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GUERRILLA IMAGES:
AESTHETICS AND POLITICS OF MOVING IMAGES IN CONTEMPORARY UPRISINGS

EDITED BY KATHRIN FAHLENBRACH, GIUSEPPE PREVITALI AND GIACOMO TAGLIANI

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Guerrilla Images:

Archeologies, Geographies, Aesthetics of Political Filmmaking and Videoactivism

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OTHERNESS, NEW MARGINALITY AND OTHER TROPES

As far as we can currently see, the 21st century has been significantly marked by uprisings, producing powerful swarms of protest pictures. Already the globally circulated images of the anti-WGO demonstrations in Seattle (1999) and Genoa (2001) at the turn of the century were most influential in coining the new millennium's imagination of participative and globally connected upheavals and politics. This was even more evident in the so-called Arab Spring and the 15-M Movement in Madrid in 2011. These uprisings indicated the dawn of a new media ecosystem of protests around digital media and online platforms (Hartle and White 2021). Since then, current images and forms of protest have continued to be deeply embedded into digital media environments (cf. Rovisco and Veneti 2017; Mortensen et al. 2019) shaping the technical (re)producibility, the effectiveness and even the very possibility of political action (Rovisco 2017; Snowdon 2020).

Throughout the last decades, such protests have produced an increasing volume of photographs and memes, but also a broad range of online videos. Video documentation, in particular, is spread all over the world in real time, enabling new protest practices and professionalisms to emerge (cf. Ristovska 2021) and creating layered ecologies in the media/movement dynamic (Neumayer and Rossi 2018; Trerè 2019). In light of these changes, Hartle and White (2022) recognize a new paradigm of "visual activism" that aims to subvert reigning visual and discursive regimes in the digital sphere and create contentious, imaginary spaces of political action. Despite their heterogeneous claims, a key feature shared by online-activists across very different places is the effort to create digital counter-publics that confront mass media coverage with their own images and narratives (Anden-Papadopoulos 2013). Accordingly,

video production has become a constitutive element in acts of revolt (Della Ratta 2018). The continuous dialectic between the actions performed by the "singular-plural" body (Nancy 1996) and their audiovisual remediation (Mirzoeff 2017) seems to disclose a potentiality that is both political and aesthetic.

Obviously, investigating protest today demands a multifocal point of view. On the one hand, it requires a consideration of the specificity of the revolts, situated in a certain historical context and in concrete local situations, as in the emblematic case of Gezi Park in Turkey. On the other hand, it is necessary to identify the globally shared digital environments and the common features of audiovisual protest practices that are manifest in activism all over the world: for instance, spreading eyewitness videos on online platforms like Twitter/X, evidencing mass mobilization in street protests and victims of police violence; or using the corporate algorithms of platforms like TikTok to generate the viral effects of mobilizing pictures. Such appropriations of digital infrastructures result in new socio-technical strategies of contestation that Milan (2019: 120) calls "cloud protesting".

In the 20th century, visually performed protest was first of all represented and performed by the use of still pictures, in the arts, in illustration, and in photography (cf. Goddard 2018; McGarry et al. 2019). Today, mediated protest is mainly performed by the use of moving images, especially online-videos (cf. Eder et al., 2020). Accordingly, a broad range of different video genres have emerged around online protesting practices. These are shaped by the affordances of the digital media environments and "embedded materialities" (Neumayer et al. 2019: 3) which are used to create, distribute, and archive contentious moving images: e.g. web-documentaries or informative videos, as well as user-generated audiovisual content like mash-up videos or video-selfies, produced by individual users. Research on the emergence of such contentious moving image genres, their specific aesthetics and functions in digital protest communication is still at its beginning (cf. Askanius 2014; Razsa 2014; Eder et al. 2020; Zutavern 2015; Eder/Tedjasukmana 2020; Fahlenbrach 2020). At the same time, it embraces a broad interdisciplinary scope, ranging from, e.g., political science, sociology, history, media and communication studies, to visual studies. While the social sciences are rather focusing on the political dimension of online media as new public arenas and resources for political actors, this issue focuses on the way moving images are used to mobilize support in globalized digital networks and the way digital platforms are shaping today the different expressive and aesthetic forms of contestation. Under the heading of "Guerilla Moving Images" we are specifically looking at audiovisual practices and aesthetics performed by marginalized groups, using established, corporate media environments as arenas of rebellious mobilization, sometimes blatantly, sometimes in more subversive ways.

Our multifocal point of view is not limited to synchronic aspects, but also involves a diachronic dimension. This may reveal relevant historic backgrounds and roots of current protests and their expressive forms and media practices. This implies an archaeological investigation of those phenomena and

circumstances that have become inescapable today, such as the construction of a police gaze in response to the riots of 1968 in Paris (Scheppe 2021), or the "reinvention of the audiovisual beyond the cinema as a technological mechanism and ideological institution" which occurred in the 1970s (Goddard 2018, 193). Considering the emergence of new audiovisual practices and aesthetics of contestation in moments of paradigmatic media change can significantly broaden our understanding of current "Guerilla Moving Images": key moments in the history of moving image contentions are, for instance, the Sowjet Agit-Prop-movies at the dawn of cinema (Didi-Huberman 2016) or the video-activism around in the late 1960s and 1970s when television became the dominant medium (cf. Zutavern 2015). At such paradigmatic moments, activists used new media environments and paved the way for forms of expressions in audiovisual contestation and engagement that still resonate today. Didi-Huberman (2016) has demonstrated the productivity of such an approach, which aims to revisit, in historic images, key moments of tension that in some manner anticipated contemporary ways of contesting the political.

AUDIOVISUAL ARCHAEOLOGIES OF PROTEST

In an astonishing picture published on Paris Match on the 29th of June 1968, we see one of the corridors of Sorbonne University – one of the key spaces of students' contestation during those months. The shot, taken slightly from above, directs our attention towards something written on the wall: "Prenez vos désirs pour des réalités" [Take your desires for realities] (Mauge 1968, 100). The practice of writing on the walls of public spaces, thus transforming them into material repositories of slogans and polemical claims, was typical of the Parisian May 1968 and also extremely common in other uprising contexts (Frankel et al. 2012). As this example demonstrates, the act of revolting is always deeply intertwined with creative processes, that range from elementary forms of writings to more complex forms of mediation, image-making or performance (cf. Fahlenbrach, 2017a, 2017b). However, even in its most basic quality, this graphical act seems to encapsulate a couple of essential traits that the global rise of contemporary uprisings made progressively evident. First of all, this sort of graffiti stands for a much larger class of linguistic acts that, regardless of their media specificity, seem to provide visual evidence of what Foucault (2008; 2009) labelled *parresia*. The deed that someone performs when telling the truth in the face of power and regardless of the possible risks seems to be a constitutive part of the whole idea of uprising, where the arithmetical calculation of the outcomes becomes secondary, in light of an attempt to fulfil a (common) desire to change the status quo. Moving from an often traumatic episode that epitomizes the contradictions of a certain context (e.g. the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi as the starting point of the Arab Springs), revolt becomes an

act of re-imagination of the present, an attempt to experience the political space differently and to subvert marginalizing power structures.

Recalling an event from 1968 at the beginning of a special issue on contemporary revolts may seem unintuitive. Given the high number of interesting case studies that contemporary uprisings have to offer, coming from almost every corner of the globe, is it really necessary to go back to something that is so widely canonized? While scholars have largely analyzed the various forms of contemporary rioting, the specific contribution that visual studies can provide in this field is still often overlooked, although a media-archeological approach may provide useful and innovative insights in this direction. This is even more surprising considering that art historian Georges Didi-Huberman (2016) devoted an important exhibition to the issue, highlighting the potentialities of a transcultural approach to the gestures of revolt, capable of focusing on recurrent actions that have to do with the ways in which we approach images as political devices, while putting in the background the specific reasons that motivated the struggle. Moving from this framework, we can ask ourselves what is the specific role played by images in practices of revolt; after all, we are still experiencing May 1968's graffiti through pictures, thus a form of mediatization somehow shapes our experience of what a revolt is, and how it can be historicized. Of course, the Parisian uprising is not the first example of this tendency, but – following the aforementioned anachronistic methodology – we might argue that can potentially both epitomize and anticipate subsequent phenomena; after all, in an archaeological perspective, is most of all the *deep time* of unpredictable connections that comes to foreground.

The history of a genealogical approach to uprisings is still to be written. Aalthough relevant contributions regarding revolts in early modernity (cfr. Clover 2016) surely constitute a useful starting point in this sense, it is nonetheless challenging to identify the emergence of visual practices or theoretical issues that are still relevant in the visual culture of contemporary uprisings. This task seems particularly difficult because it urges us to untie ourselves from a linear vision of temporality, opting for a more karstic and unpredictable one. As the Italian scholar Federico Tomasello (2020: 69-70) has brilliantly summarized, revolts as a general phenomenon seem to dismantle the consequential and teleological aspect of historical time, as they can be seen as various instantiations of a narrative in which present, past and future are deeply imbricated and continuously, reciprocally influenced.

One of the loci in which this idea becomes evident, also in a metareflexive sense, is Eisenstein's masterpiece *Battleship Potëmkin* (1925), in which the Soviet director tells the story of a mutiny and of a subsequent uprising in the city of Odessa. Unanimously considered a masterpiece, the film has over time produced a considerable amount of literature including, recently, an accurate and innovative analysis by Didi-Huberman (2020), who concentrated his focus on the third act of the movie ("A Dead Man Call Out For Justice"). Here, after the corpse of the sailor Vakulenchuk (tragically killed during the mutiny of the battleship) is deposed in the dock at dawn, a large mass of citizens gathers

around him to pay their respects. In an extremely complex sequence, that the author analyzes extensively, a kind of mysterious process is depicted and, through a propagation of gestures, Eisenstein is able to visualize the emotional economy of rebellion: "at a certain point the weeping of individuals will become a collective chant, then a political claim [...]. Then anger. Finally, revolt [...]. In this process emotion stopped saying I [...] and knows how to say We [...]" (2020: 189).

Although Didi-Huberman's analysis is quintessential in order to reposition the role of cinema and moving images at the core of the debate on the mediatization of revolts (as this special issue as a whole tries as well to do), surprisingly enough, his almost 500-page study devotes only marginal attention to the events leading up to Vakulenchuk's death, when the Potëmkin's sailors take the decision to rise up against the unliveable conditions imposed by the officers (and thus by the tsarist power). Re-inspecting the sequence in which the ship's commander threatens to hang all the sailors who refuse to comply with his orders is particularly fascinating because, in this short and overlooked passage, something extremely significant seems to take place.

At a certain point, while he is threatening his sailors, the commander points with his finger towards the flagpole, which is off-screen and shown in the subsequent shot. Its image is then juxtaposed to the close-up of a young officer, that complacently observe it; immediately afterwards, in three successive shots, we see small groups of sailors also looking at it. The reverse shot of this rapid sequence presents again the image of the ship's mast, where this time, however, the hanging bodies of the rioters appear in superimposition. Immediately afterwards, two more officers look towards the flagpole, that however appears empty again.

What happens in this short passage is that another temporal dimension disrupts the linearity of the present, producing a torsion that makes the uprising finally possible. This previsualization of the future belongs to the realm of hypotheses. It articulates something that can potentially happen, that is going to occur, at least in the light of the current *status quo*. So it represents a sort of prophecy. If it is true that every image inevitably poses a question about time and temporality (Didi-Huberman 2000), it may be productive to address the visual in its ability to let the *long durée* of historicity emerge through non-linear configurations, as pionieristically noted by Benjamin (2003: 297). Contemporary uprisings and older riots are, in this sense, not only connected in a constellation of reciprocal recalls and anticipations (e.g., BLM as a new iteration of the Rodney King Uprising of 1992), but they are also capable of posing a question concerning the possibility for the future to be thought of otherwise. Ecological video-activism is maybe the prototypic example in this sense, because its images urge us to act in order to modify our imminent future, which will only continue to be imaginable if we do – but this issue seems broadly to intersect the heterogeneous galaxy of rioting. To write an anachronistic history of uprisings, in this sense, means to generate connections through heterogeneous phenomena, looking for continuity and divergence, including in their political impacts and implications. We should not

forget, in this sense, the role played by technical devices in shaping a certain culture of witnessing, with strong implications in the development of revolts: movie cameras, portable camcorders, and digital interconnected devices have profoundly impacted the ways in which collective struggles become visible and are told, as the crucial turning point of the new millennium clearly showed.

BORN UNDER AN AUDIOVISUAL SIGN: UPRISINGS, MEDIA, AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The relationship between temporal regimes and media cultures in acts of revolt is at the core of the essays comprising this special issue of *Cinema&Cie*, which proposes a transdisciplinary reflection on the role that moving images and video technologies play within contemporary uprisings, also looking at potential points of origin for specific features of such events. To this end, referring to "contemporary" does not mean necessarily attempting to outline chronological limits, but first and foremost to highlight the disjunctions and anachronisms that define the relationship an event maintains with its own time (Agamben 2009). All the essays in this volume try to address this question through different methodologies and perspectives, providing a broad overview of case studies and hence a rich map of this phenomenon.

Though a possible periodization is not at stake in this issue, the turn of the century – particularly the year 2001 – marked a crucial cornerstone for our topic from political as well as aesthetic points of view. While 9/11 has been unanimously considered as the "year zero" of the new millennium for its consequences on global politics and the new social discourses it gave birth to, it also created a radical transformation of the epistemic relationship we maintain with technically reproduced images (cf. Baudrillard 2002; Zizek 2002). As Dinoi (2008) has observed, whereas early cinema struck its audiences for "looking like real", the attack at the World Trade Center astonished NYC citizens (and the global audiences soon after) for "looking like a movie", thus producing a complete overturning in our belief in the capability of images to attest reality. To this end, two consequences are worth mentioning: on the one hand, that event proved the effectiveness of cinema as the "eye of the century" (Casetti 2008) that shaped human perception of the world; on the other, it questioned the possibility of audiovisual images to witness reality solely through the force of their recording capability, of their "being there" and facing the event. Both questions are highly relevant to understand contemporary forms of videoactivism and extensively intersect the essays in this volume.

However, 9/11 is only one possible point of origin among others that we could use to trace the features and characteristics of audiovisual practices that document, foster, and even constitute contemporary uprisings. Articulating new chronological threads also means charting different geographies: to this

end, reflecting on recent uprisings as events that adhere to and at the same time keep a distance from their own time defines a more diverse and inclusive history of the present. This is the most distinctive features shared by the six essays comprising this issue.

Diego Cavallotti's essay deals with another key event for the intertwining between aesthetics and politics taking place in 2001, that is, the anti-G8 protests in Genoa. There, for the first time, audiovisual production was considered crucial for participants and more specifically for the Social Forum Movement: images of protesters with "media prosthesis" recording the demonstrations became a trademark of those days, testifying of the awareness of participants in the role of audiovisual media as a mandatory tool for collective uprisings. If 9/11 footage is mainly characterized by the fortuitous condition of the witnesses, in the Genoa case, on the contrary, videos are conceived as instruments for political struggle, exploiting the still developing digital ecosystem which is now the "natural environment" of the audiovisual practices in contemporary uprisings.

The anti-G8 protests can thus be considered as the symbolic foundational moment of contemporary forms of videoactivism as a "proxy profession" (Ristovska 2021). As a crucial moment when pre-digital and digital cultures collided, this event created a complex media ecosystem. To this end, it perfectly embodies most of the questions that were at stake at the turn of the century and encapsulates many of the features that will be later developed in the tactics of more recent upheavals, such as letting offline and online communities interact, creating and preserving archives with audiovisual evidence and testimonies, or fostering professionalism in videoactivism.

But if 2001 can be regarded as the starting point of the new millennium, which was born under the sign of aesthetics as the real field of political struggle, the first traces of the close relationship between video production and uprisings could also be traced back to the end of the "short twentieth century" (Hobsbawn 1994). Johanna Laub's essay proposes a comparison between Harun Farocki's and Andrej Ujica's film *Videogramme einer Revolution* (1992), about the Romanian Revolution of 1989, and *Fragments of a Revolution* (2011), the latter dealing with the Iranian Green Movement of 2009 and 2010 and produced anonymously under the pseudonym Ana Nyma. Both cases investigate the possibilities of giving testimony of events in real time beyond a mere presentism by emphasizing "connection to delay, rupture and non-simultaneity", thus exploring "the possibility of historical experience" (cf. *infra*) conveyed by such representations. In particular, the 1989 Romanian revolution encapsulated the conflict between the official image of dictatorship – which is steady, unique, and without any possible off-screen space – and the several amateur videos documenting the fall of the regime. The core of Farocki's and Ujica's film consists in editing these videos together to produce a broader perspective on the event: a new aesthetics therefore becomes possible, along with vast off-screen spaces which awaited to be filled with a new political meaning.

The turn of the century – in the long threshold between the end of 1989

and 2001 – thus proves to be a key moment in which we can detect specific meaning configurations of contemporary uprising and the crossroad between technology, experiences, and aesthetics in the media scenario, specifically the audiovisual one. Indeed, the global revolts that have marked the first quarter of the new millennium not only attempt to subvert the power in charge, but also aim to subvert the aesthetics of this very power and claim the freedom to create a new one. Reflecting on the intertwining between aesthetics and politics thus means exploring the core of these uprisings, in terms of both their logics and their demands. From this point of view, questioning the very concept of archive is crucial, as the examples of Bucharest and Genoa prove and as the other essays in the issue explore, through different methodological perspectives, geographical contexts, and media practices.

Contemporary uprising needs to confront and deconstruct the archives that were conceived as expressions of oppressive power on situated imageries. Giacomo Paci's essay analyses the case of *We No Longer Prefer Mountain* (2022), a film by Palestinian artist Inas Halabi which develops a counternarrative of the Druze community in Israel/Palestine through oral history and "fukeiron", a specific methodology of analysing the landscape emerged in Japan at the end of the 1960s. Halabi's film therefore shows how displacement – both in time and in space – can be considered as a productive analytical and theoretical approach (cf. Zucconi 2019): on the one hand, it aims to highlight contemporary strategies of land occupation and the reconfiguration of landscape through the narration of personal stories which cover more than seventy years, from 1948 to the present day; on the other hand, it provides an alternative account of the environment surrounding the Druze community by resorting to a film aesthetics developed in a complete different culture. This way, a new archive of memories and stories, images and words, is created, challenging Israel's official imagery which depicts Druze "as unconditionally loyal to the state and its army" (cf. *infra*).

Archives are not only repository of imageries but they can also be conceived as powerful weapons by opposite propaganda strategies. This is the case of the so-called Ambazonia crisis in Cameroon as analyzed in Floribert Patrick Endong's essay. Here, government and separatist forces have started a war of images which resorts to the aestheticization of violence as an ultimate resource. This conflict between imageries – whose effectiveness is rooted in the manipulation of long-term beliefs and stereotypes – reproduces the tactics of modern warfare, which clearly emerged with the war on Terror in the aftermath of 9/11, in the field of audiovisual media. In this sense, images prove to be the favourite means to "shock and awe" the enemy (cf. Ginzburg 2017), in a long thread that leads from the fall of the Twin Towers to Daesh's communication (Previtali 2020), becoming an essential tool for guerrilla practices developed by both governments and insurgents.

But archives can be also be conceived as a resource created by protesters to keep track of struggles, serving as documentation for future needs. Celykaslan's and Erensoy's essay deals with the protests in Istanbul's Gezi Park in 2013,

focusing on bak.ma, an online repository that was born out of that struggle to preserve the visual memory of the protests. By analyzing the process of its creation, Celykaslan and Erensoy highlight how one of the greatest achievements of such an operation was the creation of a transmedia community around the event, even before the production of a counternarrative that could oppose the Turkish government's account of the uprising. Resorting to a hybrid methodology that also comprises auto-ethnography, the essay shows how archiving can be a militant practice aimed at "actively creating possibilities of a living memory of the social movements through the collectivization of memory" (cf. *infra*).

Finally, archives can be considered as a living and ever-expanding discourse where different activist strategies confront each other to challenge social norms and cliches. Sofia Pirandello's essay analyses examples of a creative use of self-recoding on social media which conceals political stances within content that otherwise seemingly reproduces stereotypes. The female protagonists of these videos "smuggle" solidarity with oppressed people in make-up-tutorials to bypass state censorship, or provide tech tips to increase girls' knowledge about privacy and security in both online and offline worlds while pretending of giving advice about beauty routine. Through a post-feminist analysis of these creative uses of new media, the essay highlights that far from being a mere tool for self-promotion, or even self-exploitation, "self-recording can be used to raise collective awareness of critical issues related to the status of women, also trying to improve it, reaching millions of users" (cf. infra). Reflecting on the contemporary, mutual relationship between the embodied dimension of the political discourse and the political dimension of bodies, Pirandello points out new directions for videoactivism in the present, directions that are inextricably enmeshed with the media scenario of our epoch.

It is by offering rich, in-depth-analysis on video-activism in recent history that the essays collected in this issue reveal archaeological traces of "guerrilla images" across time and media change. In this way, they contribute to a broader aesthetic understanding of video-activism. They show aesthetic strategies and iconographies of earlier contentious moving images, still informing audiovisual expressions of protest in online-video-activism today. By presenting these studies, this issue aims to further encourage consideration of contemporary online activism, particularly video activism, in the context of historical expressions and rhetoric of protest.

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Revolution Unfolding:
The Historical Present between 'Real Time' and Latency in Found Footage Filmmaking

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The inextricable connection between uprisings and technologies of audiovisual recording and broadcasting, especially within an ecology of digital networks, suggests the possibility to follow events in 'real time'. This paper asks how filmmakers explore the complexities of this notion—and the questions of spectatorship, temporality and mediation that are attached to it—by drawing on the an-archive of protest footage. It is especially interested in the ways in which found footage filmmaking manages to (re-) create a sense of the historical present without resorting to a flat presentism. How do filmmakers re- and deconstruct experiences of 'real time' and the fraught notion of immediacy it proposes? How do their narrations attempt to give shape to the openness of the present moment? And how do they negotiate the latent historicity of events? To approach these questions, the paper undertakes a close reading of two films, *Fragments of a Revolution* (anonymous, 2011) and *Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), thus drawing a connection between digital and analogue 'guerilla images'.

Keywords
Latency
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Genre
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The proliferation of moving images during uprisings and revolutions—particularly their production by the protesters themselves—has been recognised as an intrinsic dimension of political movements, "*integral to the texture and dramatic structure of the event itself*" (Snowdon 2020, 52). Their proximity to the event confers on such images a particular status as a record, especially in their connection to 'real time': In their density, speed of distribution, and aesthetics—often blurry and shaky—they are linked to fragile promises of presence, immediacy and authenticity, especially (but not exclusively) within an ecology of digital networks. Together, they constitute a growing "vernacular *an-archive*" (Ibid., 18) of political events: A distributed, often unstable collection of images and sounds that invite a response to, or even a reactivation of their energy, from another point in space and time. While the notion of the an-archive plays with an anarchic refusal of institutional organization and corresponding systems of classification and selection (Zielinski 2016), the term has also come to evoke a potentiality that both distributed and centralized audiovisual archives hold (Thain 2018): A sense of the eventfulness and lively assemblages from which they were produced in the first place. This paper discusses how found footage filmmaking

teases out the temporal and affective experience of uprisings through (an-) archives of guerilla images. In particular, it focuses on a dimension that may at first seem counterintuitive: Historicity and latency within configurations of 'real time'.

Through practices of collecting, combining, and editing pre-existing footage, filmmakers can interrogate critically how audiovisual media shape imaginaries and representations of the past (Russell 2018). Through a series of aesthetic choices that subject pre-existing material to a different, perhaps even subversive reading, such practices create their own filmic experience and historiographical narratives. However, their material still testifies to its emergence from specific media practices, whether these are associated with cinema, amateur video or television. In this sense, found footage films are "media-referential", as William C. Wees (1993, 25) has pointed out: "They cannot avoid calling attention to the 'mediascape' from which they come, especially when they also share the media's formal and rhetorical strategies of montage." I am interested in the way found footage films reflect on the mediascape of guerilla images and its effects, by presenting spectators with a mediated sense of the historical present: A feeling of watching something—a revolution?—unfold. 'Historical present' here refers both to the rhetorical style of narrating an event in the present tense and to the historical dimension of the present. How do filmmakers reconstruct and deconstruct sensations of 'real time'? How do their narratives give shape to the openness of the present? And how do they negotiate the latent historicity of events?

In what follows, I engage in a close reading of two films that are separated by more than 20 years and grounded in very different cultural and technological contexts. Yet both speak productively to the questions at stake: *Fragments of a Revolution* (*Fragments d'une revolution*, 2011), produced anonymously under the pseudonym Ana Nyma, follows the mass demonstrations of the Green Movement in Iran in 2009/2010 from the perspective of a filmmaker in Paris, who watches, archives and edits footage of the uprising in her apartment. The film gathers these pieces of footage in a gesture of solidarity, while struggling with the complicated position of spectatorship at a distance. On the other hand, *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992) by German filmmaker Harun Farocki and Romanian filmmaker Andrei Ujică appears more analytical in its approach to the footage of the Romanian revolution in 1989—considered to be one of the first revolutions to be 'televised live' by the protesters themselves. Their film reconstructs the five central days of the revolution from a variety of footage, highlighting the mediated perspective on the event. While this paper does not offer a media archaeological approach per se, the choice of the latter film aims to highlight the relationship between real time image production and protest practices before the rise of digital ecologies.

FRAGMENTS OF A REVOLUTION: GATHERING TRACES OF THE EVENT IN 'REAL TIME'

A hand flips open a laptop on the desk in front of it. In an abrupt cut, we are thrown into an agitated demonstration. Shots are being fired. The camera rushes to the street corner, where a wave of people is shooting forward, carrying a man in their middle. The camera catches his face for a brief moment, before he is swallowed again by the crowd, shouting with outrage and grief. We leave the scene as suddenly as we were thrown into it: The full-screen mode is dissolved, and we are reminded that the video was mediated through a browser window. On the laptop we see the now somewhat outdated interface of YouTube, where the video was uploaded. It is titled "June 20, 2009 Iran Raw Footage: 3rd murder" and has a brief, collapsed description: "Warning Extremely Graphic I am submitting video from anonymous sources in Ira[n] …" The cursor clicks on a download button and navigates through a folder structure to save the video under "youtube video Iran", subfolder "1-juin 2009".

In its opening scene [Fig. 1], *Fragments of a Revolution* already foregrounds a relationality between two locations that will pervade the film: It jumps back and forth between Tehran, where the demonstrations of the Green Movement mainly take place, and Paris, where an unidentified filmmaker engages with the protesters' footage. The movement between these spaces makes the protests in Iran tangible as something that takes place on the ground, in the street (with great risk for the participants), but that also continues through the transmission of images and sounds via digital networks. Throughout the film, we follow Ana Nyma as she tries to find a position for herself that is not just on the receiving

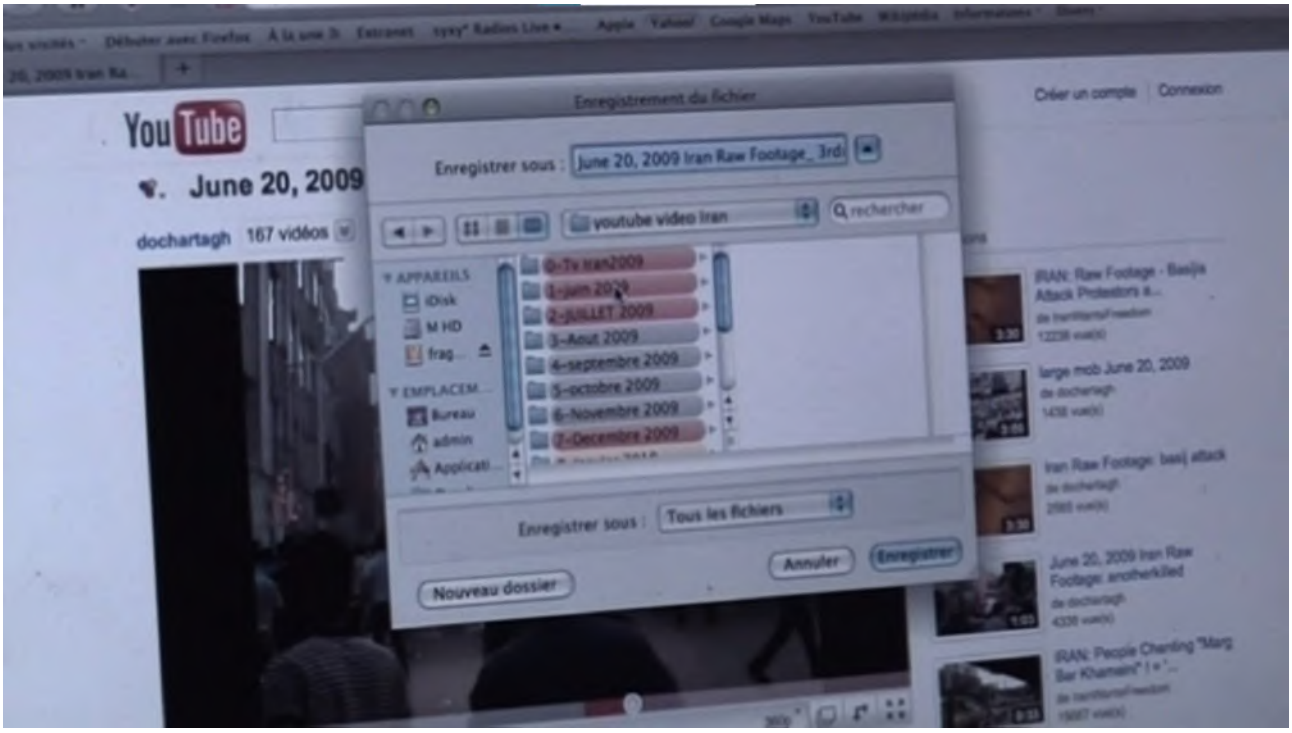

Fig. 1
Fragments of a Revolution (Anonymous, 2011), film still © .Mille et Une. Films / L'atelier documentaire / LCP Assemblée Nationale / TVM Est parisien

end of these transmissions, but that can somehow be invested in the uprising, even if it is in a minimal way—gathering audiovisual fragments of the event, downloading them onto a hard drive before they are removed from the online platform, editing them into a film. For Ana Nyma, these actions were about the desire and urgency of "finding an active place, even if it is a modest one, in the middle of these protests. It was a way of participating in the distribution of these images, of these words coming from Iran" (Ana Nyma, Guichard, and Lanzuisi 2011, n.p.).

