for action). Chanan (2011) dubs this kind of video

'citizen reportage', to signal how ordinary citizens (non-activists) increasingly engage in video documentation that stands out, not for technical or aesthetic proficiency, but for its sense of participation in audio-visual immediacy (Chanan 2011: 220). Critical to this genre is the sense of the presence of the person recording the video (Chanan 2011: 222). Often the videographer's voice (or cry) as she react to what is witnessed is present and forms part of the power of the message that comes across. Variations of the witness video also include follow-up interviews with activists providing eyewitness accounts recorded in the aftermath of the protests e.g. to counter mass media's framing of the events. Videos such as the amateur studio interviews produced by Indy-media providing alternative eyewitness accounts of the death of Ian Tomlinson during the G20 protests in London fall under this category (see appendix 6).

Documentation videos

Documentation videos make up the body of videos that, in a simple and straightforward manner, document activist marches, speeches, community meetings, direct actions, political happenings etc. This cluster of self-documentation works mainly as modes of auto-communication and reflects the role of video in forging collective identity, a sense of belonging, community and sustained commitment. Examples include videos documenting the People's Assembly during the COP 15 (see appendix 7) or the work of feminist collective FemFokus who try to capture the collective atmosphere of the ESF2008 while documenting the various political happenings around the city of Malmö during the social forum (see appendix 8). In a recent study of the use of YouTube by London-based social movement organisations, the author finds that 'members use online spaces as visual archives of their offline activities and personal ties', indicating how 'photos from offline events can help sustain commitment to the group by providing group members with possibilities for viewing documentation from their own participation' (Uldam 2010: 312). For these purposes, YouTube works as a cultural archive for offline activities forming a place of memory that fosters commitment to the act of participation (Carpentier 2010). Here we might also situate the longer video items that have sprung up recently in connection with the wave of occupied campuses and public spaces seized by activists in the Occupy movement, for example in London. Featuring the talks of supportive academics and writers such as Graeme Turner, Judith Butler or David Harvey visiting the protest camps, these videos are strongly reminiscent of what in the 1960s was dubbed the 'teach-in' (Chanan 2011). Other examples include the videos documenting the speeches of activist academics such as Naomi Klein at the alternative climate summit 'Klimaforum09' in Copenhagen or the talk of Michael Hardt at the ESF in Malmö 2008 (see appendices 9 and 10).

Archived radical video

YouTube is also a space in which the digitised 16mm and 8mm film of historical video collectives are remediated so as to (potentially) bring new life and a new audience to these works. With a para-text or on-screen text presenting and contextualising the video for a present day audience, videos from historical Left-wing collectives such as

TVTV,[4] Deep Dish and DIVA TV[5] documenting the ACT UP (The AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power) protests of the late 1980s are presented next to recently uploaded videos of the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations and videos discussing the role of social media in the Arab spring (See fig. 2).

Figure 2. *YouTube search result connecting struggles across time and space*

Other examples of this archival mode of video include the body of video work on the YouTube channel of Third World Newsreel (TWN). The activist filmmaker collective TWN has worked with video and documentary to promote self-representations of ethnic minorities, LGBT and other traditionally marginalised groups since 1967 (For an analysis of early Left-wing newsreels see e.g. Nichols 1973, Renov 1987). The TWN YouTube channel contains a rich archive of videos connecting social justice struggles across a timespan of nearly five decades (see appendix 11). Although far from all historical radical video and documentary have been digitized or necessarily archived on YouTube only, these videos represent an important category in so far as they demonstrate how YouTube provides a space in which new and old videos, raising similar political issues, are presented to the viewer in an intertextual web that may potentially connect past and present struggles.