Fragments of a Revolution recounts the events following the June 2009 presidential election in Iran without a voice-over narration, relying instead on what information is conveyed by its use of cell phone and television footage as well as personal correspondences. Occasionally, dates are inserted for orientation, but the film does not follow a strict chronology. In this way, it recounts the anticipation of political change by supporters of the reformist candidates in the days leading up to the election, the suspicions of fraud following the re-election of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejād on June 12, 2009, and the huge demonstrations with over a million protesters that ensued almost immediately. Brutal attempts to repress the uprising followed in the weeks and months, resulting in countless arrests and several deaths. The film traces the different phases of the Green Movement up to its anniversary one year later, a point at which the protests seem to have lost their initial force.

The film explicitly stages the phenomenological and subjective experience of engaging with the protests through digital networks. It uses a set-up that strikes one as an early version of a desktop documentary; but differently to a screen-capture, it emphasises the filmmaker's bodily presence: Filmed over Ana Nyma's shoulder[1], we see her exchanging news with friends in Tehran, who clandestinely send footage from the latest demonstrations, always risking that their actions are being traced by the Iranian authorities. She also actively seeks out more information and material on YouTube and other online platforms. Her engagement with the events takes place within what David Berry (2011, 143) has described as "an *ecology of data streams* that forms an intensive information-rich computational environment". Berry further qualifies this ecology as one in which a subject dips in and out of such streams in real time, picking up pieces along with it to create its own narratives. This is certainly reflected in the way *Fragments of a Revolution* stages a gathering of fragments—already indicated in the title—and their subjective rearrangement by a filmmaker, who reflects throughout the film on the challenges of finding a narrative for this material. However, the film highlights how such an engagement does not only take place online, but is always a bodily and geographically grounded experience. This creates palpable moments of non-simultaneity and a sense of disconnection.

1 In fact, we see neither the filmmaker's own shoulders nor her own hands or apartment, as she reveals towards the end of the film on cue cards. While this serves to further anonymize her, it can also be read as a gesture that distributes her subjectivity across a collective position of spectatorship, as argued in Shilina-Conte 2021.

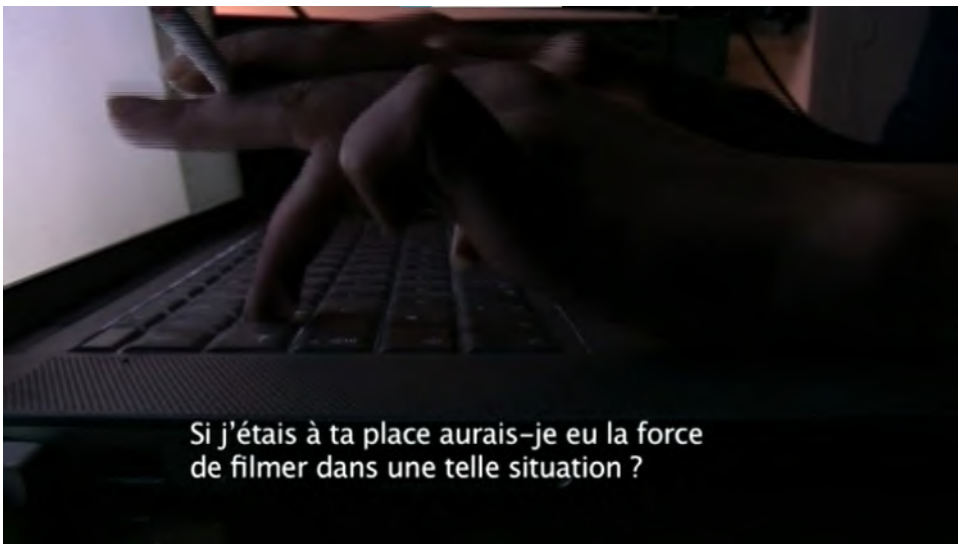

Fig. 2.
"If I had been in your place, would I have had the strength to film in such a situation?" *Fragments of a Revolution* (Anonymous, 2011), film still © .Mille et Une. Films / L'atelier documentaire / LCP Assemblée Nationale / TVM Est parisien

Nerve-wracking scenes from the protests in Tehran are juxtaposed with tranquil sights of Paris, showing how these two realities can hardly be aligned, even though they apparently occupy the same timeline.

As a temporality, 'real time' is to be understood less as a technological reality than as a "*technological imaginary*", albeit one with a strong cultural impact (Berry 2011, 143). While social media was important to the Green Movement, it should not be omitted that Internet access was heavily restricted at the beginning of the protests (Manoukian 2010, 248). Furthermore, YouTube only introduced live streaming in 2011, two years after the first demonstrations in Iran. There were therefore various forms of delay in the circulation of footage and information. Such latency is always at work within real time, even if it is sometimes almost imperceptible to the human senses. In information science, real time describes the *ideal* of reducing the time between input and output to a minimum, making computational processes as efficient as possible (Furtwängler 2012). Already in this capacity, it has a certain wishful, if not ideological dimension to it. The rhetoric of real time as a form of immediacy, even (or especially) if supported by digital infrastructure, tends to obscure the fact that behind it lies "[...] a temporal geography as uneven as our social and political geographies, in which slowness and waiting are produced and distributed alongside every advance in convenience and speed" (Volmar and Stine 2021, 10).

The film constantly interrupts the notions of ease and gratification that often accompany the metaphorical description of real time networks as a 'stream' or 'flow' (Wyatt 2021). Instead, we encounter moments of agitated scanning and searching, a perceptible sense of restlessness in the constant piecing together of fragmented bits. This restlessness is not a floating affect, but is anchored in the gestures and bodily presence of the filmmaker and her hands—clicking and dragging, sorting and editing, typing on the keyboard, drumming nervously on the table, lighting a cigarette [Fig. 2]. This is further illustrated in a scene in which numerous browser windows of YouTube videos accumulate on the desktop. A cacophony of different voices and sounds arises, all trying to communicate

something about the protests in Iran [Fig. 3]. Then suddenly a black screen, as if someone had pulled the plug. "Too many images", reads the subtitle. A flash of images, then darkness again. "Too many images don't find their place." In the background, a creaking chair and a suppressed sigh speak of the strain on mind and body. Anxiety is not (only) an individual, but a social phenomenon that "has a marked if still-poorly understood relation to always-on computing" (Hodge 2021, 208). In this particular scene, this is presented as a consequence of the gap between the human capacity to process information and the demands of a 24/7 attention economy. However, the film also makes tangible how such anxiety is linked to anticipation. It lies, for example, in the mundane aspects of Ana Nyma's encounter with latency in a digital ecology: Waiting for the web page to refresh, for the Wi-Fi to reconnect, or for the download to complete. But in a much more urgent sense, anxiety lies in the time of waiting that is social—a sociality that is a part of the digital ecology in which she moves, but that also extends beyond it: The anticipation of hearing back from friends, of finding out if they are safe, of seeing what has been uploaded to YouTube after the demonstrations. It is even the anticipation of a definite breakthrough for the Green Movement that creates a tangible sense of anticipation.

STAYING WITH THE 'SITUATION'

One of the main issues that the film grapples with is the *deferral* of a resolution of the protests to an unknown point in time. The events do not take the course that the protesters and, along with them, the filmmaker expect them to take. This is first and foremost a political and ethical issue, but it comes to bear on the

Fig. 3. *Fragments of a Revolution* (Anonymous, 2011), film still © .Mille et Une. Films / L'atelier documentaire / LCP Assemblée Nationale / TVM Est parisien

film's narrative as well. Over its course, Ana Nyma reflects on a growing sense of disorientation and discouragement that puts her at a loss as to how to proceed with the film. In an e-mail to a friend, she writes:

> *The sky in Paris is always grey. Yet during these eight months, it is as if I have been virtually living in Tehran. [...] I try to recompose the story with the images you send me. But it is as if I am facing a large puzzle where certain pieces are missing. The events of the last few months have almost made me forget how full of joy and hope we were.*

Towards the end of the film, the Green Movement anticipates a major demonstration on the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, but cannot renew its momentum, not least because of the massive persecution of protesters by the state. In the last images of the film, life in Tehran seems to go on almost as usual. Suddenly, the camera pans over to some bullet holes in the façade of a building—tangible rem(a)inders of what has happened (and could happen again).

Tensions between expectation and experience, and the ways in which they affect each other, are integral to the sense of historical time (Koselleck 2004, 255–63). To describe more precisely how *Fragments of a Revolution* engages with this, Laurent Berlant's concept of "genres of event" seems productive. These are affective and narrative templates that shape how people make sense of what they encounter, how they manage their expectations in everyday life (and in art as well), and how they come to a sense of a shared present. Particularly, Berlant's notion of the "situation as a genre of unforeclosed experience" (Berlant 2011, 5) is helpful to understand what the film presents us with. When we speak of a critical 'situation,' this implies a radical openness of the moment, in which the status quo is suspended and the trajectory of events is unclear. Uprisings seem to be paradigmatic of this. "The situation is therefore a genre of social time and practice in which a relation of persons and worlds is sensed to be changing but the rules for habitation and the genres of storytelling about it are unstable, in chaos" (Berlant 2011, 6). However, certain frames of reference can serve as orientation in the midst of this openness. 'Revolution' can be understood here as another genre of event that serves as an orienting template within such a situation, implying, for example, that there will be a shift or rupture that not only suspends the status quo, but permanently alters it (such as the overthrow of a regime). As such, revolution is not just a historical concept that is attached retrospectively to certain events, but a genre that already shapes people's expectations and understandings of their actions within their shared historical present.

What exactly constitutes such a definite shift is open to debate—whether it is seen to be political, cultural, or social; or whether it takes place in a compressed or extended period of time. *Fragments of a Revolution* ultimately refrains from making any claims for the Green Movement. It does not pretend to possess some insight from the relative hindsight to which it has access. Instead, it stays with the uprising in the uncertainty and openness of the present as a critical

situation. By holding the tension between the avowed desire for a revolution and the suspension of the status quo, the film refuses to close the situation off. In doing so, it allows for a non-directional latency in which the meaning and impact of events may present themselves differently at another time. In the final scene, Ana Nyma (still unidentifiable) turns to the camera with a personal statement on cue cards, in which she reflects on her choice of anonymity. Over the course of the cards, her "I" becomes a collective singular: "I profess that this is not the end of the story. I profess that I am countless", read the final cards. Indeed, the archival gestures within the film already point to a future in which these '*fragments of a revolution*' can be rearranged and recontextualised again.

VIDEOGRAMS OF A REVOLUTION: THE BREAKDOWN AND RESIGNIFICATION OF TRANSMISSION

Although Harun Farocki's and Andrei Ujică's *Videograms of a Revolution* (*Videogramme einer Revolution*, 1992) is by now over 30 years old, the film seems uncannily relevant to contemporary debates about audiovisual protest practices. Television played a key role in the Romanian revolution: The screen and the studio were both sites where the shift in power was made visible and actively enacted by the protesters themselves. Analogue video cameras had also become available to more individuals. Some of them filmed the protests and fighting in the streets, others recorded what was happening on the television in their living room, effectively archiving its broadcasts. Based on this footage, *Videograms of a Revolution* reconstructs five consecutive days of the revolution: From December 21st, 1989, the day of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's last public speech, to December 26, the day after the trial of him and his wife Elena, in which the couple were sentenced to death and executed. In between, the film follows the takeover of the television station, the appearance of counter-revolutionary militias, the resignation of the prime minister and the power struggles within the revolutionary movement.

The mediatization of the Romanian revolution has prominently, even notoriously, been the topic of public debate. Misinformation was running rampant and media outlets bought into images that were later exposed as fakes. Many also deplored the 'spectacle' that was made of the revolution through the use of television, particularly the broadcasting of the trial and (possibly restaged) execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu. For media critics such as Vilém Flusser and Jean Baudrillard, the Romanian revolution demonstrated the end of history in an age of hyper-mediality, where events are swallowed up by their own simulacra. It was this debate that initially caught Farocki's attention, whose filmmaking was rooted in an interrogation of the politics of images and their power. He approached Ujică after reading a book that the latter had co-edited on the impact of television on the Romanian revolution (Amelunxen and

Ujică 1990). After their research in public and private archives in Bucharest, they recognized the potential in the material to produce a specific sensation by arranging it in a linear chronology: "The aim was to disentangle the mass of images and to arrange sequences in such a way as to suggest that, for five days, one was moving from camera to camera on one and the same reel of film" (Ujică and White 2011). Intertitles with dates structure the film and emphasize the mediated perspective: "Eine Kamera erkundigt die Lage" (A camera observes the scene), "Übertragungsversuche" (Transmission attempts), "Zum letzten Mal live" (Live for the last time). A voice-over comments on the scenes and draws the viewers' attention to the use of cameras at certain moments.

Videograms of a Revolution pays close attention to the ways in which the 'real time' of television is reclaimed by the revolution. It begins with Ceaușescu's last public speech in Bucharest, broadcast live as a choreographed rally. It is an attempt to get a moment of unrest under control, as the week before there had been mass demonstrations in Timișoara, where protesters had been shot. We see the dictator presiding over the crowd on the balcony of the Central Committee, framed centrally by the camera, until suddenly a commotion seizes the people. Ceaușescu, visibly bewildered by the turmoil, interrupts his speech, at which point the live transmission is cut [Fig. 4]. Only after a while is the broadcast recontinued. The film probes this scene over and over, using various camera angles and a parallel montage of different footage. Its analysis of the sequence posits the discontinuation of the broadcast as critical: It is not merely a technical interruption, but an interruption of Ceaușescu's propagandistic use of television and its attempt to realign political reality with an idealized image of it on screen. Here, what Jane Feuer writes about the ideological dimension of American

Fig. 4.
Videograms of a Revolution (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), film still © Harun Farocki/Andrei Ujică 1992. Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR.

television's use of liveness holds true in a very different context: It serves the attempt to suture a disjunctive social and political reality, corresponding to "an ideology of liveness overcoming fragmentation" (Feuer 1983, 16). The relevance here is not so much in what the images show—which is, in fact, relatively little—, but in the disruption of certain pre-constituted protocols of their production and distribution: The interruption of real time transmission corresponds to a loss of power over the ideological construction of unity.

The next day, mass protests take place in the streets of Bucharest: The Ceaușescus are already on the run, and people have stormed the Central Committee. Others are headed to the television studio to occupy it [Fig. 5]. The camera is filming before they go live: A group of people squeeze into the frame, heatedly discussing what they should say. Finally, they are ready. "As soon as we go live", says a man who appears to be from the station, "23 million people will be listening to you". "Brothers", begins one of the protesters, but he is cut off—too soon, not yet live. Finally, now: With God's help, he says, they have made it into the television studio. Mircea Dinescu, the famous Romanian dissident writer is introduced, who promptly forgets to present his latest poem, as previously agreed, and gives a spontaneous speech: There will be another speech in ten minutes, he says, God be with them, the dictator has fled. He appeals to the Minister of the Interior to send the army home, and in five minutes there will be a speech … And anyway: "Television is with us!"—"Victory! We have won!" The scene, in all its chaotic energy, has a comic element to it. But to dismiss it for its clumsiness is to miss the point: That the rules of habitation for this televisual space, as we might call it with Berlant, have been suspended and are in the process of being negotiated.

Fig. 5.
Videograms of a Revolution (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), film still © Harun Farocki/Andrei Ujică 1992. Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR.

Fig. 6.
In the bottom left, Nicu Ceaușescu (son of the dictator) is escorted into the television studio. In the background, news of his capture is transmitted to the occupied Central Committee over the phone. *Videograms of a Revolution* (Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică, 1992), film still © Harun Farocki/Andrei Ujică 1992. Courtesy of Harun Farocki GbR.

During the short transitional period between the fall of the Ceaușescu regime and the consolidation of a new government, the television broadcasts a completely different image than before: The tightly framed shot reserved for Ceaușescu is replaced by a wide shot to capture the multitude of people who are claiming their right to occupy this frame. However, as Frances Guerin reminds us, this apparent democratization of the image does not mean that ideology can be done away with; the image "is necessarily given over to another form of ideological system, in which equally biased decision set new processes of representation in motion" (Guerin 2012, 496). This is most evident in the use of live broadcasting by the revolutionary movement, which is not merely a communicative tool, but imbued with a desire for performative transparency—for example, when political prisoners are being paraded in front of the studio camera to announce their capture [Fig. 6]. Ideology returns in another guise: Real time communication carries a political promise of authenticity, underpinned by a rhetoric of unmediatedness. Farocki and Ujică continually deconstruct this image production, drawing on uncut footage to show how seemingly spontaneous moments are created and re-staged, precisely with a delay that stretches out real time's latency and testifies to immediacy's ideological dimension. By cutting back and forth between the space of the television studio and the appearance of its broadcast in various 'videograms', feedback loops begin to build up, turning simultaneity into a refracted and layered experience.

Soon enough, however, the temporary suspension of pre-existing templates of image production is replaced by old ones. Towards the end of the film, as power is being centralized by a new political elite, the television returns to its conventional protocols. The studio has been cleared of the crowds, and a single newscaster announces the evening's program: the trial of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu.

AS IF HISTORY HAD FILMED ITSELF

The footage produced by television and private video cameras during these five days has a difficult status as a 'historical document': It not only records people's actions during those days, it becomes an intrinsic part of them, whether their actions take place in the streets, in the Central Committee or in the television studio. At the same time, its claim to immediacy is highly constructed. As Deborah Esch has stressed, the traces that mediatized events leave behind must be understood as traces of the *making* of the event, as an archive of "the ways in which what we take to be historical events are produced, even constituted by an array of discursive technologies" (Esch 1999, 6), in turn embedded in media ecologies.

In the same vein, attention should be paid to the way in which *Videograms of a Revolution* employs its own strategies to produce a sense of historical experience: Of watching a revolution, in Berlant's sense of genre, come about. It does so, I argue, by creating a narrative that seems to need no author. The continuity editing of the film manages to transcend the multiple authorship of the sources in a way that "it seems as though we are seeing history itself creating its own shape" (Farocki 2001, 264). This narrative style corresponds to a form of historiographical writing that Hayden White has characterized as a "discourse that feigns to make the world speak itself and speak itself as a story" (White 1997, 2). It is not the linearity of the chronological reconstruction as such that constitutes this style of historical narrative, but the appearance that there is an unambiguous congruity of events that renders any author obsolete—put differently, that a plot already lies within the events themselves, just waiting to be unearthed. According to White, this corresponds to a desire to see reality possess a coherence that pre-exists processes of meaning making:

> *Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the odor of the ideal. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as 'found' in the events rather than put there by narrative techniques. (White 1997, 21)*

In *Videograms of a Revolution*, the material is edited in such a way that the dramaturgical arc of a classical drama can be discerned, as Christine Lang has lucidly pointed out: An initial "messenger report" (speech by a revolutionary from Timişoara) is followed by the "initiating event" (protests disrupting Ceaușescu's rally), "peripety" (resignation of the prime minister) and finally "tyrannicide" (execution of the Ceaușescus) as "catharsis" (Lang 2014). But the impression that the events follow this plot by themselves—that history simply unfolds according to it—owes much to the immense editorial work of the filmmakers: Condensing about 120 hours of raw footage into a final 106 minutes already implies a multitude of decisions about what to select and where to cut. Another editorial aspect that is often overlooked is the process of translating from Romanian: Whose voice to

choose from a plurality of speakers and which parts of their speech to turn into a subtitle are all choices that contribute to the creation of a narrative. It is in the editing room where this apparent congruency of reality is created: In his later film *Interface* (*Schnittstelle,* 1995), Farocki will reflect explicitly on this central space of filmmaking, but in *Videograms of a Revolution*, it remains unmarked[2]. The absence of an authorial position is further supported by the way the camera's perspective as a political agent is constantly foregrounded in the film. Technical interruptions, blurriness and glitches only add to the apparent authenticity of its discourse (Kernbauer 2021, 61).

My point in detailing this narrative technique is not to double down on a deconstructive gesture, though Farocki and Ujică might ask us to do just that: To think not only about what politics are at work in the footage, but also in their montage. Nor is it to follow White down a path into constructivism, where history is produced solely through narration. What I am interested in is how the recourse to a narrative genre produces an affective dimension within the film, through which history is rendered as much present as the present is rendered historical. The potential of the archive is pushed beyond reconstruction to an anarchival reactivation of the affective energy it carries, channelled and mediated through an aesthetic form. In this way, *Videograms of a Revolution* achieves something similar to what Berlant outlines for the historical novel: It "bridges the historiography of an entextualized moment and the affectivity gathered up in the evidence that points to the animating situation" of the present (Berlant 2011, 67). But the use of found footage inadvertently produces an excess: It introduces a contingency that resists the 'odor of the ideal' that the emplotment of a narrative emits. This has a paradoxical effect: The trope of excess ends up reaffirming the film's claim to offering a privileged access to the reality of the event.

By presenting a dramatic arc with an ending, *Videograms of a Revolution* suggests a form of closure that arguably does not exist for many people more than 30 years after the Romanian revolution[3]. But its commitment to the historical present as a visual and temporal rhetoric also brings the revolution back from the past into the virtuality of the present moment. The film's epilogue seeks to retain this virtuality: After an extensive list of credits to the producers of the footage follows a final, short clip. A worker, standing among a group of people, addresses the camera directly. He recalls the repression and suffering of the people under Ceaușescu's regime and emotionally pleads for them to hold

2 Volker Pantenburg explores Harun Farocki's and Jean-Luc Godard's shared interest in the editing room as a place of meaning making and history writing, cf. Pantenburg 2015, 153–74.

3 The shooting of many protesters by unidentified militias during the revolution is still not resolved. Former President Ion Iliescu and other officials of the post-revolutionary government currently face charges for apparently misleading the public during the revolution by covertly staging a counter-revolution together with members of the Securitate, with the aim to profit from the ensuing confusion of the situation. The trial is still ongoing, but activists claim that their efforts to bring those responsible to justice have been systematically impeded (Higgins 2023).

on to the new sociality that the events of the past few days have brought about. His message carves out a space in which the past is not yet past: Open to an undefined future.

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If revolutions are mediated by their agents in the moment of their making, these practices already create the (an-)archives that structure any subsequent engagement with the events. While *Fragments of a Revolution* and *Videograms of a Revolution* both reconstruct a sense of presentness in their engagement with guerilla images, I hope to have shown that this differs from a presentism that uncritically reaffirms real time image production and its promises. Not only do they emphasize real time's connection to delay, rupture and non-simultaneity; they also explore how it might hold the possibility of historical experience. They do so in different ways: While one explores the tensions between expectation and experience, holding onto the openness of the situation, the other uses the structuring function of an authorless narrative to create an affective experience of history. Yet both are intent to not erase the latency of events—they rather explore the present as a moment of historical dimension that continues to unfold.

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“The Human Tide Mounts High”: Indymedia Italia and Genoa’s G8 in 2001

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Throughout this paper, I will focus on the media-documentation of Genoa’s G8 protests in 2001. More precisely, I will delve into the role of Indymedia Italia in the development of Genoa Social Forum’s Media Center, also referring to two of the most relevant videos produced by them and now collected in the online repository NGV – New Global Vision. In other words, I aim to highlight the aesthetic and political stances of a specific media collective during one of the most relevant historical events at the beginnings of the 21st Century.

Keywords
Genoa’s G8
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Media Activism
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INTRODUCTION: NOTES ON MEDIA ACTIVISM FROM SEATTLE TO GENOA

When we think about the protests against Genoa’s G8 in 2001, we are confronted with a multi-layered historical phenomenon, which elicits vivid reactions still now. For those who were born between the Seventies and the Early Eighties, those protests represented the peak of a political militancy started at the end of the Nineties, with the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement. This social movement became widely recognizable during the so-called “Battle of Seattle”. On November 30th, 1999,

> *[n]early fifty thousand people took to the streets to protest corporate globalization at the WTO meetings in Seattle [...] A diverse coalition of environmental, labor, and economic justice activists succeeded in shutting down the meetings and preventing another round of trade liberalization talks* (Juris 2005, 193).

During this event, a transnational movement protesting neo-liberal globalization set its agenda and its own practices of contention on a world-scale media stage. The activists fought against WTO (World Trade Organization) politics, exposing its hegemonic claims, and presented themselves as “postmodern revolutionaries” (id., 194), using digital technologies and the

Internet as means of mass mobilization. It could be affirmed that, within the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement—which, back then, was defined as "no-global", although this label is shallow and over-simplistic (Andretta et al. 2002, 80)—, "Internet-based distribution lists, Web sites, and the newly created IMC" (Juris 2005, 190) played a pivotal role. More specifically, the last acronym—IMC—referred to the Independent Media Centers, also known as Indymedia, an open-publishing online network, in which media activists could spread texts, videos, audios, and images supporting their political stances (Del Frate et al. 2021, 14).

This media infrastructure fostered multi-layered and transnational communication exchanges, through which local activists were always in contact with other global anti-capitalist organizations. Not by chance, then, during the protests in Genoa in July 2001, the Media Center of Genoa Social Forum (GSF), where the equipment of Indymedia was stocked, was one of the main targets of the state repression: during the infamous night of the "Diaz School raid", Italian policemen and *carabinieri* broke in the Diaz-Pertini-Pascoli schools, where the Media Center was located, smashing computers, Internet wires and videocameras (Bazzichelli 2006, Antonini, Barilli, and Rossi 2009; Proglio 2021, 43-47; Del Frate et al. 2021, 82-94). Taking the Media Center as one of the targets of a state-sanctioned assault had a double-fold entailment: on the one hand, Indymedia activists had witnessed police officers baton-charging the crowd with their photo- and video-cameras, and these documents represented a splinter in the eye for the law enforcement authorities; on the other, the Italian state governance—and, more broadly, the governing elites of the so-called "First World"—claimed that even independent and citizen journalists were considered part of a political problem to be solved.

In this paper, then, I will focus on the efforts of Indymedia Italia activists during Genoa's G8, their role in developing Genoa Social Forum's Media Center, and the movement's media practices. The existing literature on this specific matter mainly relates to three typologies: academic essays (or parts of them) belonging to the social movement history field (see, for instance, Bartolini 2021), to sociology (see Juris 2005; Andretta et al. 2002), and memoirs written by Indymedia members (see Del Frate et al. 2021).

From this standpoint, I will delve into the research path paved by Damiano Garofalo in the essay "New global vision: i video indymedia dell'anti-G8 di Genova", which is based on a media studies approach. More specifically, I will rely on the ecological intersections of media production, subjectivity production, and politics (Berardi, Jacquemet, and Vitali 2003; Guattari 2009, Goddard 2016)[1]. Through this methodological lens, in which media ecology studies meet social

1 If the reader wishes to delve into the interrelationships between activism and digital media technologies, see Pickard and Yang (2017). For more bibliographical references regarding Indymedia and its ability to produce information from the viewpoint of the social movements it sustained, see Pasquinelli (2002), Kidd (2003), Morris (2004), Milioni (2009), Milan (2010).

movement history and sociology, I will describe and investigate Indymedia Italia's multimedia flow of radical communication, which took shape between July 19th and 22nd, 2001, and became extremely relevant not only to narrate the riots from within the protesters' organization, but also to ascertain facts for legal purposes and to establish memories of Genoa's G8 through media practices.

These memories constitute a counter-archive of those days, and they are explored here in three different sections: in the first one, I will reconstruct the history of the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement and its long march to Genoa; in the second one, I will focus on GSF's Media Center and Indymedia Italia; finally, in the third one, I will reflect upon a selection of video documents uploaded on the NGV – New Global Vision[2] platform.

THE ANTI-CORPORATE GLOBALIZATION MOVEMENT MARCHING TOWARD GENOA

As Andretta et al. (2002) affirm in their seminal book *Global, noglobal, new global. La protesta contro il G8 a Genova*, the end of the 20th and the beginnings of the 21st centuries were characterized, in the collective imaginary, by worldwide protests against neoliberal globalization. These protests gained public conscience in 1999, with the already mentioned "Battle of Seattle", although social movements challenging an unfair world governance were already present since the early Eighties. From 1984 onwards, in fact, counter-conferences regarding industry and trade were organized on a regular basis during elite meetings, and a global movement protesting neoliberal globalization policies took shape. Activists dared to challenge the rising social and economic ideology, whose hegemonic stances were based on the notion of global free trade as a mean to increase the world's wealth.

> *From this perspective, the term globalization refers to "a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions—assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact—generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power."* (Held et al. 1999, 7)

In other words, from the last decades of the 20th century onwards, we are confronted with "the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens 1990, 64): a sort of time-and-space shrinkage has happened, primarily influencing "the production and reproduction of consumer goods, culture, and policing tools" (Andretta et al. 2002, 5, my translation).

2 See https://www.ngvision.org/, last visit on February 9th, 2024.

Seattle's and Genoa's protests arose in such historical circumstances, contesting from a transnational perspective those policies that, according to the activists, were heightening the social and economic divide between the wealthy minority and the poor majority across the whole world, and institutions such as G7/G8, IMF, WTO, the European Union, NATO, OCSE, and the World Economic Forum were blamed for it. These issues were channelled through precise practices of contention, such as the organization of massive counter-meetings during the most important political summits: they aimed to show the public opinion that "another world is possible" (McNally 2001).

Genoa Social Forum meant to be the core of one of these massive counter-meetings in 2001. It was organized to coincide with the G8 summit, which would have taken place in Genoa from July 20th to 22nd. It was the second one to be chaired by Silvio Berlusconi, the prime minister of Italy, at the head of a centre-right parliament majority. On that occasion, representatives of the European Union and the governments of the USA, the United Kingdom, Japan, Germany, France, Canada, Russia, and, of course, Italy aimed to discuss the major political issues concerning the most developed economies and, as Berlusconi affirmed a week before the summit, also to provide solutions to global poverty (Proglio 2021, 40).

On the other side, the counter-meeting capitalized on the previous mass mobilization in Prague (September 2000) and Porto Alegre (January 2001) (Seoane, and Taddei 2002), in which different collectives joined together to protest neoliberal globalization, paving the way for the foundation of Genoa Social Forum and the coordination of the protests against G8 in Genoa, in July 2001. It all began in 2000, with the political convergence of many Italian social centres joining the so-called Tute Bianche ('White Overalls') movement (De Pieri et al. 2021), leftist catholic and non-religious associations and movements, non-governmental organizations, political parties such as the Green Federation and the Communist Refoundation Party, and their youth organizations (Andretta et al. 2002, 36): they drew on "the Jobs pact" signed by fifty associations (Aa.Vv 2001, 10). Between the end of 2000 and the beginnings of 2001, when GSF was officially founded, their number ramped up to 1187.

Thus, Genoa Social Forum did not configure itself as a monolithic counter-institution: on the contrary, it was a "network of networks"—a sort of 'trans-network'—interconnecting various organizations, which had never been cooperating previously. As Andretta at al. claim, GSF's structure was "segmented", formed by "groups that are born, mobilize themselves, and constantly wane; polycephalic, characterized by a collective leadership; reticular, with groups and individuals linked to each other by multiple interconnections" (2002, 37, my translation; see also Gerlach [1971]). That being stated, although Genoa Social Forum presented itself as a political "trans-network", it aimed not only to logistically coordinate the protests, but also to elaborate a full-blown counterprogram to the G8, envisaging public forums, international demonstrations, sit-ins, etc., and setting shared rules of engagement. Nevertheless, during specific events, each association adhering to GSF could freely choose how to organize street protests.

In July 2001, then, a multitude, in the sense developed by Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt (Hardt and Negri, 2004), flooded Genoa's city centre. First of all, there were those groups and collectives coordinated by GSF (Proglio 2021, 40-47)—for instance, the Lilliput network (catholic and voluntary associations, moderate environmentalist groups, etc.); the Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions and Citizen's Action (ATTAC); leftist associations, parties, youth organizations, and unions; several NGOs; the Tute Bianche movement; and the Global Rights Network, which was composed by social centres often critical to the GSF organization. In addition to them, there were those anticapitalist and anarchist collectives that considered GSF's ideology and political requests as merely reformist (Andretta et al. 2002, 39), and were keener on violent protests, adopting tactics such as the black bloc one (Albertani 2002).

All these heterogenous parts of the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement were equally stroke by the state-sanctioned repression during Genoa's G8. In that moment, activists gave rise to a cohesive political body, which requested to be represented by the movement's media, from within the movement. From this point of view, the role of GSF's Media Center and Indymedia became pivotal.

LIKE A SWARM IN THE STORM: INDYMEDIA ITALIA AND GSF'S MEDIA CENTER IN GENOA

In the essay "The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement", activist and scholar Jeffrey Juris writes about his experience in Genoa. More specifically, he offers brief insights into the hectic activities of GSF's Media Center at the peak of the protests in Genoa, on July 21st, when nearly 300.000 people rallied in the streets of the capital of the Liguria region denouncing

> *The murder of a young Italian activist [Carlo Giuliani] killed the previous day. The center was teaming with protesters when we arrived, writing e-mails, conducting interviews, and posting audio and video clips. Pau, from the Catalan Movement for Global Resistance (MRG), was still connected to the Internet via laptop sending out real-time updates, as he had been the entire week [...]. Indeed, we had spent much of our time during the past two days running from baton charges and tear gas. Fortunately, protesters shot reams of digital footage documenting police abuses, which were compiled, edited, and uploaded at the Independent Media Center (IMC) [Indymedia] on the floor above* (Juris 2005, 190).

In this short excerpt, a precise image of the Media Center comes to mind: media activists running all over the place, trying to find a spot where to connect their laptops, and informing their fellows about the riots in the streets. During the anti-G8 protests, they used various communication forms, modalities, and techniques, feeling evenly comfortable with digital video-shooting and editing, electronic text writing, and the Internet, because, as a matter of fact,

they were part of a generation of activists who embraced the digital revolution and appropriated new technologies bending them to their specific needs. At the same time, as Naomi Klein has brilliantly stated, the use of digital media, especially the Internet, was "shaping the movement on its own web-like image" (Klein 2002, 16), with hubs and spokes "that link to other centers, which are autonomous but interconnected" (16).

Within the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement, then, a mutual interaction took place between its inherent subjectivities and the digital technologies appropriated by media activists: not by chance, the motto of the most important independent media network, Indymedia, was—and still is, although the whole project declined during the 2010s— "Don't hate the media, become the media". Back then, "becoming the media" meant primarily to exploit the technical innovations brought by the digital revolution: the so-called new media and their languages (Manovich 2001) were becoming prominent, and political collectives quickly learned how to handle them and to intrude themselves into the "Network Society" (Castells 1996) from the back door.

Grassroots networks such as Indymedia played a major role in this process. Its members, for instance, were organized in media collectives, and their activities were based on interlinked websites, each constituting a zonal node. The first one was seattle.indymedia.org, which was put online on November 24th, 1999 to cover the protests against the WTO Conference in Seattle (DeLuca and Peeples 2002; Adler 2021). After this event, the nodes proliferated worldwide (Mamadouh 2004). At the end of 2000 there were thirty of them, while in 2001 their number ramped up to seventy: among them, there was also the Italian one, italy.indymedia.org[3].

All the sites shared the same graphic design, with a three-column Home Page dedicated to the most important sections of the news repository: there was—and still is for those sites that are online—a central section named "Features", in which we could find "texts discussed in a mailing list group" (Del Frate et al. 2021, 15, my translation); another section titled "Newswire", which consisted in a "live update of all the contents uploaded by the users" (15, my translation); and a third section composed by links to other nodes in the network.

The Italian node was developed in 2000, mainly on the initiative of a philosopher, Matteo Pasquinelli and Void, an activist from ECN – European Counter Network (51). Later on, they managed to involve other activists and collectives, who formed the Autistici/Inventati group between 2000 and 2001 (Beritelli 2012, 49–83) and, as media activists, took part in protests such those in Prague at the end of 2000 (Del Frate et al. 2021, 79). Ten months later, they constituted one of the cores of GSF's Media Center (Rossini 2021), two school buildings entrusted by the local administration to Genoa Social Forum and transformed

3 See https://archive.autistici.org/ai/20210701082026/https://italy.indymedia.org/, last visit on February 9th, 2024. The Indymedia Italia site has been put online in 2021 once again, although its last update dates back to 2006.

into huge media rooms, where the editorial staffs of radio stations such as Radio Gap, weekly publications such as *Carta*, newspapers such as *Liberazione* and *Il manifesto*, and other media collectives worked side by side. Indymedia was assigned an entire floor, where the Italian crew and international members of the network teamed up.

Since their arrival in Genoa, they established a specific working routine. After having wired the buildings of the Diaz-Pertini-Pascoli[4] schools (Beritelli 2012, 116–17), they planned to hold several assemblies every day to coordinate the coverage of the street demonstrations. These meetings included the international Indymedia members, who were supposed to update their nodes. At the same time, it was decided that other groups would have stayed

> *at the Media Center, to do translations, to publish information that arrives via text message or phone. Those who remain in the Media Center coordinate with the national chats [...] Then there is the Radio channel, because there are Indymedia nodes in the world that are making broadcasts, web radio and in some cases even FM, in which they tell what is happening in Genoa [...] Moreover, we have to write the Features [on the Indymedia sites], keep up with the Newswire, and hide the posts that are clearly provocations, or spam [...] To sum up: assemblies are held before the demonstration, people are placed in various squares. There are also meetings within the working groups [...] then we leave, we call, we send text messages. Those who are standing in front of the computers make the first updates, coordinate with others, and set up the first information, listen to the radio and transcribe what it is said, and upload the radio's mp3s. Then, many people go back from the square to the Media Center, upload the updates, and go back to the square once again. And it goes on like this until night* (Del Frate et al. 2021, 85-86, my translation).

This workflow could have been effective only if the sets of policies adopted by the Independent Media Centers were respected. As Victor Pickard's research on Indymedia has demonstrated, these policies called for a "radical democratic way" of collaboration (Pickard 2006, 22–23): they dictated "a consensus decision-making model, in which all of the nodes in the network have to be in agreement concerning important decisions that need to be made" (Atkinson 2017, 132). Of course, this "radical democratic" method had pitfalls and shortcomings—one of them was that many "unspoken rules" (id., 133) remained in the shadow, becoming "'tyrannies'" such as "rigid ideologies of activists, elites masked by the lack of structure of the network, and tensions associated with vague editorial policies featured on the main website" (133).

That being stated, on the ideological side of the matter, Indymedia activists were thoroughly attached to their "radical democratic" method, which envisaged

4 Journalists and media activists were hosted in the Diaz-Pertini school, while the operative rooms of the Media Center were located in the Pascoli school.

a peer-to-peer organization, rather than a top-down structure. The latter suited better the needs of Genoa Social Forum, whose coordinators aimed to compose a political multitude through the principles of democratic representativity. Inevitably, disagreements arose during the protests. Some Indymedia Italia activists claimed that, although GSF presented itself as a political trans-network, it was stuck to hierarchical forms of organization. On the contrary, Indymedia was open to everyone: each person

> *had the same voice, we thought that everybody could take part in their own way to the demonstrations, respecting the other's way of protesting [...] they [GSF's delegates] did not want there to be an open space where everyone could come in and post their information [...] Had it been up to them, they would have given accreditations only to well-known people and only these would have had the computers available* (Del Frate et al. 2021, 94, my translation).

In other words, GSF's Media Center was based on this precarious balance: on the one hand, there was a multi-layered organization such as Genoa Social Forum, which was characterized by unstable relationships between its different groups and collectives—criticism came from the Tute Bianche and more often from the Global Rights Network—and was competing against other anticapitalist and anarchist collectives for the protest hegemony; on the other, there was Indymedia, whose members felt that the Media Center was used by GSF to pull water to their own mill (Del Frate et al. 2021, 95) and had a different collective configuration, resembling a swarm capable of self-coordinating.

This swarm-like (infra-)structure was based on molecular social processes (Berardi, Jacquemet, and Vitali 2003, 143), in which new political subjectivities were forming. More specifically, through the interaction of activists and new media technologies, heterogenous dynamics of "attraction and imagination [modelled] individual bodies and collective organisms, making them act like dynamic, changing, and proliferating subjects" (id., 144, my translation). Indymedia activists appropriated communication and information technologies, behaving like those 'collective agents of enunciation' pinpointed by Félix Guattari in the Eighties, which were supposed to allow for

> 1) *The formation of innovative forms of dialogue and collective interactivity and, eventually, a reinvention of democracy;*
>
> 2) *By means of the miniaturization and the personalization of equipments, a resingularization of the machinic mediatized means of expression; we can presume, on this subject, that it is the connection, through networking, of banks of data which will offer us the most surprising views;*
>
> 3) *The multiplication to infinity of "existential operators" permitting access to mutant creative universe* (Guattari 2009, 299–300).

In other words, during the anti-G8 protests, Indymedia aimed to create political subjects that took part in the constitution of "'a collective intelligence'

capable of autonomy and self-determination" in contrast to the "interconnected 'global mind' wired according to the power lines of semio-capitalism" (Berardi, Jacquemet, and Vitali 2003, 147, my translation). A sort of hive-mind to which semiotic operators—equipped with a video-camera, a tape-recorder, and a laptop, and acting like a swarm—could return when they had fulfilled their mission: to document what was happening in the street of Genoa during a state-sanctioned repression and to spread the information to the largest audience through the online network of Indymedia.

VIDEO-DOCUMENTING THE STORM: INDYMEDIA ITALIA IN THE STREETS OF GENOA

As it is publicly known, between July 20th and 21st, 2001, the streets of Genoa became the stage for large scale clashes between the Italian law enforcement and collectives of the Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement. A violent escalation quickly occurred, and many violent events took place: for instance, in Dante square, when protesters tried to enter the so-called "Red Zone", in which the G8 delegates were meeting; in Tomaseo square, where the black bloc confronted the *carabinieri*; in Tolemaide street; in Alimonda square, where activist Carlo Giuliani was killed; in Manin square, where the law enforcement baton-charged Lilliput activists and pacifists; in Italia avenue; in the Diaz-Pertini-Pascoli schools; and, finally, in the Bolzaneto police station.

These clashes had legal consequences, leading to several trials against the protesters and the law enforcement officers. More specifically, it is to mention the so-called "Trial against the 25 activists", charged with devastation and looting, resisting a public official, injury, and damage; on the opposite side of the barricade, almost one-hundred police officers were charged for their actions in Manin square, in the Diaz-Pertini school, and in the Bolzaneto police station[5].

Indymedia tried to influence many of these trials, circulating materials that could help the protesters, and, more broadly, its members attempted to "affect the 'media trial' to which [the movement was] subjected in the days immediately following the events" (Garofalo 2021, 184, my translation). First of all, there were clips uploaded on the Indymedia Italia site, in the "Video" section. These materials were based on the relentless activities of Indymedia operators in the streets of Genoa. They appropriated new technologies in all its forms and tools, from MiniDv video-cameras to laptops and computers, from digital photo-cameras to software for online data transmission: these devices, most of them

5 Copies of the documents concerning these trials are preserved in the GSF Legal Support Archive, housed in the Francesco Lorusso Archive at Vag61 social center, in Bologna. These documents are accessible via request to the archive managers, whom I would like to thank.

belonging to the consumer realm, were bent to semiotic counter-production and the creation of an alternative information network. It can be observed how IMC crews used digital technical objects in a video published by Indymedia's Facebook profile on the twentieth anniversary of the "Battle of Seattle"[6]—and the same happened in Genoa: a room full of laptops streamed on the Internet, while, due to technological limitations, digital videos were selected, cut into 30-seconds/1 minute fragments, and only then uploaded—longer videos were circulated only through a VHS delivery system[7].

Other reportages and documentaries were developed drawing on those clips and the MiniDvs' raw footage in the weeks and months following the G8, and they are now digitally accessible on the NGV – New Global Vision[8] platform, which presents itself as an online repository hosting independent media materials. Among them, there are the most relevant Indymedia Italia video-documents, mainly referring to two different text typologies: on the one hand, there are raw-footage compilations, on the other, we have fully-fledged reportages, in which interviews to activists, lawyers, or intellectuals provide context to the raw footage. In the last part of this section, then, I will provide two examples of these text typologies.

Concerning the first one, I will focus on *L'assalto alla Diaz* (*The Diaz Assault*, 2004)[9]. As Damiano Garofalo observes, the enunciation effects of such a document are strictly intertwined to the video format employed while shooting (Garofalo 2021, 182). Because of their easy-handling, lightweight devices such as MiniDv cameras allowed activists to smoothly shoot a video about what was happening around them, adopting a specific "man-machine" configuration: hands on a videocamera; eyes on its built-in screen. This has relevant textual effects: in the assault to the Diaz-Pertini school, everything is displayed through a "first person shot" (Eugeni 2013), and the operator "is transformed into an integral part of the video-text" (Garofalo 2021, 182, my translation). In other words, we feel a "presence effect" concerning the body of the operator; they were right there, right in the moment when the police entered the school buildings, watching the events from the windows of the nearby Pascoli school, where the headquarter of Indymedia was located, and, later, walking through the corridors of the Diaz-Pertini school. At the same time, the user/spectator's eyes are aligned with the operator/enunciator's ones, and the former can experience the same shock

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6 https://www.facebook.com/indymedianetwork/videos/indymedia-network-20th-anniversary/2644407005653227/, last visit on February 16th, 2024.

7 See the Indymedia Italia site, where it was possible to fill a form and request specific video-cassettes: https://archive.autistici.org/ai/20210620161937/http://www.italy.indymedia.org/video/, last visit on February 16th, 2024.

8 Founded in 2002, it is a video-archiving project that aims "to create independent online video channels by building a network of FTP servers and a peer-to-peer file-sharing system" (Garofalo 2021, 180). Web hosting is curated by Isole Nella Rete (ecn.org) and autistici.org/inventati.org.

9 See https://www.ngvision.org/mediabase/336, last visit on February, 18th, 2024.

as the latter regarding police brutality. An interesting reversibility takes place between the enunciator and what is enunciated, and between the enunciator and the receiver.

Contrary to what Garofalo claims, anyway, there are not two scopic regimesthe first one tied to a participatory feeling, and the second one to a "helpless and voyeur-like posture" (id., 182, my translation) —, but just one: not only when the user/spectator watches the shaky camera footage of the raid's aftermath inside the school, but also when the footage taken from the windows of the Pascoli school is displayed, they can empathize with what they see, having a hint of the police brutality through the eye/camera of the operator. This kind of alignment between the operator and the user has a deep meaning: whether they want it or not, while watching the video, the user/spectator shares the same social and political space of the operator and they establish a common enunciation ground with each other.

These elements are also present in more structured reportages such as the different versions of *Aggiornamento 1* (*Update 1*, 2002-2004)[10], in which Indymedia activists aim to give a proper context to Genoa's anti-G8 protests, showing the polyvocality and the complexity of the whole movement. In this reportage a pivotal role is played by the acts of selecting and editing the footage: as many Indymedia video-documents, *Aggiornamento 1* is, in fact,

> *sectioned into ideal chapters [...] the beginning of each one is marked by the presence of explanatory intertitles with a black background and white text. The text inside the intertitles performs, first of all, an informative function: that is, it pinpoints the geographical and temporal parameters of the events, providing the images with a precise historical context. Secondly, it is used to fill in the blank spaces of the story, not occupied by the images. Despite the fact that these videos are produced and edited close to the events that took place, this audiovisual material takes on an immediate historical value, which indirectly affects even the narratives of the most traditional media* (Garofalo 2021, 183, my translation).

Moving beyond the formal and enunciation side of the matter (well-analyzed by Garofalo), a relevant thematic issue comes to the fore: Indymedia Italia activists aimed to elaborate a different movement's representation than the one provided by the mass-media, which was characterized by well-identifiable images—the black-hooded activist throwing a brick at police officers, for instance. On the contrary, *Aggiornamento 1* firstly displays a colorful demonstration, suddenly interrupted by an intertitle claiming that troops of policemen have baton-charged the rallying activists without a proper reason. From this moment onwards, the user/spectator watches moving images of the riots in the street of Genoa, from the clashes in Tolemaide street on July 20th to the assault to the Diaz-Pertini-Pascoli schools during the night between July 21st and 22nd, mixed

10 See https://www.ngvision.org/mediabase/15, last visit on February, 18th, 2024. See also https://www.ngvision.org/mediabase/333, last visit on February, 18th, 2024.

with interviews to activists.

The ideological standpoint of Indymedia is crystal clear: the anti G8 protests in Genoa were peaceful and legitimate until the law enforcement unjustifiably began a violent repression. A twist in the course of the demonstrations took place, and police officers were brutal in their improper conduct, causing injuries and the death of Carlo Giuliani, whose corpse is visible in several shots. These statements are reinforced by interviews to activists, who tell what happened to them in the Diaz-Pertini-Pascoli schools. The police assault is considered part of a precise repression strategy, as it is claimed in an intertitle: "Hitting the Communication System: the first objective of any military operation".

CONCLUSIONS

Both *L'assalto alla Diaz* and *Aggiornamento 1* configure themselves as successful examples of counter-information. While many journalists underscored the inherent violence of many activists (and the naivete of the others) in the mass-media, Indymedia's members highlighted the responsibility of the law enforcement, shedding light to their real purpose: the repression of the movement as a whole, in order to state that 'another world was not possible'. In doing so, Indymedia gave rise to a complex media ecology, which was deeply intertwined to the social and political environment surrounding it.

In order to describe this interaction, I did not choose to focus only on media production, rather I opted for "a holistic mode of comprehending media practices in the context of their aesthetic, social, political, and subjective surroundings of which the fragmented and fragmenting categories of producers, institutions, audiences and the phases of media production, and consumption are incapable" (Goddard 2016, 13). This overarching perspective helped me to shed light on Indymedia's media practices, which were crucial for the whole Anti-Corporate Globalization Movement, and not only for those groups and collectives coordinated by GSF: media activists pointed their finger at state-sanctioned repression, showing that the riots were first of all a reaction to police brutality, which mirrored the violence of the neo-liberal governance.

Not by chance, then, the independent media documentation of Genoa's demonstrations proved to be as important as the demonstrations themselves. It became a matter of occupying a symbolic space of representation, extending the movement's influence far beyond the physical urban environment. It was a semiotic conflict, in which the G8 governments—and especially the Italian government—could be protected by friendly corporate mass-media, but, at the same time, could be exposed by information activists belonging to independent online networks, who acted like a swarm.

In waging this semiotic war, Indymedia managed to keep an intersectional balance in representation, giving voice to a plurality of social and political subjectivities, as stated by Sandra Jappesen (2021). This last point appears to be crucial for Indymedia during the anti-G8 protests, when it was extremely

important to show the world what was happening in the streets and to correctly represent a global movement that drew its strength from the interaction of different groups: although they were very often in competition with each other, they wanted to collectively affirm that, contrary to what Margaret Thatcher claimed in a famous speech, "there is another way". Indymedia provided them a global voice to shout it.

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Inas Halabi's We No Longer Prefer Mountains (2022).

Creating an Artistic Counternarrative within the Druze Community in Israel/ Palestine through Oral History and Fukeiron Methodologies

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The article looks at the research methods that lie behind the film *We No Longer Prefer Mountains* (2022) by Palestinian artist Inas Halabi. It represents a counternarrative of the identity and political issues of the Druze community living in Israel, achieved from within through an immersive glimpse. The aim is to analyse the way the visual artist relies on specific methodologies (which are contextualized within the field of Palestinian studies) to build an alternative perspective on Druze history. On one side, the paper considers oral history as it is practiced in the film: a method to write history from below, to highlight the interconnections of individual and collective stories, and to exhibit forms of *sumud* (resistance) in everyday life. On the other, it focuses on *fukeiron*, a method of filming the landscape applied by Halabi to expose symbols of colonial control hidden in both natural and urban environments. Overall, the article thinks about the role that the artist can play and the way she can contribute to a militant and decolonial research from her particular position and application of specific methodologies.

Keywords
Counterhegemonic
Narrative
Druze
Oral History
Fukeiron
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INTRODUCTION

The film *We No Longer Prefer Mountain* (2022) by Palestinian artist Inas Halabi aims to provide an alternative perspective on the history of the Druze community in Israel. It seeks to challenge a dominant narrative about the community that has developed over time by giving voice to its members and presenting an anti-hegemonic viewpoint. To accomplish this, the artist works as a researcher, gathering data and operating similarly to other academics who have studied the same subject, as we shall see. Therefore, the primary goal of this article is to analyze the research methodologies utilized in Halabi's work. Two methods will be explored in particular: oral history, which allows the artist to give voice to Druze stories, and *fukeiron*, which enables the artist to explore the territory and highlights connections with those stories.

The artist is not experimenting with these methodologies for the first time in her 2022 film. Indeed, she has previously employed similar methods in order to shed light on lesser-known stories about Palestine. Indeed, despite living abroad for several years, she remains committed to addressing issues related to her country of origin, where she was born in 1988. For example, she

even has a side activity in Amsterdam, where she currently resides: a ceramic studio called 'Turabi', which means 'my soil' in Arabic. Here she creates pieces with decorations inspired by traditional Palestinian embroidery patterns called "tatreez". Each creation tells and embodies a story of a place or historical fact, revealing her passion for storytelling.

The artist has previously used oral history as a narrative technique in other projects. One such project is *Mnemosyne* (2016), a video work consisting of interviews with 17 members of a Palestinian family, in which the family members tell their version of a family story, specifically how their grandfather received a scar on his forehead. Through storytelling, this project reflects on the importance of voice in the preservation of individual and collective memory. Moreover, Halabi also explores the position of the artist-historian, learning how to handle and communicate stories other than her own. She discovers the potential of rewriting history from below, and the responsibility that comes with being an artist who works as a researcher, collecting and reorganizing data to present a counternarrative.

Halabi has consistently supported the exploration of alternative narratives with inspections of the Palestinian territory. Landscape representations develop in parallel with storytelling, lending her stories credibility. This approach is evident in the film *We No Longer Prefer Mountains*, as well as in her previous works. In *We Have Always Known the Wind's Direction* (2019-20), for example, the artist collaborates with specialized scientists to investigate the possible burial of nuclear waste and its persistent radiation effects in the West Bank, thus linking an oral aspect to a visual one.

THE DRUZE COMMUNITY IN ISRAEL

We No Longer Prefer Mountains explores the current living conditions of the Druze community in Israel, examining both its past and present. The Druze are a small minority in Israel and have played an ambivalent role in the country's history, that reflects Israeli colonial enterprise. Halabi's movie elaborates on the dilemmas that continue to plague them, including identity issues, the writing of history, mandatory conscription in the Israeli army, the relationship to their land, and the ongoing confiscation and occupation of their territory.

To understand the current situation facing the Druze in Israel, it is first necessary to look at how this has developed historically. The scholar Lisa Hajjar (2000) writes that since the beginning of the colonization of Palestine, Zionist forces believed that the Druzes, whom they considered a "non-Muslim" community, would make "a good ally" and from early on they attempted to "alienate Druze (and Christian) Palestinians from (Sunni) Muslims". Historically, this strategy has been largely, but not entirely, successful. Already during the

1936-1939 Palestinian uprising[1] and during the 1948 war[2] the Druze community split, with some opting for neutrality, some showing solidarity with the fellow Palestinians and fighting alongside them, and others supporting the Zionist forces. These different behaviors are evident in many studies, such as the oral histories conducted by scholars Diana Allan and Rosemary Sayigh (1996) [3].

Lisa Hajjar writes that "after 1948, state building in Israel included the construction of a distinct Israeli Druze identity". This meant adopting policies that would supposedly integrate the Druze into Israeli society: the army played here a pivotal role. Since 1956, Druze men have been required to enlist in the army upon reaching the age of majority[4]. The participation of Druze men in the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) has shaped and influenced the entire community throughout the decades. Moreover, many studies show how their participation is symbolic of the Israeli strategy of *divide et impera*. Haim Bresheeth-Žabner, a scholar who served in the IDF as a youth, writes: "The Druze and Circassians serve in the most vicious IDF units such as the Border Guard and treat Palestinians in the West Bank brutally, reflecting Israel's divide and rule policy" (2020, 71).

Bresheeth-Žabner goes on to point out that after the Nation-State Bill was passed by the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in July 2018, there was much controversy and protest within the portion of the Druze community that is loyal to the IDF and the country. The law consolidated the so-called Basic Laws of Israel, quasi-constitutional laws of the State, which define Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Such a definition explicitly excludes all of the other communities that live in the territory and defines them as second-class citizens. Many Druze soldiers felt betrayed, while many observers ironically referred to them in their new situation as "honorary Jews", strategically used and weaponized. This definition marked a parallel to "honorary whites", an unofficial status in South Africa's apartheid regime to designate non-whites who were granted some of the privileges of whites[5].

On the whole, the Druze community living in Israeli territory today lives a constant debate and search for identity. In the world of visual arts, there is a direct expression of this quest. Artists such as Jafra Abu Zoulouf or Fatma

1 The 1936 Arab Revolt was a popular uprising against the British administration, that asked independence and protested against the promise of the British to the Zionist organization to grant it the land and a state, contradicting previous promises of a future independent Arab country.

2 In 1948, after the failure of the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine, a war broke out, opposing a military coalition of Arab states and the Zionist forces, which were finally victorious.

3 Rosemary Sayigh writes: "In some cases, Druze villagers were generous and hospitable to the refugees, but more often it was their cool reception that gave fleeing villagers their first taste of what it would mean to be homeless and stateless". (2007, 91)

4 They are the only non-Jews in Israel to do so, together with the Circassian minoritarian community. Only Druze males join the army, while conscription for Jewish Israelis apply regardless the gender.

5 https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2018-07-29/ty-article-opinion/.premium/the-south-african-model-make-israels-druze-honorary-jews/0000017f-dc8c-d3a5-af7f-feae3b290000

Shanan use their work to express contemporary issues related to Druze culture. In particular, Abu Zoulouf, who was born in Daliat El Carmel (a place very much present in Halabi's film), reflects through her artistic practice on the difficulties of identifying as a Palestinian Druze in the Israeli context. Halabi's film delves into this context. It aims to shed light on the real conditions of the Druze in Israeli territory and to debunk the myth of a "privileged minority". To this end, she gives a direct voice to the Druze, showing their desire for self-determination and identity expression, and for using history as a liberating tool.