Political mash-ups

The fifth and final subgenre of videos that I want to draw attention to is that of the political mash-up. Whereas the preceding category consisted of archived video work, this mode of video concerns itself with 'contemporaneous archival interventions' (Horwatt 2009). This broad category of videos is seen to designate the amalgamation of multiple source materials that are montaged together to construct a political argument. This can encompass mixing raw amateur footage or video diary recordings (the talking head) with snippets of found footage: news reports, music videos, motion pictures, entertainment programs, cartoons, animations, commercials or other bits and pieces from the inexhaustible pool of 'semiotic resources' made available online (Kuhn 2012). The political mash-up video epitomises the hybridity and inter-mediality found at the intersection point between the very purposeful and serious political statements on the one hand and the playful 'everyday creativity' (Gauntlett 2011) of increasingly media literate citizens, on the other. On YouTube , these videos are located within a conceptual grey zone and ambiguous space of media production where amateurs meet professionals, anti-capitalism meets corporate control, and the mundane politics of everyday life meets militant activism. In the following section, I unfold the aesthetic qualities and historical roots of this final category in greater detail.

[4] TVTV is short for Top Value Television: a San Francisco-based video collective founded in 1972. See appendix 12 for an example of how TVTV's pioneering alternative news report from the 1972 Republican National Convention re-circulates on YouTube today.

[5] The acronym DIVA is short for 'damn interfering video activists', a collective of video makers in New York spawned by the AIDS crisis (see appendix 13).

Political mash-up videos: Mixing content, genres and modes of politicality

In a sense, all of the videos described and categorised above are products of different strategies of remixing and re-appropriation. The mobilisation video often appropriates footage of previous mobilisations and recycles iconic images of past political struggles to galvanize for new protests. Similarly, the digitized editions of old 16 or 8mm films and VHS cassettes described in the fourth category are often sampled with, for example, graphics, text boxes, animated speech bubbles so as to re-appropriate the video for a contemporary audience. Yet this final category stands out for the extent to which the videos draw on pre-existing material in a remixing process that operates on several levels of abstraction, three of which I will highlight here.

Edwards and Tryon (2009) define mash-ups as videos that 'recombine two or more pre-existing videos and/or audio sources into a new, derivative work'. In a similar vein, Chanan speaks of political remix videos, which take found material from multiple sources and recombine it in new ways (2011: 220). In McIntosh's (2012) account of a historical body of subversive video remixes made between WWII and the launch of YouTube, he defines the genre in relation to five shared characteristics: For one thing, they work to appropriate mass media material without copyright permissions. They comment on, deconstruct or challenge media narratives, dominant myths, social norms and traditional power structures. They transform the original message embedded in the source material. Further, such videos are indented for amateur and DIY communities rather than elites, academic or high art audiences. Finally, they are low-end productions and rely on grassroots circuits of distribution. In previous periods, the distribution of such videos took place in VHS duplicating circles, film screenings, later in self-hosted websites such as Guerrilla News Networks or Adbusters, and after 2005 primarily through YouTube (McIntosh 2012).

Today, political mash-ups are 'a YouTube staple' (Russo and Coppa 2012). The genre predates YouTube by more than 60 years, however. A very early example is the short propaganda film 'The Lambeth Walk-Nazi Style' produced and circulated by the British Ministry of Information in 1942. The re-edit, which mocked the German Army, was distributed uncredited to newsreel companies in the US and UK and is generally regarded as one of the first political mash-up videos. In fact, the tradition can be traced even further back to the 1920s when Russian re-editors would repurpose American Hollywood films to create Marxist narratives and class messages. These early re-mixes were painstakingly done by hand, splicing strips of film and setting them to a new audio track (McIntosh 2012). The 1980s and 1990s brought videotapes and home VCRs allowing artists, activists and fan-vidders to make remixes via tape-to-tape editing. Although history is filled with analogue precursors to digital video of this sort, it would seem that the digital qualities and online circulation is bringing something essentially new to the practices and aesthetics of political mash-up. Therefore, in order to fully understand what the phenomenon entails today in an era of digital media, I want to extend the notion of political mash-up beyond the material practices of remixing to signify a process which unfolds on three different levels.

Contemporary forms of video activism - within which political mash-up videos represent a particular prevalent mode of creating a political argument – are about a mix of not only new and found material but of genres, actors and different degrees of political intentionality. Let me briefly unfold this argument by detailing the three interrelated dimensions of political mash-up at the level of both form (textual) and practice (extra textual) and in doing so, focus on some of the tensions and dualities that emerge in this process.