THE USE OF ORAL HISTORY IN HALABI'S FILM

In order to create a counternarrative, the first major research methodology on which *We No Longer Prefer Mountains* relies is oral history. Historian Lynn Abrams defines it as "a practical method for obtaining information about the past by means of conducting an interview" (as quoted in Thompson 2017, 132). Indeed, Halabi's film evolves through interviews with several members of the Druze community, who tell their individual stories, reflect on collective history, or illustrate specific struggles of their land.

Halabi's historiography challenges from below dominant Israeli narratives about the Druze community. This approach is reminiscent of Walter Mignolo's concept of "subalternization of knowledge" or "border thinking", which involves "absorbing and displacing hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern group" (2000, 12), in this case, the Druze. Her interviews uncover silenced voices and difficult family stories that complicate the narrative of the idyllic relationship between the Druze and the Israeli state. They also reclaim the right to self-determination and liberation from colonial power.

The interviews are set in daily-life surroundings, typically in domestic environments. This aligns with historian Alessandro Portelli's definition of oral history's task: "to search out the memories in the private, enclosed spaces of houses and kitchens – to connect them to history and in turn force history to listen to them" (as quoted in Rabah 2020, 21). They are presented as spontaneous events, capturing routine aspects of everyday life and avoiding a pre-designed televisual framework.

Halabi's work joins a growing trend among academics who are taking a similar approach to rewriting Druze history. One such example is the historian Makram Rabah, who has also made extensive use of oral history in his work. His publication titled *Conflict on Mount Lebanon: The Druze, the Maronites and Collective Memory* focuses on the historical conflict between the Druze and Maronite communities in the Mount Lebanon area. It also provides a general history of the Druze community as a contextual background.

Rabah discusses the birth of the Druze faith as a "heterodox offshoot of Isma'ili Islam" (2020, 36). This origin has historically posed a problem for members of

the Druze community, who may or may not identify as Muslim[6], a theme also present in Halabi's film. Rabah analyses how over the centuries "the Druze, as a community, do not rely on written sources to learn about their past or to propagate their group identity. They primarily employ communal structures, as well as socioreligious elements to facilitate their group's memory formation process" (2020, 96), and quotes the few ancient historians that provide a partial view of the group's history (Salih bin Yahya's Tārīkh Bayrūt and Ibn Sabat's idq al-Akhbār).

Moreover, he emphasizes how oral history has played a crucial role in transmitting information:

> *The lack of written sources has forced the Druze to rely heavily on oral tradition to preserve the socio-political legacy of their ancestors. Much of the stories of Druze lineage, valour and supposed religious persecution are perpetuated through oral traditions which, at least for the Druze, carry equal or greater weight than written sources* (Rabah 2020, 97).

Therefore, Rabah has decided to continue this tradition and utilize oral history as a methodology for his historiographical research.

Inas Halabi aligns with this approach. In fact, her film equally provides evidence through oral history to clarify some previously unclear historical aspects. However, if Halabi, an artist, and Rabah, a historian, share similar approaches in producing research data, their end products differ significantly. Halabi's output is an artistic essay-film, a video artwork that does not conform to the conventions of academic writing. Strict storytelling rules are not necessary to it for delivering its message, as is the case with university publications. By working visually and more freely, the artist can shape the viewer's experience as desired.

According to scholar Aline Caillet (2014, 94), a film that is based on a collection of interviews can create a "living archive" capable of recording stories that have no other archival record. This is the case in *We No Longer Prefer Mountains*. However, Halabi's interviews do not only present stories; the complex visual aspect is also a fundamental component of the artist's work. In fact, she presents the interviewees in a series of portraits, effectively creating a portrait gallery. She not only credits the words but also investigates their context and truthfulness by connecting them with the territory and traditions of the Druze

6 Druze community was born around XI century in Egypt, during the Fatimid caliphate of al-Hākim bi-amri llāh. He was a much controversial figure, full of peculiar religious beliefs, and thought he was a new Messiah. Among the theologians who refused this idea, the was Al-Darazi (from whom comes the term "Druze"). Around him and other preachers of Ismaili muslim origins, the Druze faith was born. They call themselves Ahl al-Tawhīd (People of Unitarianism) or al-Muwa'idūn (Unitarians), and have ever since struggled to identify as Muslim or not. Through the centuries, Druzes spread around the Levant region, and in the countries born after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the consequences of European colonialism (mainly Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel/Palestine). This has brought to the emergence of autonomous and sometimes disconnected communities in the different nations. (Campanini 2017)

community. In doing so, she takes on the role of an ethnographer, as we shall see.

Visually, the interviews in the film depict individuals without the use of subtitles, which is unusual in standard television documentaries. This shows a specific choice on the part of the artist. As a result, the interviewees' names, ages, and professions are not revealed. The artist is present on the screen only once. In all other instances, the interviewee is alone in front of the camera. This film establishes a metaphorical dialogue between the featured individuals and the viewers, who observe the scenes as if the questions originated from their perspective. Halabi acts as a mediator between the reality of the interviewees and that of the spectators. She creates a participative and affective dimension that extends to them. This dimension is characterized by a palpable trust that leads to the sharing of personal views, anecdotes, and objects that contain difficult memories by several members of the Druze community.

THE INTERVIEWS IN HALABI'S FILM

We No Longer Prefer Mountains presents fragmented interviews, resulting in a disjointed narrative. The interviews exclusively feature Druzes, with no input from Israeli. The latter only make brief appearances in scenes of everyday activities, such as walking a dog. Despite their infrequent appearances, they remain an omnipresent but ghostly entity, only recurring in the oral accounts. Contrapositions and contradictions are exclusive to the Druze community, and the film provides a platform for the various positions within it. Thus, the movie amplifies the voices of a frequently marginalized group, with a particular focus on critical perspectives within it. However, it does not strive for neutrality like a typical television production. While emphasizing historical facts through its research methodologies, it implicitly advocates for a militant and well-positioned viewpoint.

The initial interviewee is an elderly man who provides the viewer with valuable insights into Druze history. He maintains that the true origins of the Druze religion are rooted in Islam: "We celebrate exactly as Muslims do because we belong to Islam". He goes on to describe how the Druze people began living in mountainous regions as a means of escaping persecution in Egypt, and how their villages resemble typical Arab villages. Moreover, he introduces discusses identity issues faced by the Druze community in Israel: "What is very unfortunate is that today since around 50 years the Druze in Palestine are no longer (considered) to be Arab. They were separated via the educational system. A distinct circle was created for them. [...] They monitor us more than they monitor the Christians and Muslims". Finally, he comments on the ethnicity law (the Nation-State bill), which he believes may perpetuate the status of non-Jewish citizens as second-class.

The interview is conducted at the interviewee's residence, primarily in the living room. A soft light contours the setting, which includes photographs and small art pieces that provide insight into the owner's identity and personal

history. A particular focus is put on an old photograph of his maternal grandfather encircled by flowers, which tells the story of his family, native of Southern Lebanon from where they keep the accent in Arabic.

During the tour of a hill on Mount Carmel, we meet the second man who was interviewed while accompanying the artist. Halabi is not visible on the screen: she holds the camera from her point of view, which allows the viewer to become immersed in the scene. The man explains that the trees around, mostly pines, are not indigenous to the land like oaks or cedars, but were brought there by European Jewish settlers. After visiting the cemetery, the man discusses how the Israeli army controls the burial of former Druze militaries regardless of the circumstances of their death. They then proceed to his house, where he searches his personal archive for documents to support his story. He shares his experience of refusing military conscription and subsequently being imprisoned for two years in his youth. Finally, he reflects on the Israeli state's control over Druze education and its monitoring through recurring visits and presentations organized by the IDF.

A third man is interviewed near a water spring in the area of Umm al Shuqaf, which is a key resource for the Druze villages on Mount Carmel. He explains the history of Druze land confiscation by the Israeli state as follows: "I can share a detail with you: the state of Israel has confiscated more land from the Druze than all the Arabs living here. Look at the absurd contradiction here: Druzes who serve in the Israeli army and are loyal to the State, have their land confiscated the most". Moreover, he describes the strategy of converting land into national parks to prevent its use by the indigenous population. This procedure has been extensively studied in the field of Palestinian studies. In her research on landscape art in Palestinian art history, art historian Tina Sherwell analyzes it and writes: "The ruins of many destroyed Palestinian villages have consequently been covered over with new buildings or have been planted over with trees and transformed into public parks" (2003, 25). Implicitly therefore, Halabi's shots of the hills seem to seek out these same ghosts of the past, without finding them, leaving room for the spectators' imagination.

After presenting such viewpoints, Halabi's film also gives space to a contradictory perspective. The artist visits a Druze/Israeli courthouse to meet with a judge who will have a very different political view, one that justifies Druze participation in the IDF as the best strategy for self-defence, given their minority status. Before he speaks, he is seated in the courtroom. Halabi films him from below: the frame and its angle visually represent the authoritarian position the man is trying to take and incorporate into his message. He argues that the Druze, being a minority wherever they reside, must adhere to the rules of their host country in order to survive. In Israel, he believes that they must join the IDF to protect their community and even fight against their Druze brethren from other nations in the event of war. He states: "Druze living under Israel will be loyal to the State and serve its army".

The position presented in this interview differs greatly from those presented in other interviews and from the position of the Urfud activist group, which Halabi also depicts. Urfud provides support to Druze youth who choose not

to join the IDF when they reach the age of enlistment, even if it means risking imprisonment. The artist documents one of their meetings, during which they discuss recent events in Palestine, particularly those related to Sheikh Jerrah[7]. They are considering the possibility of focusing their discussions with young people on this topic and informing them that if they enlist, they may be asked to evict Palestinians.

The artist especially focuses on one of the activists, Maysan. She follows her and interviews her mother to learn more about her the group's activity. This interview stands out from the others because Halabi is present on screen. Maysan's mother and Halabi are seated across from each other at the kitchen table in the family's home. An arch-like opening in the wall frames the subjects, contributing to the shot's almost perfect symmetry. The composition presents the two individuals in a horizontal and non-hierarchical relationship, which is markedly different from the courtroom setting where the judge holds a monologue instead of engaging in a dialogue. The viewer witnesses a discussion in an intimate space and perceives the atmosphere of trust and care that fosters the moment of sharing delicate information. The artist puts the woman at ease while stating that she wants to listen to a 'mother's' perspective, which is often ignored.

The woman tells Halabi about the challenges Maysan faces because she identifies as a Druze Palestinian, as opposed to the many Druze who call themselves Zionists. She describes the threats they have received through anonymous phone calls, and how these have failed to deter her daughter's activism. Additionally, she expresses her relief that her other son has refused mandatory conscription.

In a second part of the interview, we see the woman while she is preparing *mh'ammar* (a traditional stuffed bread) for a meeting of Urfud's activists. She talks about it and explains the emotional bond that connects her to this recipe, that was passed down from generation to generation in her family. She says: "You asked me how I learned to make mh'ammar and what this food means to me. When I see mh'ammar, I remember my mother. This food really lives within me. It's such a big part of who I am". Throughout the interview, the artist manages to put the woman at ease. The artist records not only her words but also her habits, which are a reflection of the traditions and customs of the Druze community. Her work mirrors what scholar Edward Said referred to as a "native point of view". This term describes "a continuing, protracted, and sustained adversarial resistance to the discipline and the praxis of anthropology (as representative of 'outside' power) itself, anthropology not as textuality but as an often-direct agent of political dominance" (2012, 299). Indeed, Halabi does not present herself in her work as an external observer, which could imply a political dominance. Instead, she positions herself as an ally and participant in the struggle to preserve Druze traditions and identity through an act of resistance,

7 Sheikh Jarrah is a neighborhood in East Jerusalem which has gained much visibility both locally and internationally in recent years for the violent evictions of Palestinian families from their homes made by the Israeli government and army.

or *sumud*[8], expressed in this case through food, cooking, and communal eating.

One additional important aspect to mention in Halabi's oral history research is a radio program that is occasionally broadcast during the movie. The program is an open mic show aimed at discussing a possible strike in Israel by the Palestinian community to protest against the daily discrimination it suffers. The program serves as a tool to amplify silenced stories, much like the accompanying music. It provides a platform for the Palestinian community to express themselves and discuss ways to send a message against oppression. This is a further demonstration of how the artist created a safe space in the film where people felt comfortable sharing their ideas, perspectives, and difficult stories with the audience.

FUKEIRON: RESEARCH PRACTICES IN THE LANDSCAPE

Beyond private and intimate spaces, with their individual family histories and domestic rituals, *We No Longer Prefer Mountains* also includes landscape and public spaces. The oral history methodology and landscape portrayal complement each other, as the recorded stories find visual representation and evidence in the accompanying images. The artist was inspired by a precise methodology for her landscape shots: the *fukeiron*. *Fukeiron*, translatable as "theory of landscape" or "landscape theory", is "a film discourse that emerged at the end of the 1960s in Japan" (Furuhata 2007, 345). There is a 60-year gap between the original contest and the use of some of its dictates by the Palestinian artist. Despite this, there are some intriguing similarities between Halabi's film and the fukeiron originals.

Matsuda Masao, Masao Adachi, Hara Masataka, and photographer Nakahira Takuma are among the main theorists of the *fukeiron* discourse. Their practice is situated within a specific period of transformation in post-war Japan, during which the economy and society underwent significant changes, such as the "economic shift from industrial to postindustrial consumer capitalism" (Furuhata 2007, 347). Additionally, it is connected to the transformations in the Japanese left and new considerations of "political resistance and subjectivity" (Furuhata 2007, 347). In this context, scholar Yuriko Furuhata notes that directors who followed the precepts of fukeiron opted to depict state repression not through scenes of violence, such as police brutality, but by focusing on the landscape as an "embodiment of the governing power of the state" (2013, 137). In his words (Furuhata, 2013, 139): "these fūkeiron critics turned their focus away from the spectacle of violence to the underlying conditions of such violence", opting for a new imagery that would "radically reimagine state power at a time when images

8 Scholar Hoda El Shakry describes *sumud* as follows: "generally understood as a mode of non-violent protest or resistance, sumud often carries the connotation of everyday survival, endurance, and resilience" (2021, 4).

of police violence and militant protests were saturating the mass media and limiting the political imagination of the public". Commenting on films like *A.K.A. Serial Killer* (Masao Adachi, 1975) or *The Man Who Left His Will on Film* (Nagisa Ōshima, 1970), Furuhuta writes that "by focusing on eventless landscapes", these movies "reorient our attention, directing it away from spectacular sights of physical conflict and dramatic action toward nonspectacular elements of the urban environment" (Furuhata, 2013, 139).

Halabi's film fits into a completely different context than the original *fukeiron*'s, but it still highlights some interesting continuities. The study of the landscape is situated within a political context of oppression and occupation, which is intensified by the law of ethnicity. These changes and intensification of the oppression also affect the left, similarly to the Japanese context. This is evident in the activities of the Urfud group, an explicitly leftist group, which seeks to respond to the escalation of Israeli occupation policies. However, like the original *fukeiron* films, Halabi refrains from depicting violence on her screen, even though it would be easy to accompany the stories, such as those about what happens in Sheikh Jarrah, with graphic images that are constantly prevalent throughout Palestine.

Similar to the Japanese films, the camera is turned towards seemingly "eventless landscapes". However, these landscapes are not truly without events, as they conceal signs of political power and continuous control. Art historian W.J.T. Mitchell (2002, 17) describes such signs as "semiotic features of landscape" in his study on the relationship between landscape art and imperialism. Halabi brings these features to light while transitioning between natural and urban landscapes.

Regarding the former, the artist focuses on the landscape surrounding Mount Carmel, where the majority of the Druze villages is located. The artist captures footage of unpaved roads, trails, trees, and hills. In the background, we hear stories of Palestinian villages destroyed and covered with vegetation. The movie provides visual evidence to these stories by showing the same vegetation. The screen displays a mountain that is often referred to as a historical refuge by interviewees. It has now become a symbol of a new insurrection by a resisting part of the Druze community. The landscape also shows clear signs of Israeli occupation, including markers indicating a military zone or national park, both of which signify land confiscation. These markers are accompanied by various fences and barriers, all of which are documented in Halabi's film.

The artist's camera also seeks out signs of political power that are explicitly present in the urban landscape. In the streets of Druze villages, in addition to various posters advertising careers in the Israeli army, a special attention is given to Israeli flags, which are prominently displayed. The flags can be seen near houses, shops, and in the middle of roundabouts. They are often placed next to the colorful Druze flag. They stand as the most powerful symbol of the on-going colonizing process, which entails the expropriation of the land and the divide-et-impera strategy. They even penetrate religious sites. The movie shows one such example with the shrine of Nabi Shueyb ("prophet Shueyb"), an important pilgrimage place for Druze people. Flags and banners with the Israeli

colors as shown in the movie circle the temple, and representing the difficult and controversial situation of the Druze community in the country. According to an interviewee, the Druze military once used it for their oath ritual towards the IDF and the Israeli state. Additionally, we hear before 1948, when the borders with neighboring countries were open, Druzes from the region used to go there during religious holidays.

To create such representations of the landscape, Halabi employs various strategies in the film. On the one hand, she often walks through the land holding the camera with her hand, which occasionally results in shaky shots. The lens serves as the artist's and spectators' eye likewise, allowing the latter to relive the artist's journey. She walks and captures panoramic shots, with long sequences, sometimes slow, in both day and night light, aiming to include as many details as possible. On the other hand, some scenes are framed from a car window, providing an alternative speed to the exploration. This film's mixed use of landscape framing is reminiscent of classic fukeiron films, such as Masao Adachi's film *AKA Serial Killer*. Like Halabi's movie, *AKA Serial Killer* interweaves static scenes with panoramic shots taken from a car, giving a unique perspective on urban landscapes, roads, and the signs that populate them.

WE NO LONGER PREFER MOUNTAINS IN THE TRADITION OF PALESTINIAN LANDSCAPE ART

In addition to the continuity with fukeiron, Halabi's film also draws from the tradition of Palestinian landscape art. When discussing landscape representation in the Palestinian context, one of the most authoritative sources is the writings of scholar Tina Sherwell. She writes that starting from 1948 "landscape came to dominate Palestinian art, as it was conceived as the locus of Palestinian identity" (2001, 164). In her studies, Sherwell has extensively explored the representation of villages, which is also a prominent element in Halabi's film. She delves into the origins of this subject by examining the work of some pioneers of modern Palestinian art and the history of the "representations of the village found in popular images" that also influence them (2003, 148). Here, she explains, the villages "are generalized and are not usually depictions of any specific locale" (2003, 149). She goes on to write that "the generalized images come to stand for every village and, by analogy, Palestine", thus providing "a way of imaging the nation - Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community'" (Ibidem). Therefore, she finds and describes these characteristics in the work of artists such as Nabil Anani, Taleb Dweik, or Sliman Mansour. Halabi's film marks a difference with this tradition of the representation of urban landscapes. With the use of the camera, which refers to a type of ethnography "from a native point of view", she immerses herself in the reality of the Druze villages, not reproducing that representation "from a distance" and "free from the influence of the modern

landscape of Israel", as Sherwell (2003, 152) writes when describing the work of artists Khalil Rayan and Ibrahim Hijazi. Halabi explores the current reality in the villages, highlighting both the Druze-Palestinian identity and the effects of Israeli occupation. This is in line with Ariella Azoulay's study on the Nakba and the transformation of Palestinian villages after 1948, which refers to the "différend" (2001, 15) — a term borrowed from philosopher Jean-François Lyotard — to describe the gap between these two elements. For this reason, her representations are closer to the recent series of paintings by the Palestinian artist Khaled Hourani titled *Unnatural landscape* (2020), where the Palestinian landscapes, with its traditional features, are disrupted by elements such as the apartheid's walls and the watch towers.

Halabi's representation does not have a nostalgic character, lost in time. It fits into the present, looks at traditions and the territory as something alive. The landscape becomes a "practiced space", to use an expression of the philosopher Michel de Certeau (1984, 124), or a "site activated by movements, actions, narratives and signs" (Mitchell 2002, 265). The daily rituals that Halabi films, from a walk to taking care of the pomegranate fields, become ways for the Druzes to practice an identity that does not give up, that resists the authority of the Israeli occupation "who expect them to dance at Independence Day celebrations in the forests that had been planted on the ruins of their villages", to use Azoulay's words again (2011, 17). The artist herself participates in these strategies of being in the landscape. She hikes, travels around both by foot and by cars, recording her actions in long sequences. She actively engages in the reclamation of the territory and involves the viewer in this process through point-of-view shooting.

CONCLUSIONS

As observed in the analysis, Inas Halabi's film *We No Longer Prefer Mountains* presents a different viewpoint on the Druze community living in Israel. It challenges the dominant narrative that portrays the community as unconditionally loyal to the state and its army. Using the methodology of oral history, the artist collected data on the origins and historical development of the Druze in the territory by interviewing various community members in different villages on Mount Carmel. This work is in continuity with that of scholars such as Lisa Hajjar or Makram Rabah who have also studied the topic, demonstrating Halabi's aptitude as an artist-researcher.

The artist takes a historiographical approach from a non-hegemonic perspective, giving voice to various members of the Druze community who oppose a particular type of historical framing that they have experienced. While she gives space to conflicting voices within the community, she also delves into the activity of a group of activists like Urfud, who work to mobilize the community in resistance to occupation and oppression.

Using the second methodology, inspired by the fukeiron theory of landscape that originated in Japan in the late 1960s, the artist searches for signs of Israeli

oppression in the landscape, thus confirming what was heard in her stories. Similar to the Japanese directors of the past, her aim is to study the presence of authoritarian power in the natural environment without reproducing the scenes of violence that saturate the Palestinians' present, which remain present only in stories. The seemingly "eventless landscape" bears witness to this violence. Additionally, it fits into the history and tradition of landscape art in the Palestinian context. The landscape is depicted as a space that is utilized and activated by its inhabitants in their daily lives, serving as a form of resistance. The artist actively participates in this struggle, positioning herself as an ally and contributor to the Druze struggle.

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Aesthetics of Violence and Online Visual Propaganda as Weapons in a Separatist Struggle:
A Study of Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

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Since September 7, 2017, the two English-speaking regions of Cameroon have been brutalised by a separatist struggle variously called the Ambazonia War, the NOSO war or the Anglophone crisis. This conflict which opposes some separatist armed groups and government forces has involved the use by each side, of online-based visual propaganda aimed at framing their opponents in a negative light and wooing both domestic audiences and the international community in favour of their respective causes. This determination to negatively frame the opposite camp has led not only to a war of gloomy images but also the recrudescence of an aesthetic of violence in the video-assisted propaganda of the warring parties. This aesthetics of violence has so far remained understudied. This paper seeks to fill this gap by examining how specific violent images have circumstantially been constructed, deconstructed and mobilised by both separatist and anti-separatist forces in this conflict to frame or counter-frame their opponent. Using a qualitative content analysis of relevant online videos/footage, semiotics, documentary analysis and critical observations, the paper specifically addresses three questions: What has been the role of visual-based propaganda in the Ambazonia war? How have the domestic and the foreign audiences received this visual propaganda? And how have international observers – such as news agencies, politics observatories and other world organisations – mediated in the war of images that opposes government and the armed separatist groups in Cameroon?

Keywords
Visual Propaganda,
Ambazonia War,
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Separatism
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INTRODUCTION

The post-independence period in Sub-Saharan Africa has been characterised by the recrudescence of various secessionist/insurgent crises and civil wars. From Sudan and Nigeria through the Central African Republic, to Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo, various armed separatist conflicts and internecine wars have either threatened or shattered the corporate existence of different nations within the African continent. This wave of destabilising armed conflicts has in the long run not exempted the Cameroonian republic, a country which had for decades been an island of peace and a haven of stability in the whole Gulf of Guinea and the central African sub-region. Actually, since September 7, 2017, the two English-speaking Regions of Cameroon have been seriously brutalised by a separatist struggle variously called the Ambazonia

War, the NOSO war or the Anglophone crisis. This conflict which opposes a plurality of separatist armed groups[1] and government/nationalist forces has involved the use by each side, of online-based visual propaganda mainly aimed at tarnishing the image of their opponents and wooing both the domestic audiences and the international community in favour of their respective causes.

On various occasions, each side to the conflict has sought to deploy gloomy footage of the war to frame their opponents as barbaric, unpatriotic or as violators of human rights. In some instances, the belligerents even mobilised clearly doctored or manipulated videos that aimed at representing their rivals as cannibals, voodooists and primitive entities. This determination to negatively frame the opposite camp has led not only to a war of gloomy images but also the recrudescence of an aesthetic of violence in the video-assisted propaganda of the warring parties. This aesthetics of violence has so far remained understudied as the bulk of the available literature on the Ambazonia crisis tends to focus only on the military and socio-political security of communities in the Anglophone Regions of the country.

This paper seeks to fill the gap mentioned above, by examining how specific violent images have circumstantially been constructed, deconstructed and mobilised by both separatist and anti-separatist forces in this conflict to frame or counter-frame their opponent. Using a qualitative content analysis of relevant online video/footage, semiotics, documentary analysis and critical observations, the paper specifically addresses three questions: What has been the role of visual-based propaganda in the Ambazonia War? How have the domestic and the foreign audiences received this visual propaganda? And how have international observers—such as news agencies, politics observatories and other world organisations—mediated in the war of images that opposes government and the armed separatist groups in Cameroon? In line with the questions mentioned above, the paper attains three principal objectives. In the first place, it analyses war footage used for propaganda in the crisis. In the second place, it examines non-war but violent footage used in the visual propaganda; and in the last instance, the paper focuses on foreign observers' mediation in the war of images. The essay is principally based on three methods of data collection and analysis namely documentary analysis, critical observations, and semiotics.

1 More than 60 separatist groups are active in the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Some of these groups include the Southern Cameroons Defence Forces, the Ambazonia Intelligence Forces, Ambazonia Revolutionary Guards, Ambazonia Restoration Army, the Mountain Lions and the Bambalang Marine Force among others.

A BRIEF INCURSION INTO THE GENESIS OF THE AMBAZONIA WAR

The Ambazonia War is one of the multiple manifestations of the long-standing Anglophone problem in Cameroon. This problem has its roots in Cameroon's colonial history. In effect, the country has a tri-cultural colonial heritage. It became a German protectorate called Kamerun in 1884, after Germany signed a treaty with some Duala chiefs. Germany lost its protectorate to Britain and France three decades later, following her defeat in the First World War (1914-1916) and the outcome of the Versailles Treaty. In effect, the Versailles Treaty made Cameroon a mandated territory of the League of Nations under the French and British trusteeship. The British and French colonial administrations divided their newly acquired colony in what was called the Anglo-French condominium. France administered her own part of Cameroon as a separate colony while Britain ruled hers as an integral part of neighbouring Nigeria. Britain further divided her share into two administrative units called British Northern Cameroon and British Southern Cameroon.

In 1960, Francophone Cameroon got its independence from France and sought re-unification with their Anglophone brothers. The following year, Anglophone Cameroonians were compelled by the United Nations Organisation (the successor of the League of Nations) to take part in a plebiscite that was to determine their fate as an independent nation. These Anglophone Cameroonians were made to choose between obtaining their independence by joining the "République du Cameroun" (Francophone Cameroon) or by remaining part of the Nigerian Federation. Through the plebiscite, British Northern Cameroon chose to remain a part of Nigeria while British Southern Cameroon chose to re-unite with French Cameroon. Thus, Southern British Cameroonians re-united with their Francophone brothers. At reunification, the Anglophone Cameroonians constituted a minority—and later marginalised—community in the country, a situation which seems not to have changed up till today (Amnesty International 2022; Nyamnjoh and Rowlands 1998). In effect, upon re-unification, the Francophone-dominated administration of the country has over the years adopted various socio-political policies which have contributed to the marginalisation of Anglophones at almost all key sectors of the nation notably the civil service, the armed forces, ministerial appointments, education and the judiciary among others. Marginalisation has also been evident in the remarkably low level of socio-economic and infrastructural development in Anglophone regions of the country. This perceived marginalisation has given rise to various Anglophone agitations, notably the First and Second All Anglophone Conferences held in 2002 as well as the Southern Cameroons National Council's non-violent campaigns for secession (Human Rights Watch 2021; Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003).

Thus, the Ambazonia war is just an nth manifestation of the longstanding Anglophone problem. The war sparked up on September 7, 2017, after a number

of Anglophone secessionist/separatist movements took up arms to fight the Cameroonian regular army, in view of carving out an independent state called Ambazonia. This armed phase of the conflict followed the violent crushing of two protest marches organised separately by Anglophone Lawyers and Anglophone teachers in Buea, the capital city of Cameroon's South Region. The lawyers' protest aimed at denouncing the adulteration of the Common Law System in Anglophone courts while their teacher counterparts' strike action sought to censure the Francophone domination of the Anglophone educational system in the country. Both protests were violently repressed with the use of forces of law and an order. The violent repression of these protests coupled with the age-old perceived marginalisation of Anglophone communities in the country motivated the emergence of various separatist/secessionist movements. Some of these movements launched violent political activism or took up weapons to advocate the establishment of a break-away state called Ambazonia, comprising the two Anglophone Regions of Cameroon.

Since the outbreak of the crisis, armed separatist groups have tended to multiply in number and to step up their activism in the country. These groups have mainly been active in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. They have constantly carried out violent attacks not only on government institutions and public and military establishments, but also on civilians. These attacks have led to the death of thousands of civilians and security forces. A more recent manifestation of their military activity is the November 4, 2023 Mamfe attack that led to more than 30 dead civilians and tens of seriously injured people.