The material practices of political mash-up

First, I consider the concept of political mash-up to refer to the remix of new and found video material to advance 'new political narratives and promote political subtexts' (Edwards and Tryon 2009). At this level, mash-up video makers engage in the critical transformation of media *content*. A large body of theory has been devoted to remix at this level (see e.g. Edward 2009; Kuhn 2012; Horwatt 2009; McIntosh 2009; 2012). The various ways users co-create online content have been described interchangeably as e.g. mediated modes of 'DIY citizenship' (Hartley 2010) or acts of 'photoshopping for democracy' (Jenkins 2006). As a set of material practices, political mash-ups that document and narrate demonstrations and political struggles, involve the process of cutting and mixing digital content. Juxtaposing new and archived content, the videos are testimony to how 'critical digital intertextuality' (Edwards and Tryon 2009) works to visually connect past and present struggles across time. Today, such videos are distributed simultaneously or in close proximity to the event they recount and are characterised by an evanescence and overabundance of ephemeral images. Some of their defining features thus include the speed with which they circulate, the fluid and ephemeral quality of their existence, and the collaborative nature of how they are made by tearing apart and putting together material from the vast sea of images made available online.

Within all of the earlier traditions of political filmmaking and movements described in the previous sections, remix and the purposeful re-appropriation of existing footage have been key components in historical political struggles as part of the subversive fabric of their messages. Despite such continuities over time, Horwatt (2009) points out that whereas remixers in the past relied mainly on B-films and film waste (because of the inaccessibility or high price of original footage), political remixers today have unlimited access (although illegally) to any thinkable kind of mainstream media content. This inevitably changes and extends the discursive-aesthetic range of resources from which remix arguments can be built.

One prevalent mode of remixing content in political mash-up videos is to juxtapose images with a soundtrack and lyrics that re-narrates and re-casts the images into new contexts of meaning. Such audio-remixing strategies are by way of example demonstrated in the video 'All together now Genoa G8' in which gory images of the brutal violence of the Italian police during the G8 summit in Genoa 2001 is set to the joyful and carefree tones of a Beatles love song creating a satiric and dissonant political statement on protest policing and repressive authorities in liberal democracies (see appendix 14).

Figure 3. *Framing the news anchor as croupier in the absurd theatre of casino capitalism.*

Another example of the critical and playful remixing of content characteristic of the political mash-up video is seen in the Indymedia production 'Pro Capitalists gather for G20 in London April 1st'. In this video, scraps of CNN, BBC, RT and FOX news reports on the global financial crisis are 'jammed' so as to ridicule and subvert the statements of politicians, bankers and news anchors.

Mixing these 'disrupted' news reports with amateur recordings from anti-capitalist protests in London and footage from a Casino, this hodgepodge of re-edited content frames the global financial crisis as a product of 'casino capitalism', the corruption of political and economic world leaders, and the inability/reluctance of mainstream media to critically probe and expose these matters to the public (see appendix 15).

The collapse of genres and styles

Second, the concept of mash-up also bears meaning to the process of mixing genres and stylistic forms. Political mash-up videos draw upon a wide range of different discourses, styles, and narrative structures of different media genres and products. They hardly represent a self-contained or stable genre. Instead, they migrate, mutate, replicate in a constant shuttle between fictional and factual genres in a 'cross pollination of styles' (Hill 2007).

A particularly good example of videos that work between performative and realist strategies to attract the attention of the viewer are mash-up videos, which combine the features of the personal vlogs with what we may loosely refer to as the alternative news report. In collapsing these two genres, such videos for instance combine close-ups of 'the talking head' typical of the video diary, with eyewitness accounts or fragments of mainstream media news material, to create a new and personalised narrative of the protest event. Some of these more individualised modes of political expression intrinsic to the video diary tend to deflate into a politics of narcissism in videos that seem to be is more about boosting channel traffic and achieving celebrity vlogger status than about constructing a political argument or engaging in political a debate.