The secessionist movements have also instituted series of ghost towns, terror mechanisms, guerrilla tactics and "curfews" which have critically affected the economic and security conditions of the masses in Anglophone regions (Amnesty International 2022). In view of responding to secessionist groups' movements, the Cameroonian government has, mainly through its military, embarked on very muscled actions notably curfews, mixed patrol, military checkpoints, and surprised attacks on separatist vigilantes. These retaliatory initiatives have since 2017 yielded only patchy fruits. Although thousands of separatist fighters have been neutralised, captured or killed by the regular army, the two Anglophone regions of Cameroon have remained visibly brutalised and unsafe particularly for both Francophone and Anglophone civilian communities. Whole villages have reportedly been burnt even by the regular army and incidences of regular military's violation of human rights in the affected regions have regularly been outlined by international observers and the local press (Amnesty International 2022; Human Rights Watch 2022). In effect, the army has sometimes cooperated with ill-intentioned vigilantes to perpetrate various violations of human rights in specific localities of the two Anglophone regions (Amnesty International 2022). Thus, the violent confrontation between the regular army and the separatist groups has often put the civilian communities in crossed-fire situations. In other words, people in the Anglophone zones of Cameroon are everyday between the army, armed separatists and militias. Thousands of lives have been lost. And over half a million of civilians have, for safety motives, sought refuge either in

neighbouring Nigeria or in the Francophone regions of the country (Amnesty International 2022; Mudge 2020).

Besides the use of military attacks, the secessionist movements have deployed various communication strategies that have contributed to magnifying their domestic terrorism and facilitated the spread of their separatist propaganda in and outside Cameroon. The bulk of this separatist propaganda has been in the cyberspace, and aided by a wide diversity of online footage. In effect, the separatists have not hesitated to disseminate videos and images of their violent military attacks, terrorist activities and indoctrination through the social media. The dissemination of these violent images has also been aided by ordinary internautes. The urge to neutralise this secessionist online propaganda has motivated government and nationalist movements in the country to similarly deploy image-based communication strategies which have not always been free from controversies. The use of images in the crisis can well be explained with the aid of the two concepts of visual propaganda and aesthetics of violence.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPTS OF VISUAL PROPAGANDA AND AESTHETICS OF VIOLENCE

By definition, propaganda is the use of biased or misleading information for a political cause or for the perpetration of an ideology. It involves the dissemination of rumours, half-truths and fake news among others, in view of influencing public opinion (Koppang 2009; Hobbs and McGee 2015). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011), propaganda has its roots in the history of the Catholic Church, particularly the setting by Pope Gregory XV of the "Congregatio de Propaganda Fide" (Congregation for Propagating the Faith), a movement that was active from 1621 to 1623.The Congregation's mission was to propagate the Catholic doctrine in communities of non-believers. In line with this, propaganda was originally associated with religious indoctrination. It was thus defined as "an organization, scheme, or movement for the propagation of a particular doctrine, practice, etc". However, over the years, propaganda has somewhat shifted from religious to political indoctrination. It has also mainly been used by dominant or counter-hegemonic forces as a tool of control and conformity. For instance (autocratic/dictatorial) governments have often used it to influence their citizens into acting and thinking according to governmental philosophies as well as upholding and supporting the contrived images of these governments (Koppang 2009; Mitchell 2010; Hobbs and McGee 2015). Similarly, more aggressive movements such as separatist and insurgent groups have often deployed it for indoctrination. Fitzmaurice (2018, 64) explains the indoctrinating effects of propaganda. She notes that "propaganda works by "circumvent[ing] individual reasoning and rational choice" and distracts individuals from making personal assessments of biases in the propagandist's reasoning and message

[...] It manipulates acceptance by preying on an individual's emotions such as, fear, anger, grief, guilt and revenge".

Propagandists deploy a variety of potent tools and media to sway hearts and influence public opinion. One of these tools is images. In effect, modern visual media such as film and photography have often systematically been deployed—notably during World War I and during anti-Jews Nazi campaigns in Hitler's Germany—to influence attitudes among the population. Such use of images is called visual propaganda. According to Walsh (2022), this kind of propaganda is particularly prevalent and effective during war periods. The effectiveness of visual propaganda lies in the fact that images are *immediate* influencers in that, they produce immediate emotional responses from the viewers. This is rationalised by the fact that the human brain tends to process images 60,000 times faster than text. Another reason for the effectiveness of visual propaganda resides in the fact that images are uniquely emotive. Seeing the image of a starving African child is likely more effective than reading an article about famine in the Black Continent; this is in line with the maxim that states that a picture is worth a thousand words. International NGOs have often exploited this potential of images in their fundraising campaigns. In the same way, political propagandists have often viewed visuals as a power-laden tool, having a profound effect as a tool for propaganda (Walsh 2022). Violent images of human suffering, warfare and crime etc, in particular even have greater power and effects. As noted by Reinhardt (2019), "repeatedly, pictures that expose the sources and conditions of injury have, in inciting horror at affliction or anger at injustice, helped to change what Elizabeth Spelman called 'the economy of attention to suffering'". These images "burn into memory: it is hard to forget them, even when we want to do so. Nor are these indelible images easy to avoid" (Walsh 2022, 13-14).

The use of visual propaganda in contexts of war—such as the Ambazonia war—is often characterised by the deployment of aesthetic violence or the aestheticisation of violence. According to Margaret Bruder (1998), the aestheticisation of violence in a visual medium—notably a filmic or photographic text—is the depiction of violence in a "stylistically excessive", a "significant and sustained way" that enables audience members to connect references from the "play of images and signs" to artworks, genre conventions, cultural symbols or concepts. This means depicting violence in a way that audience perceives it as a work of art. The concept of aesthetic violence is rooted in theorists' belief that there could be some inherent pleasure in the acts of perpetrating or witnessing violence, particularly when the perpetrator or beholder of this violence is not the victim (of the very violence). Thomas de Quincey (1827) for instance claims murder—like any other thing in this world—can be "treated aesthetically, as the Germans call it — that is, in relation to good taste". Similarly, British philosopher, Edmund Burke (1755) highlights the idea of an inherent pleasure in violence. In his theorisation of the sublime, Burke describes terror and pain as the strongest of all emotions that the human mind is capable of feeling. He further advances that there is an inherent "pleasure" in these emotions. This

conception of inherent pleasure in the act of witnessing violence had earlier on been suggested by Aristotle's concept of catharsis—which is about human fascination with violent content (cited in Pandocchi 2000). In his theory, Aristotle (see Feshbach 1984) contends that man tends to take pleasure in watching the very things that constitute a source of pain to him; for instance, human corpses.

In the same line of argument, Joel Black (1991) argues that under certain conditions, violent acts such as murder could become kinds of artistic oeuvres that are aesthetically pleasing to the human mind. He writes that: "[if] any human act evokes the aesthetic experience of the sublime, certainly it is the act of murder [...] if murder can be experienced aesthetically, the murderer can in turn be regarded as a kind of artist—a performance artist or anti-artist whose specialty is not creation but destruction" (Black 1991, 14).

Much of the theorisations of aesthetic violence mentioned above focus more on fictional media images. However, they may, to some extent, be applied to the online violent images used either for terrorism or propaganda. In effect, violent groups such as terrorist and insurgent organisations have developed methods of treating violent images in aesthetically pleasing ways. Online terrorism scholar, Joshua Molloy (2023) illustrates this truism in a study devoted to a far-right accelerationist network called "Terrogram". The scholar observes that this network promotes white supremacist terrorism through an aestheticisation of the violence images that it uses for online propaganda. Such aestheticisation is mainly done through visual manipulation which among other things aims at "the fetishisation of the terrorist image in propaganda and 'terrorwave' – a visual style in which the aesthetics of the militant are worshipped". Molloy (2023, 4) further explains the terrorist group's aestheticisation of violence thus:

> *Content is often altered with a glitchy VHS-style effect to make it resemble old film footage, or with neon colour grading, emitting a sense of nostalgia. Militants and scenes from decades-old conflicts in Northern Ireland, Chechnya or the Balkans are regularly repurposed for accelerationist propaganda, while images from contemporary conflicts are often edited with VHS degradation to appear older. The focus of these images is on what is perceived to be an attractive 'fashionable' style, rather than the ideological affiliations of militants.*

Slome (2022) similarly theorises violence aesthetic using his concept of "aesthetic of terror". In an article devoted to America's war against terror in the Middle East, the researcher associates his aesthetic of terror with the preponderance of images of violence in today's popular culture and visual arts as well as with the growing urge from audiences to watch and enjoy these images of violence. Using the visual culture that emerged after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, Slome (2022) illustrates how terror sometimes loses its horrific characteristics and becomes associated with beauty and pleasure. He writes: "What emerged in terms of the visibility of the [9/11 terrorist] act was the power of terror as an image-making machine, an

exploitation of spectacle". The author adds that "Thousands died in the attacks, but billions of people endlessly watched the falling towers until those images were etched into the global psyche. Many writers and artists considered 9/11 a work of art with which few could compete" (Slome 2022, 11). In his book titled *Cloning Terror: The War of Images*, Mitchell (2010) offers a similar reading of images related to the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the USA. Thus, violence is often reconfigured not only as a work of art that can be pleasing to audiences, but also as a strategic and subtle weapon for various causes. Image-making becomes a new and significant weapon in a distinctly novel kind of warfare (Slome 2022; Mitchell 2005).

VISUAL PROPAGANDA AND VIOLENCE AESTHETICS IN THE AMBAZONIA WAR

As earlier mentioned, the Ambazonia Conflict could rightly be called a war of violent images that opposes a number of Cameroon-based secessionist movements and some nationalist/government institutions. The conflict has, in effect, led to what French scholar Henry Giroux (2006) calls a "spectacle of terrorism", a kind of aestheticisation of violence. With close respect to Western nations' muscular crusade against terrorism in the Middle East, Giroux explains that this spectacle of terrorism is "a visual culture of shock and awe". Such a culture is made ubiquitous by "the Internet and 24-hour cable news shows devoted to representations of the horrific violence associated with terrorism, ranging from aestheticized images of night time bombing raids on Iraqi cities to the countervailing imagery of grotesque killings of hostages by Iraqi fundamentalists" (2). In the specific case of the Ambazonia crisis, the visual culture of shock and awe is so far manifested by the way both sides to the conflict deployed violent images to frame their adversary, exonerate themselves from war crime accusations or/and woo national/international audiences in favour of their respective cause. In this section, attention is given to these two sides' deployment of violent images.

USE OF WAR FOOTAGE FOR VIOLENT PROPAGANDA

Since the beginning of the crisis, both the secessionist movements and the Cameroonian government have slanted and deployed war footage to spice up their propaganda and push their respective causes. The secessionists for instance have on various occasions used images of indiscriminate killings of civilians and those showing the destruction of houses by Cameroon's regular army in Anglophone regions, to frame the government as a violator of human rights and an apologist of genocide in the Anglophone regions. In late April

2018 for instance, footage[2] showing the burning of a village called Azi in the Anglophone region of Cameroon emerged on the Internet. The footage shows a dozen men in military fatigues, helmets and webbing, setting fire to some village houses and torturing handful of villagers. The fact that the aggressors' uniforms are consistent with those often worn by Cameroon's elite army unit, the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), motivated secessionist movements and even some rights organisations—notably Human Rights Watch (2022) and Amnesty International (2022) —to associate the violent incident with the Cameroonian army. Although it is unclear whether the men on camera are indeed members of the BIR, secessionist groups and separatist activists quickly capitalised on the contents of the footage to negatively frame the Cameroonian army and government.

On December 8, 2021, footage of another military reprisal attack in Mbengwi, a locality situated in the North West Region of Cameroon, made rounds on the Internet. The footage[3] mainly shows remains of about 35 houses and shops alleged to have been torched by the Cameroonian military. The video also shows corpses of teenagers allegedly shot dead by members of the Rapid Intervention Battalion, as well as presumed eyewitnesses to the macabre event. The ambient noise in the video is partly composed of some cries and mornings produced by some onlookers. According to some eyewitnesses' accounts culled by Human Rights Watch (2021) and Amnesty International (2020), a convoy of the Cameroonian army faced an attack from a separatist group called Ambazonia Defense Forces, in that locality at about 2 PM on that day. Actually, a tactical vehicle of the army was destroyed by an Improvised Explosive Device. This incident caused the death of some soldiers. In retaliation, the Cameroonian army allegedly launched an impromptu raid along the road where they were attacked. They cracked down on any civilians suspected to cooperate with separatists. In the course of the raid, soldiers set fire to houses and businesses along the road and inadvertently killed a dozen civilians. In spite of the eyewitnesses' accounts, the Cameroonian army denied the allegations that its members committed atrocities in the locality. Through a press release, the army rather claimed that the ravaging fire that destroyed the structures was the outcome of an explosion that happened after a separatist military warehouse situated in the theatre of the raid exploded.

Most separatist groups disregarded the government forces' version of the story. They brandished the online footage of the Mbengwi attack as clear evidence of a genocide systematically orchestrated by the Francophone-dominated government in the Anglophone regions of the country. A case in point is the self-proclaimed interim president of the Republic of Ambazonia who blamed the Cameroonian military for the deaths of civilians and described the

2 The video of the Azi village attack is available at http://www/bbc.com/news/world-africa-44561929

3 The footage of the Mbengwi attack is available at the following link: https://www.bareta.news/cameroun-military-burnt-civilians-alive-in-mbengwi-road-bamenda/

military action as a massacre. He said: "This is wickedness, this is genocide going on. We are losing hundreds per day" (quoted in *Africanews*, 2021, par. 23-24). In the same line of thought, the commander of the Ambazonia Defense Force (who claimed the separatist attack), denied that atrocities committed were due to his men's "liberation efforts". He claimed that the condemnable killings and burning of businesses in Mbengwi are in no way a dissuasive factor to their separatist struggle. In his words "Ambazonia is our land, our hope, it is our place of respite, [...] You think if you burn our homes, you molest our children, they will give up. Make no mistake. We will turn the armoured cars into dust. We will fight till the end" (quoted in Kindzeka 2021, 11).

By mobilising the imagery of random killings, genocide and massacre, the separatist movements subtly call to mind many Cameroonian and West African myths and stereotypes around African governments and regular armies. They particularly call to mind the image of a despotic and irresponsible government, represented on the battlefield by its heartless, brutal and misguided army. The imagery thus calls to mind the legend of the "zombie" army that will not hesitate to resort to terror and barbarism to ultimately entrench government's authoritarianism, thereby turning its back on the very populace it is supposed to protect. Thus, through their choice of symbolisms, the separatist movements hoped to capitalise on the popular imaginary about the army and the government in Cameroon in particular and West Africa in general. Actually, since the beginning of the conflict in 2016, there has emerged a galaxy of eye witness' accounts and investigative journalists' reports that have sought to provide evidence pointing to such barbarism and carnage committed by Cameroonian forces in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon (Human Rights Watch 2022, 2021; Africanews 2021; Amnesty International 2020, Harkness 2020). They have even emerged evidence of similar questionable acts committed by the military in its fight against terrorism in the northern region of the country. On April 22, 2020, for instance, the Cameroon government released a report (cited by Mudge 2021) in which it recognised human rights violations committed by its army in a massacre that took place the preceding year in a community called Ngarbub. All the issues mentioned above have over the years pleaded in favour of the separatist movements' claim that government forces are using unorthodox warfare techniques in their anti-separatism moves in the NOSO regions.

Visual propaganda has been deployed not only by the separatist groups but also by the anti-secessionist movements in the country. In effect, the Cameroonian government and its allies have similarly capitalized on a number of online images showing atrocities committed by separatist groups, to attempt to sway the hearts of both domestic and foreign observers in favor of their anti-separatist military crusades in Anglophone regions. A case in point is a video that emerged on the Internet on August 11, 2020, showing three separatist fighters torturing a 35-year-old woman to death. In the shocking video, the three separatist assassins drag their victim (a certain Comfort Tumassang) over the ground. The latter has her hands tied behind her back. She begs incessantly for mercy before being beheaded by her aggressors. "Fine play", a Pidgin English

expression for "well done" can be heard from one of her assassins as her throat is brutally cut with a machete. The woman was allegedly killed because of her suspected collaboration with the Cameroonian army against separatist groups in Muyuka, South West Region of Cameroon.

In a few days, the troubling video went viral on the Internet and was even used by many Cameroonian television stations to spice up their programs devoted to the Ambazonia war. Elite broadcasters such as *Afrique Media*, *CRTV* (state owned television), *Vision 4* and *Equinox TV* among others repeatedly used the images in several of their news programs. Most media houses tended to use the images to negatively represent the secessionist movements. Besides being a golden opportunity for anti-separatist propagandists, the horrific images exposed the terrorist penchant of the separatist groups. In effect, the very brutal nature of the act shown in the video revealed that the armed separatists—and by extension their political allies—sought to instill terror in the hearts of civilians who might want to collaborate with the Cameroonian army to the detriment of separatist fighters. It should be noted that the use or online circulation of horrific videos showing the torturing and brutal killing of civilians and security forces have been one of the strategic weapons deployed by separatist fighters since the beginning of the struggle. These separatist fighters have been using such images to threaten civilians with death and instill terror among communities of people who may potentially collaborate with government forces or violate separatist movements' injunctions in Anglophone regions. Thus, the "spectacle of terrorism" has often strategically been deployed by separatist movements in their violent campaigns.

A counter-terror approach has been used by government forces to mitigate the image-based threat of the separatist movements. This approach has consisted of circulating or encouraging the proliferation of footage showing government forces' major victories at the war front. These have included videos showing the storming of key separatist fighters' bases, the liberation of hostages and the arrest and/or killing of notorious separatist "warlords". On July 12, 2022, for instance, the government forces exposed the corpse of a notorious separatist warlord nicknamed "Field Marshall" (real name Olivier Lekeaka) in the streets of Kumba, South West Region. This exhibition enabled the massive filming of various videos that were virally circulated on social media. The videos showed the harmless and de-personalized body of a hitherto fearless and dreaded separatist warlord[4] whom the government forces had tracked for years. Thus,

4 "Field Marshall" was at the head of the Red Dragons of Lebialem, a separatist group. He was a dreaded warlord who many times had been declared or thought to be dead. On December 31, 2018, government forces claimed they had killed him in an ambush. Unfortunately for them, the Ambazonia interim government denied his death. Few weeks later, videos of the warlord surfaced on the Internet proving that news of Field Marshall's death were indeed fake. His killing in July 2022 by the government forces signified a major blow dealt on the separatist war mechanism. His killing also signified hope that government forces could deliver on their anti-separatist military campaign.

the footage aimed at two things. Firstly, it sought to neutralize the terror insidiously instilled by Ambazonia warlords in many North-West and South-West communities; secondly, it aimed to depict government forces as unbridled and victorious forces on which the masses could count for their security. This could aid Cameroon government's propaganda around its army's capacity to protect the population against separatists.

According to the popular imaginary in Cameroon, many notorious Ambazonia warlords use black magic popularly called "juju", for fortification and offensive purposes (Arrey-Mbi 2020). Allegedly, such use of sorcery mystically magnifies their fire force and helps them neutralize regular army's attack against their positions. This popular fantasy thus represents Ambazonia warlords as quasi invincible entities or at least, very hard targets for any opposing force. By encouraging the circulation – nay explosion – of videos showing the fall of notorious Ambazonia warlords, the Cameroonian army and government hope to shatter the myth of these warlords' invincibility. Thus, the government suggests that the fall of Field Marshall becomes indexical to the vulnerability of the insurgent and the eminent and progressive fall of separatism in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

DOCTORING OR APPROPRIATING NON-WAR IMAGES FOR VIOLENT VISUAL PROPAGANDA

The visual propaganda deployed by both the separatist groups and the government has sometimes involved the appropriation or doctoring of non-war images. Separatist movements, for instance, have in various cases used techniques such as photoshopping and montage to turn innocent images into misleading visual weapons and aggressive propaganda. A case in point is the online circulation in May 2019 of a series of images showing a Cameroonian policeman, presumably lynched by an angry mob in Bamenda. Widely circulated by separatist movements, the images suggested that the police officer (in the images) had shot a youth in Bamenda and was in reprisal killed by an angry mob. Although the images made rounds on the Internet, it shortly turned out that they were drawn from the video of a policeman who consulted a local prophet of God for spiritual deliverance. Thus, separatist movements doctored video images of a non-war event for their violent visual propaganda.

It goes without saying that by deploying the imagery of an angry mob in conflict with security forces, the separatist activists sought to capitalise on the negative reputation of the country's police. Indeed, according to social representations in Cameroon, the police force is unprofessional, corrupt and more bent on supporting an authoritarian regime. This notion of the police has often been observed—and even confirmed to some extent—in situations where the police had been called to handle uprisings or anti-government activism in the country.

Their interventions in these situations have most often been characterised by brutality, gross violation of human rights and the "inadvertent" killing of innocent people. In 2008 for instance the police used such brutality to crush street protests in some of the country's big towns such as Douala and Yaounde where a social movement nicknamed "Strike of Hunger" took place. Similarly, the police violently intervened to quash university student protests in Buea in 2004 and 2006. These unfortunate precedents could only plead in favour of the separatists' anti-police representations.

Another example of misleading separatist image-based propaganda is a short video that was released on December 8, 2016, by secessionist movements to tarnish the image of the Cameroonian President, Paul Biya. The video shows a man dressed in black behind a white mask urging President Biya and his cabinet to quickly address the Anglophone problem. The masked man warns that their organisation will release sex videos relating to the President and attack some public services if Cameroon's government does not oblige. The government overlooked the warning but no attack or release of sex tape was effected by the blackmailers. Thus, Ambazonia separatist movements deployed non-war videos for character assassination campaigns against the Cameroonian government. Their action could be related to some relatively new and popular forms of visual culture in Cameroon one of which is the sharing of sex tapes on the Internet for political reasons. On many occasions, the emergence of Cameroonian celebrities' and politicians' sex tapes on the Internet has triggered controversies and sometimes political confrontations between public figures in the country (Tametong and Meka 2022, The Guardian 2021, Roxburgh 2019). By alluding to some fake sex tapes of the President, separatist activists hope to engender similar scenarios of political controversy or anti-government agitations in the country. By their act, the separatist movements also perpetrated a form of image-based violence ("cyber-obscenity") that is relatively new, but popular in the country's political scene.

Similar misleading attempts have been made by anti-separatist movements and the Cameroon government. In June 2020 for instance, various government officials used some cannibalism images widely circulated on Facebook as weapons of character assassination against armed separatist movements in the Anglophone regions of the country. The images in question were the contents of a video link posted online on June 20, 2018. The video showed a man cooking human body parts in a pot placed over a wood fire. In reality, the video was the work of Nigerian make-up artist, Hakeem Onilogbo. However, it went viral on social media; and soon elicited all manner of interpretations from Cameroonians. Some internautes claimed the man in the video is a cannibal Ambazonian fighter and that the images were taken in Anglophone Cameroon. Without verification, Cameroon Minister of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation, Atanga Nji, relayed this rumour in a number of televised programs, thereby framing the armed separatist groups and militias as cannibals. In a June 25, 2018, CRTV program titled "Inside Presidency", the minister said the armed separatists were worse than terrorist groups (notably

Boko Haram) and that they deserved to be brutally crushed by the regular army. In his words: "Boko Haram committed atrocities, but they did not cut up humans and cook them in pots" (quoted in McAllister 2018). By deploying the imagery of cannibalism, Atanga Nji and his followers subtly appealed to Cameroonian people's aversion to cannibalism as well as to their disposition to hastily otherize cannibal people. Social representations in Cameroon tend to associate cannibalism not only with barbarism and primitivism but also with voodoo and black magic. In effect, according to the popular fantasy, a cannibal is not too different from a sorcerer who mystically "eats" the body and soul of their victims. The same as the sorcerer, the cannibal eats human flesh.

Although the cannibalism notion evoked by Atanga Nji was later debunked by local websites and foreign observers, the minister's propaganda brought to the fore the question of the atrocities committed by separatist movements in the Anglophone regions of Cameroon. Additionally, this propaganda somewhat sought to sway the hearts of masses in favour of government military campaigns against the separatist groups.

FOREIGN OBSERVERS' IMAGE-BASED MEDIATION IN THE CRISIS

A good number of foreign observers have sought to mediate in the war of images that oppose the separatist and nationalist movements in Cameroon. In fact, any time controversial footage of the Ambazonia war makes rounds on the Internet, websites and organisations such as the BBC, Human Rights Watch, Al Jazeera, Transparency International and Television France International among others arise to debunk or confirm the veracity of the footage; by so doing, these organisations contribute to the political and media discourse around the secessionist crisis in Cameroon. At various points, the BBC has, for instance, provided satellite images to verify the veracity of various online footage showing village burnings and other atrocities committed by the warring parties in Anglophone Cameroon. Incidents such as the April 2018 attack in Azi village and the December 2021 Mbengui massacre where civilians were randomly killed or injured have triggered various satellite-images from the BBC, aiming at establishing the responsibility of government forces in the attacks. BBC's satellite images show the theatres of the different attacks before and after the attacks. They also show the magnitude of infrastructural destruction to provide hint on the severity of the military attacks. On some of its websites, Amnesty International shows similar satellite images of attacks on a handful of villages in some South West villages[5].

5 Amnesty International shows Satellite images of presumed military attacks on Anglophone Cameroon's villages in a website accessible through the following link: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2021/07/cameroon-satellite-images-reveal-devastation-in-anglophone-regions/

For many observers, the satellite images published by BBC and Amnesty International are influential and impeccable. In fact, most Cameroonian audiences have for decades cultivated the habit of trusting international news agencies more than local—particularly pro-government—media organisations (Tanjong 2006). This reduced trust in the news published by local media houses is partly due to such issues as yellow journalism that is common in the Cameroon media ecology and the perceived government's influence on, or control of news in the country. However, it must be highlighted that the satellite images provided by the BBC and other news agencies for verification remained weak—if not inappropriate—in determining the veracity of some online footage. For instance, the satellite images prove that the attacks mentioned above actually took place in those localities. But they don't provide indisputable evidence on the identities of the authors of the attacks. Given that any side to the war may disguise as their opponent just to beat observers' vigilance, evidence other than the satellite images are needed to determine the identities of the authors of the atrocities. Government spokespersons have most often hinged on this weakness of the satellite images to deny claims of government forces' implication in the violent attacks (Atonfack 2021).

Like the BBC, international right organisation Human Rights Watch has circulated a good number of online videos, visibly aimed, at sensitising the international community about the atrocities presumably committed by both government forces and separatist movements in Anglophone Cameroon. One of such videos[6] is a report produced by senior researcher Ilaria Allegrozzi (see Human Rights Watch 2022). In the video, only images of atrocities presumably committed by government forces are shown. Although the notion of human rights violations by separatists is mentioned in passing in the voice-over of the report, no image of such violations is shown for illustrative purpose. Thus, Human Rights International—like a handful of other international observers—has entrenched the culture of representing the government forces as the only authors of human right violations in the war. Meanwhile, all the belligerents in the conflict have allegedly committed untold atrocities in Anglophone Cameroon. This tendency by international right organisations and foreign news agencies to brand Cameroon armed forces as the principal or sole violators of human rights in the war is likely to be interpreted by pan-African audiences/observers as evidence of an anti-Cameroon image campaign.

CONCLUSION

In the look of things, one has the impression that both the separatist movement and government capitalised on Aristotle's notion of catharsis, that is human fascination with violent contents. The videos both sides deployed have not

6 This video can be accessed through the following link: https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/28/cameroon-new-attacks-civilians-troops-separatists

been exceptional in terms of image and sound fidelity. Yet they have most often been viral and fuelling huge buzz in and outside Cameroon. Both the separatist movements and the government have tended to believe that the battle to win the hearts of the domestic and international audiences is fought with the aid of violent images. Thus, the Ambazonia conflict has since its beginning been a war of violent images. This war has, at some points, involved what theorists call the "spectacle of terrorism". Both sides to the conflict have sought to use violent images in their online visual propaganda to frame or counter-frame their opponent. The separatist fighters have sometimes used images of their atrocities to terrorise civilians in Anglophone regions and force the latter to scrupulously bow to separatist antigovernment policies. Government forces have on their own part deployed images of their gruesome killing of Ambazonia warlords, to suggest their capacity to neutralise separatist movements and protect the civilian population in the brutalised Anglophone regions of the country. Both sides have also excelled in the manipulation of non-war images to frame their opponents as violators of human rights or barbarous entities. One thus observes that the belligerents capitalised on the Cameroonian masses' strange and paradoxical disposition to watch shocking images related to the Ambazonia war.

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Video Activism and Activist Archiving: Collective Testimonies, Resilient Images and the Case of bak.ma

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Video activism is an essential tool of communication for global uprisings. Particularly in countries where media is tightly controlled by officials, video activist content allows for the visibility of marginalized struggles, instantly disseminating their demands, actions, and encounters with state violence. Moreover, the visibility of such realities contributes to shaping communal emotions and strengthening collective resistance. However, in the over-saturated web environment, these images lose their contextual significance amidst the constant sharing which demands our attention. Consequently, the need to organize these images and provide them with an identity within the framework of social struggles, acts of resistance, and the pursuit of justice they represent becomes increasingly crucial. In this context, digital and autonomous archiving initiatives do not make sense of the surplus of internet images but also act as a counter-practice that challenges the states' official archiving practices and its claim of monopoly over history. The digital archiving practices of activist groups wrest control away from established institutions, enabling the dissemination of alternative histories through images. As a result, these archives preserve the experiences of social groups ignored by official ideology and foster the proliferation of grassroots practices. Furthermore, the video activist archive emerges as an alternative infrastructure that supports the growth of community networks, activism, and protest cultures. This essay will centre on a study of bak.ma — the digital media archive of social movements that was created in Turkey following the massive urban protests in 2013 known as the Gezi Park protests. It seeks to examine how this archive constructs a national memory beyond state-approved knowledge and practices, achieved through decentralized and collective data collection that restores control of protest movements to the people. Additionally, this essay will also shed light on the challenges inherent in autonomous initiatives, encompassing issues like censorship, funding, labor and sustainability.