Figure 4. *Crossover between the intimate video diary and the alternative news report.*

We see these tensions being played out in the video 'Goodbye Alex' in which a vlogger pays tribute to the Greek teenager, Alexandros Grigoropoulos, killed by police in Athens in 2008 (see appendix 16). On YouTube his death spawned a surge of alterative news

reports and commemoration videos that link his death to anti-capitalist struggles across Europe and a broader critique of the marriage between state repression and neoliberalism in Western democracies. In 'Goodbye Alex' the female vlogger pose as news anchor and commentator in a subjective and sexualised performance that weaves the story of his death and the following riots across Greece into a de-politicised narrative of everyday life and the hardships of being a teenager. Placed in a bedroom setting and addressing the camera in a confessional mode, the video combines eyewitness accounts of the events leading to his death (cell phone recordings taken from a nearby balcony), and images of the ensuing riots with broadcast news images from the funeral. Used as a platform to stage herself and the vlog, the video encapsulates how political mash-up videos are situated in the grey zones between documenting a story and creating a new one in a process which, in some cases, is less about mobilising solidarity than it is about forging 'a public experience of self' (McDonald 2002: 125).

Edwards (2009) argues that as opposed to earlier modes of video activism that sought to signal their difference from mainstream, dominant media forms, political mash-up video today 'embraces popular culture as its starting point'. This new quality to some extent collides with how the political use of video, traditionally, has been strongly connected to the production and submission of *visual evidence*. The videos on the one hand build their arguments around truth claims and ambitions to expose 'the real' version of the events. On the other hand, in the process of 'jamming' the footage and recombining it in new ways, they produce polysemous and ambiguous readings and dramatize the event at the expense of facts and the strict submission of visual evidence. The blurred, shaky footage induces a sense of immediacy and the lack of professional sheen adds to a feeling of authenticity. At the same time, digitally manipulated images are ubiquitous in the videos and the digital animations added onto the footage dislocate the realist strategies of the handheld camera position. Certainly, the playful and performative nature of certain videos and the popular cultural contexts from which the material is lifted can undercut claims of alterity and the radicality of documenting political realities that require action. As testimonies to the cross-fertilization, mimicry, and hybridisation so central to political discourse in a digital age, these videos straddle the categories of fact and fiction, art and document, entertainment and information, politics and popular culture. In doing so, they blur the boundaries between authenticity and performativity, subject and celebrity, individualism and collectivity.

The convergence of political actors and motives

Finally, the concept of mash-up should also be understood in relation to the many different actors, more or less overtly political in intent and modes of address, who engage in video activism today. The remix culture of today is not confined to the few who have access to technology and the skills to master the equipment. Today, virtually anyone with a laptop and an internet connection can make a mash-up video within a matter of minutes. This vague category of 'anyone' is also part of what requires us to rethink what we understand by the notion of political mash-up videos and

video activism more broadly. Although this does not imply that anyone with a mobile phone camera has become a video activist, the opening up of the field of video activism does make traditional conceptualisations and strict boundaries hard to sustain. The role of the video activist is taken up by an increasingly broad range of different, not always easily identifiable or explicitly political, actors. On YouTube this development is epitomised by how the work of, for example, established video monitoring groups documenting police brutality and independent radical filmmakers are chaotically sandwiched together with those of unaffiliated, more or less politically motivated passers-by who, perhaps even by chance, have caught a pivotal incident on camera. At this extra-textual level of the process of mash-up, technology has not only brought a new group of actors into the field, but has also brought this motley array of different actors in contact on some platforms. On the one hand, the same videos display Left propagandist-realism reverberating with the politics of traditional class struggle against unjust social conditions, providing a collective response and directions for how to change these conditions together. On the other hand, the example of 'Goodbye Alex' described above illustrates how these ideological horizons are often combined (and sometimes clash) with vernacular, pop-culture remixes and more individualistic modes of political expression and identity politics.