Keywords
Turkey
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INTRODUCTION

People's Democratic Party Istanbul MP Sırrı Süreyya Önder threw himself in front of bulldozers to save the uprooting of trees in Istanbul's Gezi Park on May 28, 2013[1]. Önder, who happens to also be a film director, is a significant voice of both political and artistic opposition in Turkey. The video served as a

1 To view video in question, please visit: https://bak.ma/EZG/info

catalyst for the widespread mobilization of protestors, resonating deeply with citizens who connected with the defiant act of reclaiming public space from the authorities. This widespread circulation of the video on digital platforms highlighted a critical aspect of media dynamics in Turkey—a realm predominantly controlled by the government, selectively disseminating narratives that uphold existing power structures. In this environment, social media emerged as a vital alternative for citizens seeking accurate information about the events unfolding in the city's metropolis, as traditional news outlets failed to convey the reality of the situation (Haciyakupoglu and Zhang 2015; Tunç 2015).

While initially an environmental protest aimed at preserving the trees in Taksim's Gezi Park against urban renewal plans, the protests evolved into a nationwide political demonstration directed against growing authoritarianism in the country (Yörük and Yüksel 2014). The protests also reignited discussions related to Turkey's public memory (Özyürek 2007) and visual culture of social movements. Similar to other examples of global uprisings since the beginning of the 2010s, citizen journalism proliferated and became a vital tool for their coverage and documentation. Witnesses and participants in the protests shared their first-hand experiences through images.

Throughout the park occupation, numerous live broadcast stations were set up on-site. Platforms such as Çapul TV, Naber Medya, Videoccupy Collective and Ankara Eylem Vakti played host to politicians, NGO representatives, artists, and members of Occupy movements worldwide. Their goal was not only to explore ways to progress and sustain the spirit of the occupation but also to engage audiences and make them feel intimately connected to the ongoing events. Importantly, all broadcasts were streamed on the internet, eliminating the necessity for self-censorship. Moreover, filmmakers, journalists, and activist members of Videoccupy, who had previously harnessed the power of video and film for political purposes issued a call during the protests, urging everyone in the park to share their images in a collective pool, marking the beginning of bak.ma—the digital media archive established in the post-Gezi era with the aim of preserving the visual memory of the Gezi Park Protests. The priority at the time was rescuing the recordings and thus preserving the visuality of the protests.

Historically, in Turkey video activism has played a multifaceted role: it has acted as a platform for alternative media, empowered specific communities, and served as a vital documentation tool in response to mass media censorship. Askanius (2014) identifies these as the three key categories defining the purpose of video activism. Since the 1990s, video activist collectives have documented and disseminated recordings of the solidarity actions of minorities, left-wing, libertarian, and anarchist groups and their various resistances—strikes, occupations, demonstrations, protests, and commemorations. Yet, video activism is also linked to remembering, where the images are not only produced for the instant dissemination of information but also as part of a visual memory and telling (hi)stories of social causes (Berensel 2012, 7).

These fundamental aspects of video activism in Turkey also shaped the structure of bak.ma, a digital media archive of social movements. Many political

communities intersect with each other in this archiving work through video activist heritage that provided the ground in which bak.ma was seeded in 2013. In this context, video activism serves as a form of resistant recordkeeping practice, bearing witness to how the *archival turn in activism* (Pell 2020) has resonated in Turkey over the last two decades.

This archival effort, as an extension of the ongoing video activist initiatives and a communication strategy for them, addressed a significant gap in Turkey's historical preservation and archival landscape—the notable absence of a comprehensive record of protest narratives. By integrating videos into the practice of history writing as original documents, bak.ma challenges the concept of authority of who is authorized to keep the records of history for future generations. A new historicization is thus enabled by countering the hegemonic narrative produced by mainstream media, becoming in and of itself a political act that facilitates the re-creation of social visual memory (Çelikaslan & Şen, 2017, 164).

In this essay, we begin by establishing a framework for understanding activist archiving. Through the lens of bak.ma, a case study, we delve into how such archives cultivate a social memory that transcends state-approved knowledge and practices. This is achieved through decentralized and collective data collection, empowering protest movements with regained control. Additionally, we explore the challenges inherent in activist initiatives, including censorship, accessibility, knowledge reproduction, activist labour, and sustainability. Our case study draws from the personal experiences of both authors: one as the co-founder of bak.ma and the other as an active member. Leveraging our engagement as scholars and activists in the field, we have collected empirical data to identify systemic issues within activist digital archiving. This methodological framework allows us to gain insights into the challenges faced and facilitates the sharing of experiences as a political act, initiating dialogue and fostering conversations about strategies for addressing these challenges. By employing our personal experiences and observations within an autoethnographic methodological approach, we create space for "a politics committed to creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change" (Jones 2005, 763).

APPROACHES TO ACTIVIST ARCHIVING

Among scholars and archivists alike, there has been an increasing interest in addressing absent and neglected social and political content in national archives, forms of exclusion from official memory, and the marginalization of certain minorities through archival practice. They have endeavoured to bring visibility to the archives of neglected communities (Cifor 2017; Sheffield 2019; Caswell 2021) whose right to archive they have highlighted (Prelinger 2021; Azoulay 2017). A body of research acknowledging that the archiving practices of neglected communities enhance theoretical knowledge has developed. Critical

archival studies have similarly promoted the notion of activist archiving and offered new perspectives to describe and transform the misrepresentation of marginalized communities within their own archives over the last decade (Flinn 2011; Cook 2012; McKemmish and Gilliland 2015; Caswell 2021; Cifor 2017; Rigney 2018).

Theorized by archive-related studies and research in the English-speaking West, community archives emerged through an interplay with activist politics that continues to challenge traditional institutional forms. These practices intend to empower communities, who take control over their own representations and historiographies. While these contributions are undeniably inspiring and necessary, they reveal a gap in the discourse. There is a notable absence of an archival approach that centres on the online, collaborative, activist archiving of audio-visual heritage from non-Western conflict-affected areas.

Building on the considerable history and experience of participatory community archiving in many European countries and North America, a new archival wave in conflict-affected areas outside the West has also been on the rise. The emergent archival wave has certain aims to sustain societal needs that include but are not limited to the preservation and circulation of archival material, provision of a social space, advocacy for human rights, and offering critical evidence of value to the quest for truth-seeking. For instance, archival initiatives in South Africa, South America, and the Middle East embrace vulnerable but influential content for such demands. Within their bounds of possibility, these initiatives utilize audio-visual tools and digital technology in their archival and other practices.

Archives in Turkey—both national and independent—are the target of state violence from time to time. The Turkish state has developed problematic relations even with its national archives, particularly with respect of its founding mass abuse, the Armenian Genocide of 1915. Sociologist Meltem Ahıska (2006) discusses the failures of archiving, censorship, and falsification in the national archives regarding certain politically charged subjects that have an important impact on historical truth.

Ahıska highlights archives "are not only the concerns of historians who are interested in recovering the past but also of political rulers who aim to frame the past for present purposes" (2006, 1). Consequently, these information systems privilege certain narratives while marginalizing others, their borders defined by state ideology. This reality had previously been highlighted by Michel Foucault (1969), who contends that archives mirror power structures of specific political, social, and historical contexts. Ahıska's examination of Turkey's missing archives reveals instances of censorship and archive falsification regarding politically charged subjects, significantly impacting historical truth. Thus, is only the state-approved knowledge that prevails, turning the writing of history oppressive and exclusionary, while the past is reshaped and read to preserve power relations to the present. As a result, social memory is also erased, with organized efforts to foster forgetfulness put into place by all the ideological apparatus of the state. Quoting historian Yosef H. Yerushalmi, Ahıska reminds us that "the opposite of forgetting is not just remembering, but justice" (2006,

28). Accordingly, we approach recordkeeping practices in conflict-affected areas as evocative initiatives that attempt to seek justice.

Activist archival initiatives offer a response to the state's monopolization of public memory and the political ramifications associated with such mnemonic power. Positioned as resistant infrastructures, they extend beyond institutional archiving models. Institutional archives, formal manifestations of archival possibilities, do not exhaust the full potential of what archives can be (Pad.ma 2010). Michelle Caswell (2021), advocating for the "joy of disruption", argues that archives, through interruption, can disrupt cycles of oppression. This realization prompts calls for a more activist role for archivists, challenging the presumed neutrality of archiving—a point emphasized by Robert Kaplan and Howard Zinn (1977). In this context, archives, while capable of serving as tools of hegemony, also hold the potential to become tools of resistance (Schwarz and Cook 2002, 13).

We contend that through activist archives, a distinct politics of the archive emerges—one critical in advancing social justice projects. While archives remain pivotal sites of knowledge and power, activist archives subvert their role as tools of domination and control. Moreover, such interventions wrest away control of the ideological hijacking of memory by the state, enabling groups to create a sense of their past, present, and future. The desire to reshape the politics of the archive has prompted a call for more collaborative and participatory forms of archiving, fuelled by the immense material arising from 21st century social movement protests. These approaches find support in the idea of the *commons*, emphasizing that access to knowledge should be equal for everyone.

Building on this transformative potential, archiving has become a conspicuous activist practice for less institutionalized and horizontally organized movements. These autonomous, activist archives disrupt dominant discourses, asserting the authority and rights to represent themselves. Susan Pell (2015) argues that these archives offer spaces of empowerment, self-determination, and collectivized knowledge production. They are crucial sites for understanding the evolving politics of the archive and contemplating the broader relationship between archives and politics. These archives share characteristics of functioning independently from institutional archives, being autonomously created, controlled, and maintained. They serve as primary material resources for marginalized groups to write their alternative and counter-histories, providing spaces for engagement in broader discourses. The archive provides images an identity, positioning them within a larger narrative of events unfolding, contextualizing the images in time and place.

BAK.MA: DON'T LOOK!

bak.ma provides a good example of how activist archiving becomes a form of resistance against historical erasure and manipulation, as a basic right to one's own history. Through its archival footage, bak.ma invites us to discuss

power structures, the disruption of social inequalities, and labour conditions, both in Turkey and transnationally. Mobilized activist archival footage enables us to correlate important political events in history and comprehend today's authoritarian politics in a broader context. Thus, bak.ma addresses the need for collaborative archiving practices in conflict-affected areas as part of the struggle for human rights, justice, freedom of speech, and the right to access knowledge. Equally, the activities and collections of bak.ma bring into question the role of archiving in political activism and open up various ways of considering the socio-political and also material dimensions of collaborative archiving as a media practice.

The story of the emergence of the bak.ma digital media archive can be told through the different collectives that constituted it over the last decade. The idea of bak.ma was born out of struggle, emerging during the Gezi Park Protests, and it remains attached to the moment. Its history also reflects the transformation of Turkey's political and social conditions since 2013. During the Gezi Park Protests, the video activist collective *Videoccupy* was formed. Initially, there were twelve members, but many others—friends and colleagues, as well as video activists, filmmakers, artists, and designers—joined them to record the mass protests, police response, and daily life of occupation that sprang up in Gezi Park. This continued from the first days of the protest, up until the evening of June 15, when the police attacked the park, burning tents, and brutally removing protestors. Videoccupy aimed to reveal the peaceful intent of the protest movement, which had been misrepresented in the mainstream media.

Many protestors also recorded the uprising on their phones and handycams, and soon Videoccupy realized the need to collect these recordings to preserve the historical significance and the visual memory of the protests. Like the live broadcasts from Gezi, which disappeared after they were transmitted, there was a realization that the videos taken by protesters would soon be lost [Fig. 1].

After the end of the protests, *vidyokolektif*, a feminist video activist collective,

Fig. 1
Still from "Videoccupy" (bak.ma 2014).
(Videoccupy is creating visual memory of the resistance).

was formed by the seven female members of Videoccupy. This group recorded further protests, edited videos, and worked on organizing the footage for an open-access archive. In June 2014, a publicly accessible portal was created called bak.ma. Employing a verbal sleight that uses a domain name (.ma) to give the negative instruction "Bakma" (Don't look) to express the paradoxical, reclaiming nature of its endeavour, bak.ma enables a closer look at the memory of the social resistance. The name came out of discussions about how activist video practice could disrupt the state and mainstream media's authoritative gaze. Through the footage collected in the archive, video activists served as witnesses to incidents of police violence and human rights violations, effectively transforming video into the public's watchful eye.

The initial upload of material to bak.ma was approximately 4TB of data, equivalent to over 800 hours of video footage. Mass uploading required several computers running Linux, and after significant effort, the content was uploaded and processed over the course of one year. This footage required additional archival work, including categorizing the collection, creating metadata, and entering annotations.

A group called *Artıkişler*, with support from some members of Videoccupy and vidyokolektif, undertook this archival work. Their open and participatory approach to archiving as well as the autonomous, and collective structure of bak.ma drew much attention. Since then, many people and groups have contributed to the archive's development, bringing in their own collections and video footage. Notably, a guerrilla TV network, Sendika TV (Syndicate TV), provided bak.ma with tapes, video CDs, and DVDs that had been rescued from police raids in the basement of their office in Ankara. Most of the footage documented the Tekel Workers struggle of 2009-2010 and other political events, including the May Day celebrations between 1977 and 2015 [Fig. 2][2].

2 Tekel was a Turkish tobacco and alcoholic beverage company. In December 2009, the Turkish government declared the closure of 12 Tekel factories, in line with their ongoing privatization policies that were ongoing since 2002. Approximately 10,000 workers faced redeployment into other public sector positions under temporary contracts, pay cuts and diminished employment rights. This announcement triggered industrial action by the workers against the implementation of insecure employment conditions within the public sector. The workers argued that the changes in their employment would significantly reduce their monthly wages and eliminate severance pay and, to show their discontent against the government's privatization and employment policies, around 12,000 workers established resistance tents in Ankara's Abdi İpekçi Park. The resistance lasted 78 days and was documented by video activists, journalists and filmmakers. The video recordings of the resistance were brought together on bak.ma under the category of Tekel. For the May Day celebrations in 1977, an estimated half a million people gathered in Taksim Square. During speeches, gunshots were fired, causing chaos and turmoil. At the same time, armoured police vehicles entered the area, crushing and killing many. As the crowd attempted to leave the square down the long, steep Kazanci street, a truck positioned at the top blocked their path, leading to a stampede and many lost their lives due to the crushing. 41 people lost their lives, while 136 were seriously hurt. This day has come to be known as Bloody May Day. None of the perpetrators were caught and brought to justice. May Day celebrations have been banned in Taksim Square except for the year 1978 and the three-year period from 2010

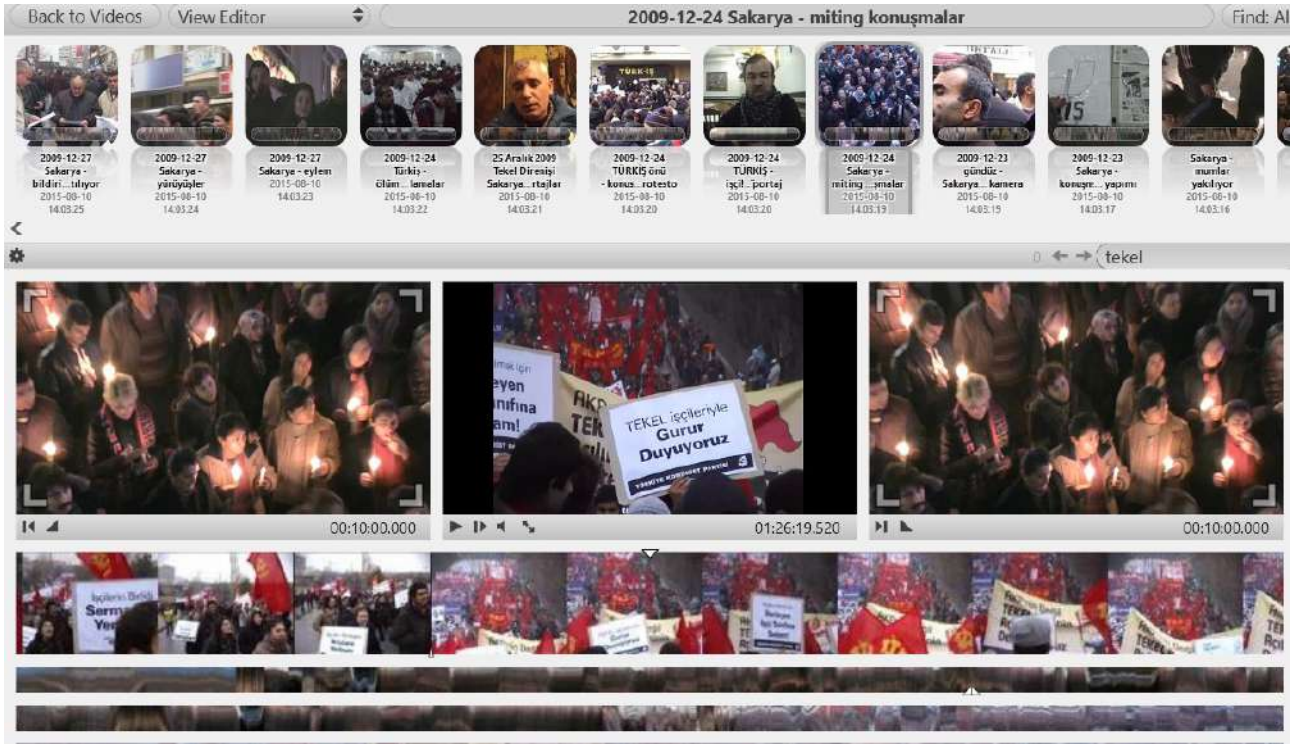


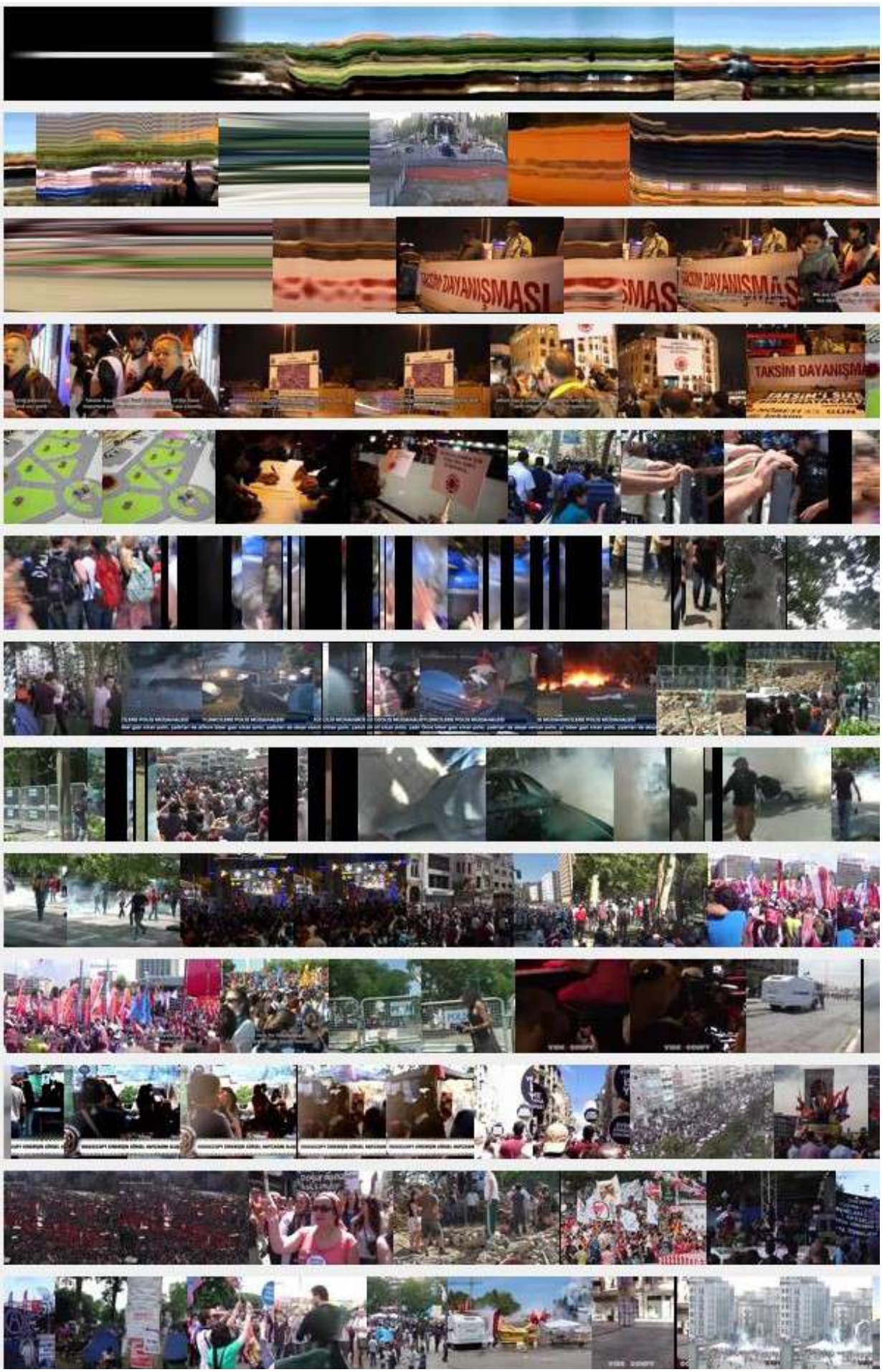
Fig. 2
Still from the video collection "Tekel" (bak.ma 2015).

At the base of bak.ma is a decentralized digital structure that enables a collaborative and autonomous archiving process. It employs the software program *Pan.do/ra*, a free, open-source media archive platform that allows to manage large, decentralized collections of videos, to collaboratively create metadata and time-based annotations. This makes it possible to sort the videos by date, group them in categories, tag them based on events, attribute keywords based on the details of the event, and establish the time of day and location of the event. This approach aligns with the platform's commitment to fostering a collaborative engagement and open environment. In that sense, bak.ma embodies what has been called a "living archive" (Hogan 2012) because it invites audiences to be active participants and collaborators in the archive, relinquishing control of collection and expanding user autonomy. As such this kind of engagement with data, prevents "any one agent from imposing narrative and ideological closure upon the data" (Haskins, 2007, 406).

Users of bak.ma are automatically granted the permission to download and upload static files and moving images; they can create public, private, or group collections and lists; and they can edit the data and metadata, add new titles, maps, documents, annotations, and tags, and link all the information. Once uploaded, each file has its own URL; moreover, each frame can receive its own URL through time-based annotations. Each video file and each frame can be edited, not only by inserting text, subtitles, or keywords but also by selecting various forms of visual timelines [Fig. 3].

Fig. 3 [next page]
Timeline view from the video collection "Gezi" (bak.ma 2014).

to 2012. Every year, activists try to enter the Square but are faced with harsh police brutality and detention.


TAKSİM DAYANIŞMASI
TAKSİM DAYANIŞMASI
TAKSİM DAYANIŞMA

The videos on bak.ma have mostly been categorized, sorted, and described collaboratively by titles, keywords, tags, short or long texts, and/or annotations. Cataloguing and annotating the digital objects are essential parts of the work and also a creative and transformative part of activist archiving in which the relational process in the archive develops. Because the archivist assigns the value of the material in this way, Brunow suggests understanding cataloguing—in the context of analogue film archives—"not as a neutral, descriptive activity, but as a performative act of power." (2018, 180). Thus, the collaborative nature of this process is an important aspect of activist archives, cultural memory and its polyvocality can be influenced by creating multiple narratives and images in the process of annotations. Likewise, on bak.ma, titles, tags, keywords, and descriptions are informative and have a strong effect on the perception of the content. The lists of these items create new political compositions by *folksonomy* which is described as "a type of distributed classification system" by Marieke Guy and Emma Tonkin (2006). A group of individuals, mainly users, create this system by tagging online items, images, videos, bookmarks, and text [Fig. 4].

The digital objects then have descriptions, information, keywords, and tags attached. This distinctive structural approach reflects bak.ma's commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, and preserving the authenticity and context of the materials within its digital repository. Archival content takes precedence in this practice, which, for bak.ma, primarily refers to the video collections.

The bak.ma video collections consist of audio-visual media of different formats and lengths but mostly digital raw footage of activist recordings, feature documentaries, and short films. As an ever-expanding archive, bak.ma has more than 50 categories that refer to key subject areas. The content of the online archive includes and involves visual and textual data of social movements such as the Gezi Park Protests, TEKEL workers' resistance, May Day marches and various other protests from 1977 until today, including specific demonstrations, events, meetings, talks by feminist and queer groups, urban rights activists, and ecological initiatives. The archive also includes testimonies, evidence and recordings of the curfews, blockades, and destruction in Kurdish towns by the Turkish state from different periods between the 1990s until today.

The sizes of these collections change over time. bak.ma is also an archive in progress; classification and annotation of the collections are ongoing operations.

Fig. 4
Main page, excerpt from screenshot of the menu (bak.ma 2014).

Date 647	#	Categories 92	#	Tags 497	#	Keywords 836	#	Groups and Collectives	#
2004	108	Gezi	826	arşiv	12	Hierarchy	21	Tekel İşçileri / Tekel...	80
2013-06-11	68	Göç Migration	27	eylem	11	InterflugsStructure	21	Videoccupy	63
2013-06-13	67	Göçmen Hakları	8	interviews	11	learning	21	Anonymous	60
2013-06-12	64	Görsel Düşünme	1	tahribat	11	Question	20	DİSK	55
2013	63	Gründung	3	işçi	10	Accessibility	19	Seyri Sokak	52
2013-06-04	63	Hamburg G20	4	mayın	10	EmploymentSelecti...	19	Surplus of Melbou...	26
2013-06-02	61	Hayata Dönüş Ope...	2	panel	10	GoodMoment	19	İHD	24
2013-06-15	46	Hayvan Hakları	2	seçim	10	PoliticalAgenda	19	Başak Kültür ve Sa...	21
2018	46	HDP	9	Sur	10	Videozeitung Intro	19	vidyokolektif	20
2013-05-31	35	Hewsel	3	bostan	9	archive	18	Taksim Dayanışması	18
2013-06-07	35	Interflugs	17	cizre	9	Autonomy	18	HDP	16
2013-06-08	33	Interflugs Archive	60	çatışma	9	Feminism	18	bak.ma	13
2014	30	İstanbul'un Artığı	2	çöp toplayıcıları	9	Institutionalisation	18	KozaVisual	13
2010	27	kadın hareketi	21	feminist	9	Kurzfilm	18	Kaos GL	12
2013-06-09	27			futbol	9			Dev-Lis	11

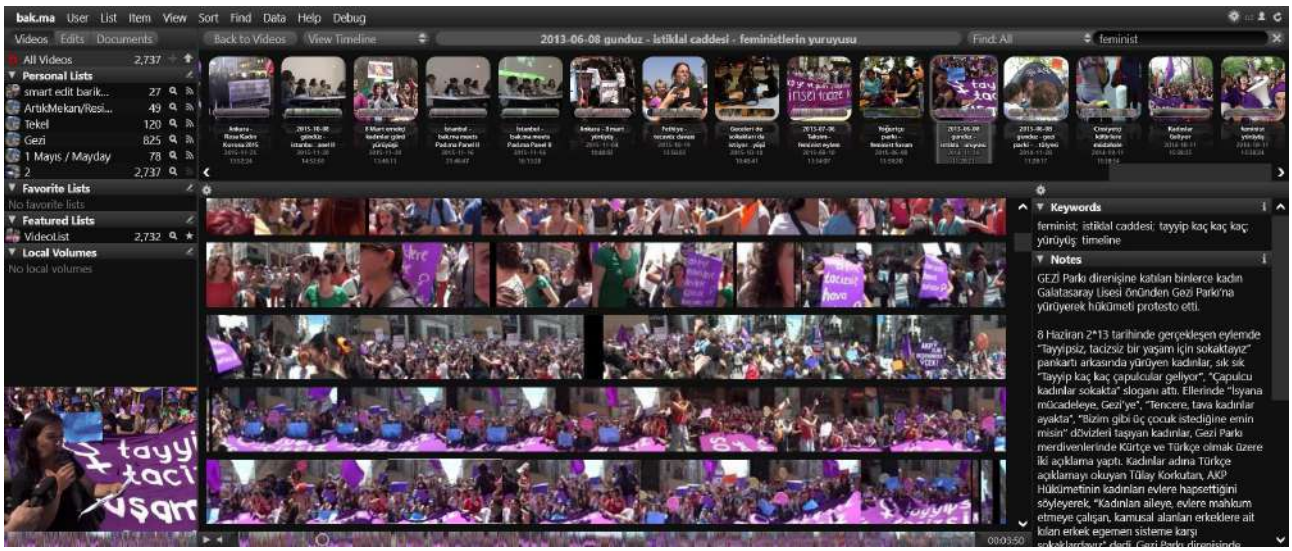


Fig. 5
Timeline view, excerpt from screenshot of the video file "feminist march on Istiklal Avenue" (bak.ma 2014).

From the initial goals of preservation, now bak.ma has expanded in scope and location, including social movements from various parts of the world related to the topics of migration, postcolonialism, antiracism, LGBTI+, and feminism [Fig. 5].

The archive collective diligently gathers visual recordings and documents produced by media activists, groups, and individuals involved in these struggles. Beyond videos, bak.ma also provides a collection of texts focusing on topics such as autonomous archiving, media archiving, video activism, and social movements—available for free download. However, preservation, accessibility and maintenance remain the key focus of the archive, rather than its improvement, because these are the basic needs required for the fundamental constitution of the archive.

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES IN ACTIVIST ARCHIVING

Activist archiving grapples with a host of structural challenges that impede its sustainability. These challenges encompass labour and financial limitations, alongside safety risks such as detention and censorship.