In this sense, the notion of mash-up is concerned with how videos are made by and blur the boundaries between different actors who all display different modes of 'politicality' (Corner 2011). This notion of politicality refers to the different levels and 'aspects of being political and doing politics' in (textual) and around (extra-textual) the videos. Surely, video activism is defined by the explicit engagement with and critique of 'issues to do with the control of resources and exercising of social power through formal institutions and procedures of regulation' (Corner 2011: 189). Across the broad spectrum of videos that fall into this category however, some showcase groups that are actively campaigning for more participation within an extended democracy, while others depict groups, networks and individuals that are carrying out self-conscious 'guerrilla' actions against a system about whose possibilities for change they remain pessimistic. At the level of text, the videos are, on the one hand, defined by their very explicit, directed and self-conscious engagement with core political issues unfolding on screen. On the other hand, the various modes of appropriating these videos online such as sharing, liking, 'favouriting', 'digging', commenting or remixing can demonstrate different and less overtly political modes of engagement by different actors driven by a multiple range of motives. These extra-textual modes of politicality could be understood as more subtle ways of engaging with politics, which may only implicitly critique institutions and structures of power. Conversely, other videos that are not necessarily directed at a specific, opinionated community of viewers, may be received by an online audience in a highly politicised manner and spur extensive political debate. In this sense, the videos work concurrently to both deliver the political as a set of participatory practices directly attacking and intentionally seeking to affect the formal institutions of power, and to bring out a sense of political engagement that demonstrate the broader manifestations of politicality, i.e. the multiple ways of 'being political' and performing politics

which can materialise in numerous, often unforeseen (and sometimes even unintended), ways across the cultural terrain.

Political mash-ups are a departure from earlier modes of media activism, but not all are simply an offshoot of social movement politics or the political agenda of a specific organisation. The participatory logics of political remix are different from earlier eras of video activism where the activism and media production were more thoroughly intertwined. Instead, they 'operate at a remove from earlier alternative forms of media production and lean more towards a political centre (though leaning towards left–of–centre), than their alternative media forbearers' (Edwards and Tryon 2012).

Alternative media makers have never been a homogenous group easily boxed to fit into analytical categories just as the lines of difference between constructing political documentary arguments and mere video documentations have always been problematic. But recast onto the ever evolving, hybrid and contradictory spaces of the new media ecology, these longstanding controversies over 'the politics of documenting the political' (Corner 2011) and the role of the audio-visual in political argument and portrayal raise increasingly complex questions of representation and agency that beg our attention.

Concluding remarks

Still very little is known of the role of YouTube and digital video practices in the 'mobilisation, framing, diffusion and resonance of protest and protest movements' (Doerr, Mattoni and Teune 2013). In a contemporary mediascape, where new forms of visibility are inextricably linked to new forms of action and interaction (Thompson 2005) we need to revisit longstanding debates of the role of the audio-visual in political action and thinking, and ground our analysis in the rich histories of these matters. In the attempt to makes sense of and induce order into the chaotic and staggeringly abundant sea of online videos, this article provides a taxonomy for identifying and understanding contemporary forms of video activism as a diverse range of media *forms* for political investigation and portrayal in online contexts. I have singled out and detailed the features of the political mash-up video, which plays an increasingly important part of 'transgressive political discourse in a digital age' (Edwards 2009). This genre demonstrates some of the ways in which the shift in control over production and distribution of videos, epitomised by YouTube, have given life to a multiplicity of new video forms that combine aesthetic-discursive qualities in various creative ways. They pay testimony to how activists seek to induce meaning into and have a say in how the history of protest events is written and how protester and police violence is framed and presented to the broader public. Understood against the backdrop of the long history of our political use of media and the cultural practices that surround them, online mash-up videos represent a continuation of previous modes of video activism but possess their own unique aesthetic contributions of a digital age.

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Electronic Appendices

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2: 'Call out video for the G20 summit counter-mobilisation 28th March…', uploaded by user 'manchesterg20', Available at http://www.*YouTube*.com/watch?v=hl-IfrMh6cI.

3: G20 Fail', uploaded by user 'illuzia', Available at http://www.*YouTube*.com/watch?v=3YrzjrmuaUI&list=PLBAE89762D2C58A01.

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