Activist communities engaged in archival efforts are deemed both economically and politically vulnerable, and the longevity of collectives is precarious, dissipating when the initial excitement wanes. The necessity for a common space, juxtaposed with the isolating nature of individual computer-based efforts, adds to the complexity. The absence of a formal or institutional structure in bak.ma provides a non-hierarchical, autonomous working environment and an uncensored, free content space. However, as is common in any social organization, this setup introduces a precarious and uncertain situation in terms of sustainability. The level and continuity of labour dedicated to bak.ma are naturally influenced by personal, economic, and political factors in the lives of the volunteers. Moreover, the lack of sustainable financial support hinders

the active organization and expansion of the archive's content. Instead, the content remains confined to areas of interest dictated by individual encounters and networks.

The absence of sustainable financial support not only jeopardizes the systematic development of the archive's content but also restricts it to more niche areas driven by personal interests and connections. The issue of content and information management is also related to what to include and exclude in the age of pervasive digital media. The lack of curatorship may lead to the overwhelming challenge of managing excessive content. Since autonomous archiving demands significant virtual space and specialized IT skills, the financing of both the platform and the labour behind it becomes essential for the overall output of the material in the context of an archive.

Security concerns further exacerbate the fragility of autonomous archives; the personal collections of video activists, documentary filmmakers and journalists recording social movements and struggles in Turkey have long been under threat. Two recent cases can be given as examples: Oktay İnce and Sibel Tekin faced the challenge of safeguarding hard drives in the face of potential risks. Video activist Oktay İnce's house was raided on October 18, 2018. The police confiscated his archival material and digital devices contained all of his output in the last 20 years. İnce demanded the return of his archive by protesting on a day-to-day basis in various public spaces in Izmir and Ankara. In his press statements, which were cut short by his detention by the police, he has stated:

> *I spent a large part of my life on video activism and making documentaries on social struggles in Turkey. They (the police) confiscated the visual archive of social struggles in Turkey from the last 20 years, the documentary works, all of the raw footage waiting to be edited, and our labor. There is nothing that constitutes a crime in these archives and material; they are breaking the law themselves by taking the original material, instead of copies. My concern is not about the court case they are planning to file. What worries me is that the archive of social struggles in Turkey over the last 20 years will be destroyed while in police custody.* (Bianet 2019)

Fellow video activist and documentary filmmaker Sibel Tekin on her part was arrested on December 17, 2022, following a raid on her house where her digital archival material, cameras, computer and some books were confiscated by the police. She has documented rights violations throughout her work and today is being punished for increasing their visibility. While she is being charged with membership to a terrorist organization, there is no organization listed in her indictment, demonstrating how arbitrary the judicial system in Turkey has become. She was released two months later, on judicial control measures. bak.ma sees it as one of its responsibilities to protect these digital collections; however, the delicate balance between maintaining the spirit of dissemination and negotiating the associated risks raises questions about the fate of archives as enduring projects.

On the other hand, the government in Turkey remains unaware and seemingly disinterested in online niche spaces like bak.ma. The site has not been blocked in Turkey as of yet, although surveillance mechanisms are well in place for alternative channels like Twitter and YouTube, which are subject to censorship when there is content deemed "politically controversial in nature" (Askanius 2015, 465). Moreover, while such platforms have been deemed revolutionary and democratizing information, consolidate action into video production and consumption of the individual, rather than into a community (ibid.) So, on the one hand, being niche does permit for some security from outright internet blocking, on the other hand, the dissemination of the information on bak.ma remains limited. Thus, a constant negotiation of risks becomes part of the structural reality of such initiatives.

CONCLUSION

While authoritarianism has been rising and violent conflicts have expanded globally over the last quarter-century, activist media practices have been playing a critical role in responding to the restriction of freedom and rights. In this context, bak.ma emerges as an embodiment of the need for collaborative archiving practices in Turkey, interwoven into the fabric of ongoing struggles for justice, freedom of speech, and access to knowledge.

"The Contemporary and World History" textbook distributed in the Turkish public education system demonstrates now more than ever the importance of bak.ma as a multivocal resource on the Gezi Park Protests. Instead of a politics of erasure, the textbook's narrative has manipulated the events in the park and the intentions of the protestors, framing them not as a form of civil activism and as a democratic right to protest, but rather a rebellion concocted by foreign capitalist forces, aiming to topple down the Justice and Development Party's economic and democratic policies—their environmental motivations depicted as an excuse for such anti-government demonstrations (Alemdar and Keleş 2019, 244–5). This rewriting of history has been a tool to justify the conviction of 16 peace activists to sentences ranging from life imprisonment to 18 years behind bars for attempting to overthrow the government. The Gezi Trial demonstrates the dual impact of authoritative retelling: distorting the historical record and legitimizing repressive actions. This intentional rewriting not only perpetuates a skewed understanding of the Gezi Park Protests but also casts a shadow over the broader public memory, fostering a narrative that undermines the very democratic principles the protests sought to uphold.

In contrast, bak.ma transcends the conventional bounds of archival practices, not merely serving as a repository of historical documentation but actively creating possibilities of a living memory of the social movements through

the collectivization of memory. As the Gezi Trial[3] exemplifies the potential consequences of rewriting history to serve political ends, bak.ma serves as a counter force that actively shapes a narrative of resistance, resilience, and enduring social change. This living memory is one that evolves, adapts, and remains relevant to the ongoing struggles for justice. It offers a counterpoint to the forces of authoritarianism, enabling the preservation and dissemination of narratives that challenge the status quo. In doing so, it operates as a dynamic space of empowerment, instigating a paradigm shift in the politics of the archive. Beyond mere preservation, bak.ma becomes a catalyst for a more profound engagement with the past—one that resists erasure and actively shapes the contours of collective memory, as memory does not have a homogenous subject (Ahıska 2006, 11). As such, bak.ma is not merely an archive; it is a resilient response to the challenges of the present and an active force for envisioning a more just and liberated future. By grounding itself in the principles of collaboration, empowerment, and accessibility, bak.ma illustrates how collective memory can be harnessed to shape a narrative of resistance, resilience, and enduring social change.

3 Businessman and philanthropist Osman Kavala was imprisoned on October 18, 2017. He was sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment on April 25, 2022, for attempting to overthrow the government by force by allegedly orchestrating the Gezi Park Protests. His co-defendants Mücella Yapıcı, Çiğdem Mater, Ali Hakan Altınay, Mine Özerden, Tayfun Kahraman, Can Atalay and Yiğit Ali Emekçi were sentenced to 18 years in prison and arrested for aiding the attempt to overthrow the government. On September 18, 2023, another court overturned the 18-year prison sentences given to Ali Hakan Altınay, Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi and Mücella Yapıcı and decided to release Mücella Yapıcı and Ali Hakan Altınay on condition of judicial control. The trial has been characterized as "a mockery of justice" by Human Rights Watch, emphasizing being a critic of Erdoğan's government as the "number one form of political persecution in Turkey today" (Human Rights Watch 2023).

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Portrait of a Girly Girl:
When Recording a Video Selfie is a Feminist Practice

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YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are increasingly used today as tools of resistance and environments of expression. This paper will focus on feminist video-selfies that address stereotypes of the female body, status and behaviour and propose to ironically dismantle them. The article will consider issues of female networked presence and creativity by referring to early attempts to create a personal video channel, documented by Elisa Giardina Papa in her video artwork *need ideas!?!PLZ!!* (2011). The undercover presentation of political content will be discussed as an activist strategy, as in artist Addie Wagenknecht's fake make-up tutorials, in which she actually gives instructions on how to protect oneself both online and offline. Video-selfies are widely shared on social platforms as a playful way to meditate on personal identity. This happens, for example, thanks to the social filters of the artist S()fia Braga, which allow users to freely experiment with unfathomable views of themselves and to interact with others in a performative way. All these examples use creative strategies to convey a critical message. While never discouraging physical protest, they offer another ground for activism and dissent, and the possibility of literally embodying them.

Keywords
Self-recording
Video art
Feminism
Make-up tutorial
Stereotypes
DOI
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NO NEED FOR HOLLYWOOD

When I was at high school, my friend and I used to record videos of ourselves while studying together at home. We translated Ancient Greek and Latin into Italian in the kitchen, in my room or hers, while at the same time commenting on our everyday life, our friends, schoolmates, our crushes, sometimes also singing, always being loud and dramatic. At that time, around 2009, we were using a compact digital camera I owned, pretty much the same as Sadie Benning with their Fisher-Price Pixelvision. Obviously, there are a lot of differences between our videos and a piece of art. My friend and I had no artistic pretences, to start with, nor even wanted to produce a movie or a structured narration. However, as Benning famously did, we were using the cyclopic mechanical eye as a teenager's diary. In order to investigate stereotypes and expectations linked to love and relationships, in Benning's short movie *It Wasn't Love* (1992) the artist tells the story of a romantic encounter, acting, sometimes together with another girl, as female and male individuals on a date are expected to.

Giving and accepting a lift; offering each other a cigarette; dancing romantically, are presented as ambiguous actions that involve erotic, childish and violent traits. At the end of the movie, Benning says something that can be interpreted both as referred to the content and as a statement, which involves the medium she chose: "We didn't need Hollywood, we were Hollywood". Similarly, even though naïvely, my friend and I were fascinated by the camera, mostly because it allowed us to put on stage our friendship at its best, to perform ourselves and validate our identity.

Needless to say, we were not the exception. For the selfie is so widespread, both in picture and video, it has been repeated many times that the digital generation is the most narcissistic in history (Tanni 2021, 201). Interestingly, this practice is often associated with a typically feminine frivolous tendency, linked to self-monitoring and self-discipline, which is justified by obsessive self-care (see Storr [2018]).

However, the camera does not work like a mirror: it does not reflect our specular image, it rather looks at us from the point of view of a different gaze, which therefore sees (and lets us see) ourselves like an object (Dalmasso and Grespi 2023, 22). Even though nowadays personal devices permit the "mirroring mode", in order to see one's face as a specular image on the display, they still do not act as a real mirror because it is impossible to meet one's own eyes on the screen: we can either stare at the front camera or look at our image (id., 26). Furthermore, as is typical of recording in general, the selfie is always the re-presentation of someone who is not there, "resuscitated" as they will appear no more, at least because they will never be that young never again (Pinotti and Somaini 2016, 236). Thus, the magic of the selfie mode is precisely its transformative power, the possibility it gives of looking at ourselves as if we are facing another person.

In fact, the self-referential use of video as a critical tool has been explored extensively in contemporary art, even before Benning's video diaries. Joan Jonas, Martha Rosler and Dara Birnbaum, to name but a few, have chosen to make video performances in which they hand over their bodies to the camera in order to produce a series of images capable of critically examining the idea of "femininity" and the space of expression that art has traditionally afforded women. In this sense, Benning's work seems to hark back to pieces of art such as *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), Jonas' first attempt with a camera, in which the artist decided to film different versions of herself, including the seductive masked Organic Honey, who acts stereotypically, with gestures and behaviours that are often considered "feminine". Jonas's camera brilliantly demonstrates the constant self-surveillance that women undergo in order to conform their bodily habits to a culturally determined role, while also offering a way out of the traditional Narcissus trap thanks to the "telepathic" address to those watching (Fateman 2015).

To put it simply, self-recording works like a message in a bottle to establish a dialogue with strangers, the first being ourselves, as I said, and the second being the public.

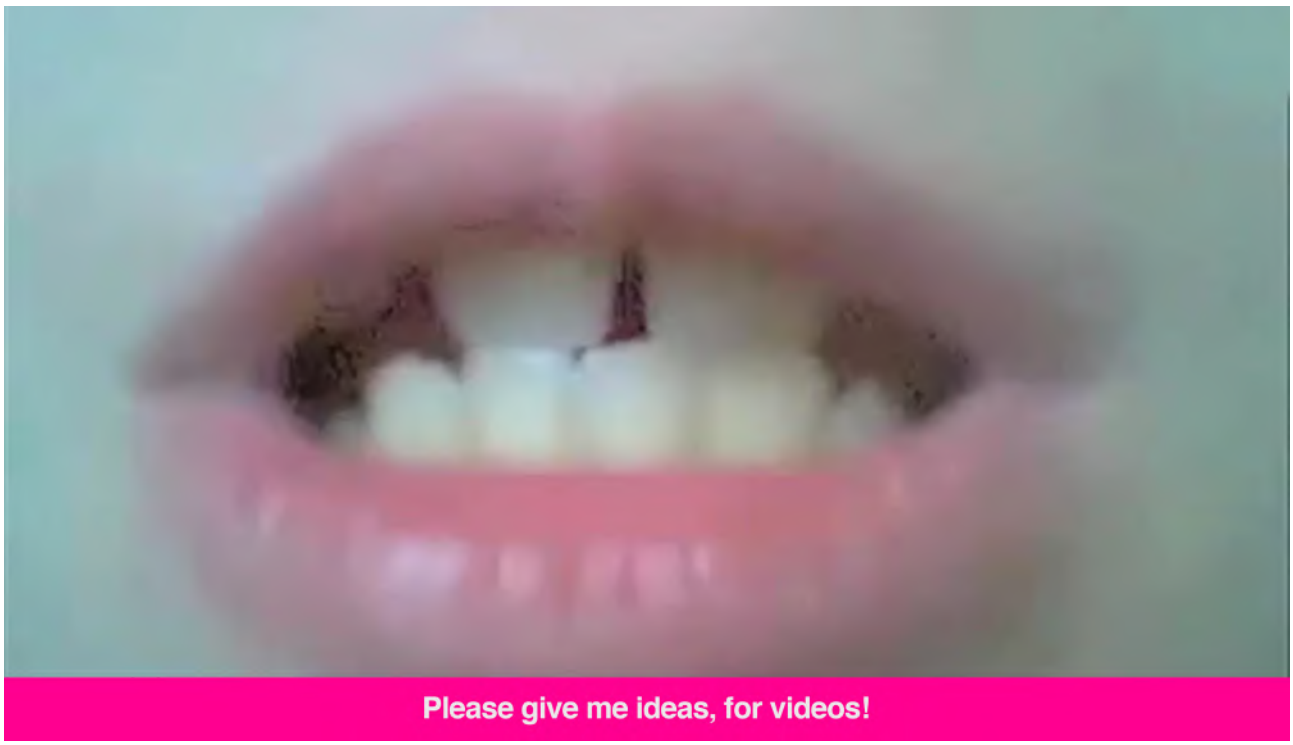

Fig. 1:
Elisa Giardina Papa, *need ideas!?!PLZ!!*, 2011. Still from video. Video HD, color, 5 minutes and 28 seconds. Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Tanja Wagner.

"BROADCAST YOURSELF"

When social platforms for video-sharing, such as YouTube, created in 2005, and TikTok, first launched in 2016, became popular, the range a video-selfie could reach was incredibly amplified. Like my friend and me, many other people started to be attracted by the chance of giving details about their private lives and asking for help in moments of fragility. For many users, especially teenagers, the video-selfie became a way to both prove one's emotional intensity and authenticity and to connect with a global community of peers (Tanni 2021, 198–99).

A few years after YouTube first appeared, artist Elisa Giardina Papa decided to investigate this phenomenon, aiming at understanding how our hyperconnected world has changed human relationships and collaboration. The result of this research is her artwork *need ideas!?!PLZ!!* (2011), a collage of video selfies posted by early teens, who repeatedly ask the spectator for ideas to employ in the video itself, in order to start their own channel. As appears immediately clear, most of them are girls. Giardina Papa's teenagers seem to be so concerned about social appearance and expectations that they privilege productivity over originality: as some of them explicitly say, they have no time to think the structure of their project through, they just need an idea to please the audience (maybe singing or dancing?). They are not stupid, as one of the rare boys hastens to clarify. They simply do not know what to do[1] [Fig. 1].

1 https://vimeo.com/27488845.

Indeed, Giardina Papa's teenagers understand self-recording is potentially a way to make money, but also that it is not easy and there is a lot to be learned[2]. Even if still just in a raw, immature way, these videos contain a profound intuition: YouTube could be used as a space to be loud and to shine, to make every single moment of our life worthy of attention. The idea of making money by simply living before the camera is obviously not secondary. Posted on YouTube, during the first six years that followed the platform creation, these videos already reveal the pressure social anxiety could induce, especially in search for online celebrity. The famous YouTube motto "Broadcast yourself" promotes an entrepreneurial ideal of self-branding, which in this particular case could be read through the lens of the post-feminist discourse, according to which the neoliberal regime is the one in which equality has been fully achieved for all since everybody is free to fulfil themselves (Harvey 2023, 137).

These users were patently lacking in tech-literacy because when these videos were taken the digital shared space was still to be explored. If the internet was ever the people's medium, it was not very much so in the early 2000s, given that "in 2007, only 1.5 per cent of social networking users contributed to their content — the rest remained passive consumers" (Quaranta 2017, my translation). In 2007, most people did not produce content and/or were not ready to do so. For this reason, *VVEBCAM* (2007), by Petra Cortright, a masterpiece of the "vernacular ego-clip" (id.), is maybe the most representative work of art of that time. In the famous video, the artist filmed herself staring at the screen, static, her face completely apathetic, surrounded by cute digital additions such as coloured slices of pizza, lightning bolts and insects[3]. What Cortright shows is, in fact, a life lived largely in front of a screen, in which users are given, if anything, the opportunity to manage the ways in which they want to display their public image, albeit always within predefined functions and templates. In the words of Federica Patti, the multimedia performance "invites each of us to experience ourselves as a show" (2022, 159, my translation), in which even apparently empty moments seem interesting enough to be recorded and, above all, embellished. In this respect, Cortright became a mouthpiece for an entire generation, little by little meshed with non-human digital technologies and submerged by pictures and news from all over the world. Assailed, like all other users, by an excessive and not always verifiable barrage of information, Cortright responds with a reflection with a Cartesian flavour: I can record myself, therefore I am. On the one hand, the artist situates herself within the internet community. On the other, she suggests a possible critique to that same community, and therefore a self-criticism: she depicts herself as a not particularly active user, mostly looking for

2 As Alison Harvey rightly points out, focusing on the negative aspects of selfie and video-selfie production risks stigmatising only the users who take them, blaming them for wider social, economic and political problems, also without acknowledging their specific skills, which are absolutely necessary to produce a quality product that can be taken seriously by an audience (Harvey 2023, 215–7).

3 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k50Mj8ZY-xY.

content to alleviate the feeling of boredom, who remains mute and impassive (Quaranta 2010, 163). In this sense, *VVEBCAM* seems to echo Barbara Kruger's iconic work *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)* (1987): she still mainly a consumer, albeit a 2.0 one.

As a process of familiarisation has taken place, the involvement of users has increased, and with it posting by women as well. While the latest statistics show still a vast majority of male users on YouTube (Ceci 2023a), on TikTok, which is the most popular app worldwide, the participation is almost equal (Ceci 2023b), or according to some statistics even mostly feminine (Howarth 2023). These data seem to confirm the famous comparison made by W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) between pictures and women, according to which they both want to be looked at. However, such a simplistic understanding, especially if applied to the practice of self-recording, fails to recognize the most compelling aesthetic and political issues involved in online sharing, and reveals a moralizing attitude towards individuals who are typically marginalized, both offline and online. Considering the material uploaded, it is more likely women on the social networks, just like any other user, do not want only to be an object of admiration, they rather want to be listened to.

What I am arguing here is that sharing a video-selfie is a political act. Indeed, connected self-recording implies embracing the feminist dictum "the personal is political", which is also connected with the strategy of publicly narrating the self as in the personal journal, extensively explored by the feminist oral narrative during the 1960s and 70s (Abrams 2019). This does not mean the content of a video-selfie is always inclusive and edifying, rather that it entails a certain vision of the world, more or less consciously pursued, always culturally and socially driven, and expressed by putting one's face out there. Sometimes the original message can be interpreted to the point that it is distorted: as *need ideas!?!PLZ!!* clarifies very well, exposing one's own body and life could be used not to raise a feminist consciousness, but rather for individual purposes, in economic and visibility terms. So-called neoliberal feminism is also a paradoxical form of political act, mostly concerned with personal happiness and success (Rottenberg 2020), which ends up weakening feminism as a social justice movement.

Certainly, being an expert user does not involve being a responsible citizen, just as being a woman is not enough to be a feminist. As feminist media theory has already pointed out, social media could be successfully used as contexts that can favour the self-expression of marginalised subjects (i.e. Rentschler 2014; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose 2016; Trott 2018), but at the same time they are exploited to reinforce gender stereotypes. Generally speaking, the internet is still largely tied to the *cliché*, which describes men, preferably white men, as technically and productively engaged with technology, and women as more emotionally and consumer-oriented (Harvey 2023, 191).

IRONY IS THE REVOLUTION: A MAKEOVER FOR STEREOTYPES

The stereotype that women on the Internet are mainly looking for products to improve their appearance, and are therefore constantly taking selfies to prove their beauty, is therefore one of the most common. The topic is nowadays variously debated on Instagram and TikTok. Some users, the so-called bimbos, have chosen to completely adhere to this stereotype, acting and dressing in a caricatured feminine way (abounding with glitter and pink, stressing care of hair, body, and general appearance) while at the same time asserting their right to freedom, well-being and power, sometimes also intellectual interests, in order to support the idea that "beautiful" does not mean "weak" or "dumb". However, it has been widely pointed out how the message of the bimbos tends to identify femininity with a very specific and restrictive aesthetic model (that is, white, blonde, skinny, well-off), that was originally conceived to satisfy heterosexual male desire, and, most importantly, that tends to exclude the majority of the world's population[4].

Positive reference to stereotypes, however, especially that of the "vapid girl" one, is not new. For example, the political value of make-up, and specifically of related make-up tutorials, has been highlighted for it can be seen as a form of "feminine masquerade" with a disruptive power (White 2018). With respect to this issue, there is also another, more subtle, way of exploiting the stereotype, which does not imply accepting it but instead suggests ironically dismantling it. Given the belief that the majority of women are shallow, self-obsessed and therefore not interested in boring things such as politics, make-up tutorials are not normally a target for online censorship. Having realized this, in 2018 the artist Addie Wagenknecht started to post some YouTube videos in which she pretends to give make-up tips while actually offering instructions on how to strengthen one's own privacy, cybersecurity, and security in general. The series, entitled *Self care and crypto*, mocks the idea that women are not in control of their relationship with digital technologies, nor are experts in anything that requires technical or engineering knowledge. At the same time, it makes a concrete contribution to raising the awareness of her audience on these issues. In one video, she applies a moisturising mask to her face, while she suggests always giving a fake phone number at the club[5]; in another, she pairs advice on "hiding that we are human" with foundation and blushes together with the explanation of how to use bittorrent, in order not to need a boyfriend for practical activities[6] [Fig. 2].

Just one year later, Feroza Aziz, a seventeen year old American with Afghan

4 For example, here: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy80RxwP9R3/?img_index=1.

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKQiGbmIH8U.

6 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE3sVBQdFVk.

Fig. 2:
Addie Wagenknecht, *korean sheet masks and password management for pore refining wins*, still from a YouTube video (2018).

roots, posted a video on TikTok purportedly explaining how to use an eyelash curler, while actually denouncing the persecution of Uyghurs in Chinese detention camps. A few seconds into the video, Aziz, still holding the eyelash curler, says: "Use your phone you're using right now to search what's happening in China, how they're getting concentration camps, throwing innocent Muslims in, separating their families from each other, kidnapping them, murdering them, raping them, forcing them to eat pork, forcing them to drink, forcing them to convert". She defines the situation as "another Holocaust" and pleads with the audience to spread awareness, then she comes back to make-up recommendations[7]. It seems that invisibility is not to be achieved exclusively by disconnecting oneself from the Internet: Aziz's video succeeded in escaping censorship enough to reach almost 1.4 million views. This happened mainly because make-up tutorials are labelled as "female", and therefore "safe", content, not worthy of institutional attention (Tanni 2020, 10–11).

Apart from making evident that content produced by new media artists and by those who are simply creative are nowadays virtually indistinguishable, what is most interesting here is that cases like Wagenknecht's and Aziz's put into practice a feminist ethic of care, turning a context of self-care *par excellence* (make-up tutorials) into an opportunity for gaining widespread attention. Their videos are certainly tutorials aimed at an audience, but they are not looking for fans or customers, rather they are asking for a community to react. Just like Benning and Jonas, the logic they apply is the opposite of narcissism, not trying to sell an idea of individual self-improvement and empowerment, and not wishing to advertise products. Besides, they do not focus on beauty as the most important political tool they, as women, have. Make-up tutorials become the perfect ground for collective confrontation and undercover action.

The connection between make-up tutorials and politics has become a

7 https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLg8bca/.

veritable viral trend (Newman 2021). A particularly striking example is the video uploaded by Sailor J. on YouTube entitled *GETTING A MAN 101* (2021), in which she comments on the habit of wearing make-up as a necessary step to gain a man's attention and companionship, no matter the effort and the time it takes. The video, which is conceived as a normal make-up tutorial that provides precise instructions for a look, is in reality an articulate and ironic critique of the beauty standards imposed on women and their underlying motivations, as clarified by comments (very reminiscent of the style adopted by Wagenknecht) such as "Men cannot know we wear make-up, it will be over for all of us [...] so if you are lonely and single just do as I say and you'll be fine and before you know it you'll have someone paying your bills", "Men cannot know that we don't sleep [...] if you don't look like a white beauty blogger it's over for you" and

> *Champagne is always a good colour to go with, a man is gonna find me and think "Wow, a woman born with gold eyelids". If a man marries you, it needs to be reapplied before bed as well because you don't want him to wake up in the middle of the night and realize that you were not born with golden eyelids*[8].

On the other hand, there are those like Clementine (aka Clem Babe), on YouTube, and Alex Maher on TikTok, who take make-up, hairstyles and clothing very seriously and use the vlog form to introduce a wide audience to general political issues or specific moments in the evolution of the feminist movement. Several American TikTokers apply their make-up in front of the camera accompanied by election signs supporting either the Republican or the Democratic party. In a video from 21st February 2021, user @marynjoyce interprets the challenge of recreating the typical "Republican make-up" in her own way. The video ends with a sign that says "The election isn't over yet! Real women vote for Trump"[9]. In contrast, in a video from 3rd February 2021, user @smallfairygoth puts on make-up with a voice in the background explaining what it takes to be a communist, and ends her look with a hammer and sickle on either side of her eyes[10]. Finally, in July 2020, after the Democratic US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez spoke out against the insults she had received from Republican congressman Ted Yoho, several TikTokers, such as @beautybysonalii, who normally applies her make up in front of the camera while giving her opinion on politics, began making videos in which they put on make-up while lip-synching to Ocasio-Cortez's speech, which can be heard in the background. The core message they stress is that "I'm here because I have to show my parents that I am their daughter and that they did not raise me to accept abuse from men"[11]. In August 2020, Ocasio-Cortez herself agreed to appear in the Vogue video series

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8 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJ4zzkI4CtY.
9 https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLbEdrn/.
10 https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLgL4dC/.
11 https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLgdSnw/.

Beauty Secrets explaining her morning routine, showing viewers how she takes care of her skin and applies her iconic red lipstick. Paradoxically, her tutorial is less radical than those made by girls who felt inspired by her speech. As she applies her make-up, Ocasio-Cortez says she accepted Vogue's invitation because "femininity has power [...] just being a woman is quite politicized"[12]. She therefore wants to promote the idea that femininity can be understood as synonymous with strength and political engagement. While the association of women with the political sphere is obviously not in itself problematic, and nor is the choice to wear make-up when performing a political role, the assumption that women have to adhere to prescriptions that can be achieved through cosmetics is critical (not least because Ocasio-Cortez's video incidentally advertises a range of products). From this perspective, to be "feminine" is to be "beautiful according to a restrictive standard", and seems to be part of (all) women's nature. On the contrary, a general call for "femininity" seems not suited to convey the multiple needs of women from different cultures, origins and backgrounds, while it reinforces the myth of perfection required of women, at home, at work and in their free time. Even though in the video Ocasio-Cortez states that self-care is an act of resistance in a world that tell us we are always wrong, consciously or not, she is in fact adopting an attitude towards "real beauty", which scholars such as Dara Persis Murray have shown to be driven by a neoliberal logic and to be oppressive for women (see Murray 2013).

It might come as a surprise that the disruptive effect of Wagenknecht's, Aziz's and Sailor J.'s videos is not to be found in that of Ocasio-Cortez. On the contrary, this proves that make-up tutorials are not themselves feminist, even when performed by a professional politician who claims to be part of the movement. What makes them count as a feminist act is the ironic subversion of a cliché pursued to meet a collective advantage. The pairing of make-up tutorials and politics continues to circulate: for instance, @danielaggarcia13 uses them to discuss the Mexican presidential candidates for 2024[13] as well as, more recently, @museera, who comments on the current situation in Palestine[14]. However, this is not the only stereotype circulating widely online: on TikTok, another popular trend is the so-called "WitchTok". Hundreds of thousands of users follow the accounts of people who claim to be witches, experts in spells, curses, prophecies, potions, candles and crystals, and in a general art of well-being, which they teach to those who wish to try. Online witchcraft is mostly practised by young girls who record themselves while they discuss their gender, social, political and cultural affiliations, debating with others on the myths, characters and ideals through which they can refine their individual and group identities (Eugeni 2023, 51). In some cases, therefore, video-selfies of witches are not only

12 https://www.vogue.it/video/watch/beauty-secrets-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-rappresentante-al-congresso-statunitense-gli-step-del-suo-iconico-red-lips-make-up.

13 https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLg8yqa/.

14 https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLgeCMp/.

an opportunity to positively redefine a stereotype that has violently marked the history of women in general, but also to add layers of meaning to this reference in a more precise and intersectional way, giving rise to discussions that reflect on cultural colonialism and identity tourism. In this sense, some young witches are wary of other girls identifying themselves as such, as this would imply an undue appropriation of a craft that has historically belonged to specific territories and ethnicities: in several videos uploaded on her personal account, Imangelle TheUnfitMisfit reclaims the practice of hoodoo, the result of a mixture of European, African and Native magical practices that is typical of Afrodescendants, long-enslaved especially in the southern United States, from those who she believes are only spreading dangerous misinformation (id., 56). In some cases, TikTok witches' political engagement has gone beyond the platform, such as in 2020, when, during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement protests, they participated by casting curses on police and protecting protesters with spells (Yalcinkaya 2020). The WitchTok witches filmed themselves instructing their community to help them in this operation, sometimes urging them to take advantage of a favourable full moon to physically take part in the protests, sign petitions and make donations to the BLM movement (Sung 2020).

NATURAL BORN ELECTRIC

The case of online witches helps us better understand a fundamental aspect behind the success of self-recording. Women's bodies have long been considered more susceptible than others to being visited by supernatural entities because of their "electric" nature: emotionally volatile and vulnerable, they would therefore be the most expert in all those practices involving occult and non-rational skills (Sconce 2000, 12; see also Grossi 2017). Regarded as mediums *par excellence*, either as bodies capable of receiving and transmitting information, or as messengers of the supernatural, women have often decided to take advantage of the authority granted to them in the spiritual realm to speak out in public about gender equality, universal suffrage and the right to self-determination (id.,14;48–49). A similar mechanism is produced in the tutorials, where a *cliché*, be it that of the "girly girl" or that of the witch, is exploited to a community's advantage by lending oneself to the camera, literally "embodying an uprising" (Andén-Papadopoulos 2020, 5017). Sacrificed to the need to communicate with other worlds, the female body itself becomes a "fantastical space" (Berton 2019, 100, my translation).

In this sense, there is a final form of self-recording that I would like to analyse, making reference to S()fia Braga's artistic work: social filters, those effects that change the image of the user's face (or background) while taking a photo or a video to be shared online. In her practice, Braga often experiments with social filters, each of which is considered a work of art in itself, but is also part of a larger project entitled *Forehead Vulva Channelling Research: Hidden Clitoris* (2021-), which is still ongoing and consists of lectures, videos and

Fig. 3.
S()fia Braga, *Forehead Vulva Channeling Research*, Still from video, 2022, courtesy of the artist.

also installations. As the title suggests, the artist presents it as the work of a research group on the "mental clitoris", to which we can all connect in order to achieve physical and psychological well-being. Braga sees this as the third eye of the Oriental tradition, the true appearance of which men have tried to conceal throughout history, in order not to spread knowledge and awareness about the power of female pleasure and the female body, fearing the obvious negative repercussions on the myth of masculinity. The instructions for embarking on this journey of awareness are quite simple: "Find a place where you feel comfortable, inhale and exhale, touch your body and rediscover yourself, take your time without rushing, possibly even with tools to help stimulate", and can be practised either by lying on mats in front of a tablet during the project's public installation, or wherever you want, downloading the filters from Braga's personal Instagram account and trying them out[15] [Fig. 3 and Fig. 4].

The filters are obviously not an end in themselves, but rather a way of intercepting those who spend a lot of time in front of their screens to encourage them to think about their own power and possibilities outside of the platform. For example, the caption of the Instagram post introducing the filter *Don't Kill My Vibe* (2021) explains how to download it, inviting users to "a little exercise and self-esteem". To activate it, simply open the mouth. Your face then appears split in half, dominated by a fuchsia and chrome clitoris. Braga wants nothing more than for the user to contemplate this hidden part of themselves by repeating the operation twice a day in front of all their Instagram friends. This artistic filter is an amusing and rather explicit invitation to masturbate and experiment with one's body, as well as normalising the sharing of such experiences with others. It suggests improving one's inner awareness of one's own pleasure by using the filter as a substitute for images of women's naked bodies, which are often sexualised and overexposed. Moreover, it does so without using images that

15 https://sofiabraga.com/projects/channeling/.

Fig. 4.
S()fia Braga, *Forehead Vulva Channeling Research*, Galeria 17, Pristina, Photo Credit Majlinda Hoxha, 2023, courtesy of the artist.

could be censored by Instagram's algorithms, which are designed to eliminate explicit content. In short, it is not important how you look, but how you feel. Finally, the filter also plays with the stereotype of women's difficulty in being rational: female bodily pleasure might be located in the head, usually associated with theory and reasoning. The user is therefore encouraged to adopt these discursive regimes by wearing them like a mask: by framing themselves with a handheld device, anyone can enter the scene and interpret the features generated by the filter in their own way. The aim is not just to show off, but to take a stand and invite others to listen and respond, opening up a participatory debate.

In addition, the *Forehead Vulva Channelling Research* highlights the storytelling that online projects generally undergo. Braga's followers frequently ask "How is your cult going?", demonstrating that it is often difficult to determine what is true and what is not when we make the bored scrolling through Facebook or Instagram our primary source of information (see Pirandello 2023). Braga reflected on these and other critical issues related to the practice of self-recording and video-sharing. Like Giardina Papa before her, she created a video installation, *Welcome to my channel* (2020), composed of a selection of videos found online on the main sharing platforms, this time focusing on the tendency of young people to make public their mental health problems. Again, the majority of users are women who talk about their conditions or film themselves directly during a crisis or a manic episode. Braga's video shows how, while

the sharing of video-selfies has provided an unprecedented opportunity for the creation of information and support networks for vulnerable individuals, the popularity of the phenomenon has also exposed them to the economic interests of companies that offer them benefits in exchange for promoting their products and services. The line between truth and self-fiction seems then to be blurred: the great freedom of expression guaranteed by social networks has consequently developed a tendency to exaggerate certain personality traits, and to fake others, so that an improvement in terms of mutual support is also accompanied by a gain in terms of visibility and profit[16].

Apart from the ever-increasing technical sophistication of users, something else has changed since my friend and I used to enjoy filming ourselves. The video-selfie phenomenon on the net has become so popular that it has attracted the attention of private companies who have every interest in keeping the most-viewed vlogs alive: a cultural revolution is always welcome if it allows you to get rich. Self-recording is certainly an amplifier that has allowed historically marginalised subjects, normally taught to remain silent, to express themselves freely. As such, it certainly is an instrument of power. On the other hand, it is important to remember that having a form of power at one's disposal does not directly equate to having access to the exercise of power (Harvey 2023, 138).

As we have seen, self-recording can be used to raise collective awareness of critical issues related to the status of women, also trying to improve it, reaching millions of users. Never before have bodies, and women's bodies in particular, been used to incorporate a particular world-view to this extent. As the forms of protest associated with them evolve, so do the forms of their exploitation and taming, in order to diminish their revolutionary significance. Women's participation alone is not enough to overturn the current neoliberal system from within, which, it must be said, can instead take advantage of the opportunity to reshape and present itself in a different guise. In order to make the necessary distinctions in a jungle of videos that can look very much alike, it is then essential to analyse each of them with respect to the content, as well as the attitude towards the wider community of all those who lend themselves as a *medium* for a message.

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16 https://sofiabraga.com/projects/welcome/.

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BEYOND CINEMA

Saving the Past, Making History:
Film Festivals and the Dynamics of Rediscovery

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This article explores the impact of A-class film festivals' retrospective programming on the canons of global art cinema, wanting to contribute to a current trend in film scholarship exploring the relationship between film festivals and film histories. The argument proposed here is that, by recircling and mediating the latest film restorations and even taking ownership of specific restoration initiatives, film festivals have become key platforms for the rediscovery of so-called 'film classics', contributing to shape the articulations and understanding of film histories. To this aim, the article gauges with the dynamics of cinematic rediscoveries through the theoretical prism of cultural memory studies, exploring how film festivals developed, between the early 1980s and the 1990s, a retrospective interest in the material body of the film historical past, and its preservation and restoration,acting as both arbiters and harbingers of what body of films become available once again and, eventually, studied by scholars, critics and students. By considering several institutional cases and the emergence of retrospective strands in some of the major A-list festivals, this article contends that these festivals have become essential 'sites of passage' to the contemporary ways of accessing and historicizing of the histories of global art cinema.

Keywords
Film Festivals
Rediscovery
Film heritage
Film Restoration
New Film History
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INTRODUCTION

The extensive body of literature dedicated to film festivals has described how these institutions have developed critical functions within a variety of areas of interest, spanning from pedagogy (Patterson and Gaudelli 2023) to industry facilitation (Turan 2002; Wong 2011), from human rights activism (Iordanova and Torchin 2012; Tascon and Willis 2016) to cinephile and experiential tourism (Gold and Gold 2016). In spite of this, festivals' film historical agency and their role within the film heritage sector remain a considerable blind spot in film festival and film historical scholarship. In fact, few contributions have explored the topic thus far, limiting their interventions to proposing methodological insights (Di Chiara and Re 2011) or being anchored in specific case studies (Stringer 2003; Marlow-Mann 2013; Zarandona 2016). The lack of research on the topic is surprising, given that festivals have embedded a retrospective focus on cinema's past since their emergence (see Hagener 2014, 288-89) and, furthermore, because top-tier and second tier festivals have become key sites for the public revamping of

restored film heritage. With special attention to this latter vein, this article aims to unravel the impact of festivals' retrospective programming onto the canons and histories of global art cinema[1], willing to contribute to a recent scholarly trend which investigates the ways film festivals have contributed to shape film historiographies (see for instance Ostrowska 2020; Vallejo 2020). Through that, the essay is set to lay the ground for a more systematic understanding of the relationship between film festivals and the film historical heritage, questioning the logics of cinematic 'rediscoveries' and seeking to unearth their impacts on the historicization of cinema.

Methodologically, this work is based on the analysis of institutional documents collected from across a variety of European, North-American and Asian film festivals and archival institutions. These documents were provided by heritage and festival institutions in some cases, whilst others were gathered from public archives and private collections, over the course of about four years of doctoral research. Among the archival sites visited for the purpose of this research are the Renzo Renzi Library in Bologna, the British Film Institute's Library in London, the Cinématheque Française's Library in Paris and the Archive of the Pesaro Film Festival. Building on a variety of documents (press clipping, briefings, catalogues, meeting minutes, reportage, e.g.), the article historically explores the emergence of archival film festivals and the opening of retrospective strands in the major A-list film festivals between the 1980s and early 2000s, investigating the reasons why and how film restorations took centre stage in the film rediscoveries heralded every year by film festivals. Through that, the essay moves on to outline how film archives in collaboration with festivals have started to reconstruct global art cinema histories, mediating and re-activating the cultural and historical value of a selected number of cultural works. In doing this, the essay takes track of how film restoration initiatives are promoted and circulated through major international festivals like Cannes, Venice and Berlin, observing how these festivals either reclassify or cement specific works from the historical past as 'classics' or 'auteurial works'. In this vein, the article sheds light on how festivals in collaboration with archives have contributed to canon making processes, emphasizing how these institutions can enhance the importance of some titles rather than others within film histories, and to fasten their re-circulation and re-distribution.

1 Though world cinema is a fundamental category within the festival circuit, here I depart from it and prefer the more conceptually neutral "global art cinema" which steers us to consider and "analyse [art cinema] in its terms of geographical engagement, thinking closely about formations and deformations of art cinematic space" (Galt and Schoonover 2010, 11).

SAVING THE PAST: NEW FILM HISTORY AND THE FESTIVAL-ARCHIVAL ALLIANCE

Between the 1980s and 1990s, the call for saving films spread significantly among film experts and cinephiles, film festival programmers included. Claims about the "disastrous implications of [film] losses for the memory of mankind" (Glissant 1984, 3) on a 1984 issue of the UNESCO Courier verify that anxieties around the wealth of cinema's material body were climaxing in those years. Under the aegis of UNESCO, key non-profit organisations like the International Federation of Film Producers (IFFP), the International Film and Television Council (IFTC), the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and the International Council on Archives (ICA) started drawing public attention on the world-wide preservation of film heritage to safeguard the "most popular art of the twentieth century" (Glissant 1984, 3). Simultaneously across Europe and North America, revivals, retrospective events and festivals grew in number and relevance through these decades, each characterized by a specific engagement with the recuperation of cinema's history and the preservation of its material body, and all inspired by the FIAF 'Cinema 1900-1906' conference (Brighton, 1978). Regarded as the foundational myth of the so-called New Film History (or NFH: see Elsaesser 1986: Gunning 1990; Musser 2004) and as a watershed in film culture on many levels (disciplinary, methodological, theoretical, organizational, etc.), the influence the Brighton conference has exerted on the realm of festivals and film-related events is certainly remarkable.

Several methodological changes and shifts of emphasis fall beneath the NFH umbrella-term, which was coined by Thomas Elsaesser to underscore the transformative effects triggered by the Brighton conference and the related "Early Cinema movement" (Elsaesser 1990: 1—2). The former, in particular, set in motion a redefining process within the discipline of film history, drawing attention on the empirical study of the Early Cinema period, its surviving examples, and of the conditions and contexts of existence of cinema – both in its physicality and as object of production-consumption (Strauven 2014: 61—62). This meant a series of disciplinary shifts towards research approach based on the close-reading of film texts and para-texts for instance, and a significant growth in scholarly interest on previously neglected periods of cinema's history – especially, the silent era (Bowser 1979: 510-11); on a theoretical level, 'ideological' film historiographies (for example, Marxist-oriented histories à la Georges Sadoul [1959] as well as Internationalist-universalist accounts of world cinema in Paul Rotha's way [Rotha 1930; Rotha and Griffin 1949]) and along with the so-called 'Grand Theories' they started being discarded, as they came to be perceived as flimsy and inapt to scientifically sustain film historical research and film scholarship altogether (Bordwell and Carroll 1996: XII–XVII). Most notably, NFH united film experts' communities around the archival mantra 'to collect, preserve, and restore', fuelling a shared anxiety around and a parallel commitment to the safeguarding of film materials from the "many potential deaths" of cinema

(Groo 2019, 12). Among the most productive and seminal germinations of such a commitment was the creation of festivals like Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, the CinéMemoire, the Internationale Stummfilmtage and Il Cinema Ritrovato, which were set to counter 'the destruction of the youngest art", to say it with Il Cinema Ritrovato's curator Gianluca Farinelli (1989, 4). All these festivals sought – and some actually managed – to establish themselves as yearly sites of gathering and discussion for the community film experts (Cavallotti and Simoni 2022, 209-10) and, more importantly, took ownership of the mediation and re-circulation of the latest archival re-discoveries.

The first edition of GCM was organized in 1982 by La Cineteca del Friuli in Gemona (Italy), in association with the local cinephile organisation Cinemazero, under the supervision of Davide Turconi (festival director from 1982 until 2005), Carlo Montanaro and Paolo Cherchi Usai, among others. Presenting a programme entirely focused on silent cinema, this festival has played an important role in exploring and reviewing film history since its outset. To this aim, collaborations with influential scholars or film historical researchers' community, such as the Domitor (International Society for the Study of Early Cinema), have been staple in the Pordenone's programming strategies throughout the years, thus making the festival a crucial site for exploring the first two decades of the twentieth century through research focuses that change each year (national cinemas, directors, performers, etc.). Taking a less specialist curatorial approach than GCM, the CinéMémoire in Paris was first organized in 1991 by the French film historians Emmanuelle Toulet and Christian Belaygue, in association with the Cinémathèque Française and with the patronage of the then French Minister of Culture, Jack Lang. In 1990, together with Martin Scorsese, Lang launched the 'Nitrate Plan', namely a vast ministerial initiative aimed at restoring and preserving nitrate films, and a festival, originally named the French-American Restoration Film Festival. From the collaboration between international film preservation actors, the French Ministry of Culture, the Cinémathèque Française, the CNC and the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, the CinéMémoire soon became an important site for the revisitation and rediscovery of old films, primarily showcasing the restorations of French and North American 'film classics' from the so-called 'cinema of the origins' (1895-1915). Despite its rather vast audience and international success and the publications stemming from these events[2], the festival had a short life, with its last edition held in 1997.

A more enduring and seminal archival festival has been Il Cinema Ritrovato, first conceived in 1986 as a tentative strand of the Mostra Internazionale del Cinema Libero – the so-called Porretta Terme antifestival[3]. By turning attention

2 The catalogues of these events were sophisticated scientific outputs that provided audience with rich historical and technical information in view of the film programme. See, for instance Toulet and Belaygue 1991, 1993, 1995.

3 The Mostra Internazionale del Cinema Libero, also known as 'antifestival', was established and formerly held in Porretta Terme and, in the mid-1980s, it was relocated in Bologna to be placed under the aegis of the Cineteca di Bologna. For more information about the Porretta antifestival, see Gelardi 2022.

to film restoration in the light of the Brighton Congress, the Mostra undertook a process of self-differentiation by evolving from an anti-institution of cinematic discovery into an institution of re-discovery, which was tethered to the Cineteca's year-round activity, its restoration lab (L'Immagine Ritrovata)[4] and the international network of film archives. Created "to inspire [film historical] revaluations" (Rosenbaum 2010, 61), Il Cinema Ritrovato has regularly attracted a special cluster of cinephiles, one including highly reputed film archivists, curators, festival programmers and directors together with film historians, critics and scholars, including Ian Christie, Michel Ciment, Pamela Hutchinson, Aboubakar Sanogo, Kristin Thompson, among others. However, Il Cinema Ritrovato differed from other archive-driven festivals as it grew into an event capable of catering also for vaster, non-expert cinephile communities, for it took on a wider curatorial spectrum which has embraced the whole span of film history, while also privileging international auteur cinema.

Shelving the glamour of traditional festivals and embedding instead a rigorous commitment to the discipline of film history and the "theory of film restoration" (Farinelli and Mazzanti 1991, 5), these festivals provided film archives with an access-strategy alternative to the traditional in-house screening programmes, tethering film historical research to archival work and its usage in their annual programmes. By endowing critical momentum within exclusive festive spaces, festivals have been able to grant films that are not materially destroyed but fallen out of the frames of attention, valuation, and use an important resurfacing from cultural forgetting to memory and opening them to reinterpretation: from archival sources to canon. The kind of functions festivals perform in this context arguably resonates with a metaphorical insight put forth by cultural memory scholar Aleida Assmann. In Assmann's conceptualization of the archive-museum relation, the museum is framed as an exhibition site where some objects are displayed within informative frameworks (specialized strands, thematic retrospectives, tributes, anniversaries or celebrations, e.g.) so as to impress the viewers, others are stored in peripheral rooms and are not made publicly accessible: through these means, the museum shapes its own history of the field, cataloguing and exhibiting selected works of art (Assmann 2008, 98). This metaphor shed light on some of the functions played by film-related retrospective events at festivals and helps to understand the festival-archive relationship: whilst the festival serves to exhibit films from the past to catch viewers' attention and make a lasting impression, the latter stores and preserves films, and eventually restores some of them. From the mid-1990s onwards, such an alliance and the necessary synergy between festivals and archives went on to influence the priorities of film preservation in the international sphere.

4 In 1990, L'Immagine Ritrovata was launched thanks to a two-year workshop sponsored by the European Social Fund, aiming to establish a film restoration laboratory specialised in photochemical restoration and train several archivists. The laboratory was established in 1992 and is now a limited liability company (LLC), acquired by the Cineteca as a subsidiary company in 2006.

REVIEWING THE PAST: FILM RESTORATIONS GO 'CLASSICS' AT FILM FESTIVALS

The impulse to re-view the past can be traced back to the very origin of the film festival phenomenon. Already in 1929, at the Stuttgart *FiFo*-exhibition (abbreviation of 'Film und Foto') – considered by some to be the archetype of the modern film festival for its focus on the artistic and cultural remit of cinema (Hagener 2014: 288-89) – Hans Richter presented a retrospective program about the 'master works' of the 1920s film avantgarde, along with contemporary filmwork by Dziga Vertov, Germaine Dulac and Man Ray (Newhall 1955). Among the top-tier festivals, the Berlinale started revisiting the film historical past from its outset (1951) through its 'Retrospectives' strand that, between the first and third editions of the festival, was dedicated to 'Silent Movies' from France, Germany, Italy and the US. The Italian antifestivals also engaged with cinema's past, staging tributes for recently deceased filmmakers or creating programmes retracing the milestones of the French and the British New Waves. Equally event based, though smaller in scale, cineclubs selected films from previous decades, catering to audiences keen on either experiencing for the first time or recollecting canonical films, thus reigniting their 'historical memory'.

From the audience's perspective, the desire to re-watch classics has been framed through the prism of cinephilia (Elsaesser 1995; Willemen 1994, 226- 28), and interpreted as an act of remembering which, coloured by nostalgia and a bittersweet sense of loss, renegotiates the distance between one's own past and the present. On an institutional level, re-presenting and re-framing canonical films have usually served a disciplinary aim, propagating a discourse of film as art by retracing the historical development in the use of the cinematic medium, from the past to present days. These fragments of the film canon, framed variously as milestones in the development of the art of cinema, or having left an enduring mark in the memory of generations of cinephiles, are meant to outlive their present, being ceaselessly reinterpreted and remediated within different historical and sociopolitical circumstances. To perform such canonization, integral to the institutionalization of cinema (Staiger 1985), film festivals have usually dwelled on the celebration of *auteurs*, national waves, the motif of film-as-universal-language and the labels of 'classic' or 'cult' films.

Before moving to further explore the logics of festivals' cinematic rediscoveries and consider their potential impact on film canons, a caveat must be given. When observing the global festival circuit, any attempt to lump together film festivals, their cultural policies and especially their agendas within a single, cohesive conceptual framework has been hampered by the inherent heterogeneity of this panorama. Consistent with that, a systematic theorization of film festivals' engagement with film history and heritage would fall short of considering their differences in subjects of interest (film formats, historical focuses, genres, e.g.), screening practices, audiences and stakeholders, financial sources and structures. An archive-driven film festival like the Festival of Film Preservation

in Los Angeles[5] could hardly be compared with the ever increasingly popular and eclectic Il Cinema Ritrovato, given their diverse programming policies, local and international stakeholders, and locations; however, should one choose to focus on their audiences, it would be surprising to notice that the two have much in common, given that they are both considered seminal events to contemporary film historiography tendencies, being flocked every year by international film historians and archivists eager to keep track of the latest findings from archives. The following sections will narrow the analysis on a cluster of institutions, that of A-tier film festivals and their retrospective programmes dedicated to restored film heritage. This methodological choice is supported by the consideration that, being these festivals fundamental "industrial nodes" within global film markets (Iordanova 2015), they have great impact both on the film distribution industry, and on public discourses. Thus, the theoretical insights put forth in the following paragraphs are mainly related to these institutions and their cultural agendas.

Within the main film festivals in the global circuit, the ordaining of past works as 'classical', which has run in tandem with the discovery of contemporary films, has been a perpetually ongoing process which has interwoven with contemporary historical, cultural and technological developments. In this vein it is significant to note that, with new film restoration techniques being ceaselessly updated and the proliferation of digital means of film distribution, A-list film festivals have established themselves as influential platforms for the circulation of restored films. Around the 1990s the 'major three', Cannes, Berlin and Venice, have started actively advocating for the protection and conservation of the world cinematic heritage, embracing the heritage rhetoric traditionally heralded by UNESCO and FIAF. Tellingly in this regard, the Cannes Film Festival invited, in 1994, the then-director of UNESCO, Federico Mayor, to present the work carried out by the UNESCO with FIAF "for the preservation of the world film heritage" at a press conference. In this occasion, Mayor presented the general lines of the UNESCO *1980 Recommendation*, and the fund-and-interest-raising projects to establish new film archives in the 'developing nations' of the world. The fight for preserving the world film heritage, he argued, had to be seriously undertaken by all nations, "with the hope that Cannes Festival would help to promote the cause concerned" (FIAF 1994, 13-14) – and it helped indeed.

Since 2000, this trend has intensified with the opening of specialised strands, such as 'Cannes Classics' (2004) and the Berlinale's three-fold programme, with the long-standing 'Retrospective' (1951) & 'Homage' (1977) sections being augmented by the Berlinale Classics parallel, where "digitally restored film classics and rediscoveries celebrate their premieres".[6] As for the Venice

5 Running since 1988, the Festival is organized by the UCLA Film and Television Archives and, from its outset, it was used to present the yearly preservations achievements of the UCLA's Archives and of other US film heritage institutions (MoMA Film Library, National Film Archive, e.g.), also willing to raise public awareness on the 'historical and cultural importance' of the sector. For more information, see: Cullum et al. 2015.

6 https://www.berlinale.de/en/festival/sections/retrospective-homage-berli-

Biennale, it was under the directorship of Gillo Pontecorvo (1992-1996), in 1992, that several retrospective events started being curated (see Donati 1996, 70-71) and, in partnership with the Cineteca di Bologna, the 'Venice and the Italian Film Archives' conference (1994) was organized to discuss joint access strategies to allow film archives to screen and circulate their latest restorations through the main Italian festival. Eventually, these strategies were implemented in 2012 with the opening of the Venice Classics strand, presenting "a selection of the best restorations of film classics carried out over the past year by film archives, cultural institutions and production companies around the world."[7]

Throughout the last twenty years, film festivals have cemented their investment in cinematic rediscoveries and their commercial potential. This has been a slight shift, but it brought with it important consequences. With new restoration initiatives being launched every year in these sites, major festivals like Cannes have been involved in the organization of specialized market-events, where streaming services' representatives and film distribution companies can acquire newly restored 'back catalogue' contents for their libraries[8]. Quintessential, in this regard, is the case of the International Classical Film Market (MIFC) of the Lumière Film Festival (LFF) in Lyon (France), a film festival dedicated to so-called 'heritage cinema', and which was founded in 2009 by Thierry Frémaux, director of the film museum and cinémathèques Institute Lumière in Lyon and, more importantly, delegate general of the Cannes Film Festival. The MIFC was established in 2013 as a sidebar of the LFF and is today regarded as the world's leading event in the business of heritage cinema. The event brings together numerous agents (film distribution companies' representatives, TV and VoD programmers, film archivists and restorers, rights holders, institutional organizations, private exhibitors and festival directors), sharing best practices and prompting the sale and purchase of film rights within "the international heritage film industry".[9] Whilst it was initially meant to draw on the interest of French agents mainly, through the last nine years the MIFC has turned into an event of international relevance, flocked to every year by professionals from around Europe and North America (Meza 2021), this itself being a sign that important economic and cultural interests are expanding (and shaping) this market and the film restoration and preservation business.

By merging symbolic and financial values in their yearly celebrations of the latest film restorations along with the art of conservation, A-class festivals

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nale-classics.html, last visit on November 2nd ,2023.

7 https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/films-restored-venice-classics, last visit on November 2nd, 2023.

8 'Back catalogue films' or 'catalogue films' is a formula used within the digital streaming service jargon to describe films that have already had a first cycle of distribution. In some cases, these terms are used interchangeably with other terms such as 'classic films' or 'heritage cinema'. For more information, see Gilles and Simone 2016, 9—10.

9 https://www.mifc.fr/media/mifc/mifc-press-book.pdf, last visit on March 7th, 2023.

along with seminal archive-driven festivals (above all, Il Cinema Ritrovato) have grown determinant to the priorities of what films ought to be restored and re-circulated internationally, in some cases even commissioning specific projects.[10] As top-tier events like Cannes offer a powerful sounding board to promote and legitimize the circulation of rediscovered films, archives seek to meet both the expectations of festivals' directors and programmers and the taste of their target audiences, proposing film restoration initiatives of consolidated cultural and historical value, which are thus palatable to the festivals' community of interest and arthouse networks. From the archives' point of view, the rhetoric of 'authenticity' and that of 'philological restoration' can generate novel attention for one title, adding a layer of staged truthfulness to cinematic rediscoveries.[11] Comparable to the aura of an auteur, restoration has emerged as a significant operation for both the marketing and canonization of films. While suggesting an act of cinematic discovery insofar as it indicates and legitimates new entries in film canons, film restorations and, thereby, festival rediscoveries have been unique in their reversal of the obsolescence of certain objects from the horizon of the relevant. In this vein, the narrative of 'restoration' entails a generative act which, by reinstating a film's material body within film history, offers novel critical relevance and presence to films.

From a technological perspective, the re-contextualization unfolds through state-of-the-art restorations which adapt films to the most recent digital formats (2K or 4K), remixing sound elements and, in some instances, even altering chromatic elements, timing or producing different edits – a trend well evidenced in the 4K restoration of part of Wong Kar Wai's oeuvre (see Elrich 2021). In tandem with this, a further argument in support of digital restorations is that these operations are said to enhance the digital availability – adding a slightly different nuance to the twin notion of 'accessibility', traditionally emphasized in film heritage discourses by policy makers.[12] For instance, on occasion of the

10 By way of example, one can consider the Udine Far East Film Festival and the Shanghai Film Festival which have commissioned several restoration projects through *L'Immagine Ritrovata Asia*, the Cineteca di Bologna-owned laboratory in Hong Kong. See Gelardi 2020.

11 In the early 1990s, Michele Canosa, Nicola Mazzanti and Gian Luca Farinelli proposed replacing the notion of 'original' with that of 'authentic'. Reconstructing a film's authentic meaning is, according to them, the goal of a philological research that entails the census of all existing versions, the collation to establish their degree of kinship, and the individuation of the 'forefather' copy to be restored. Building on the convergence between Lachmannian literary philology, the conservation-preservation theory from Cesare Brandi and Gianfranco Contini's theory of literary criticism, the so-called 'Scuola Bolognese' of film restoration theory characteristically hinges on such preliminary processes, deemed indispensable to indicate a film's 'authentic version' (See Canosa 1992; Farinelli and Mazzanti 1994). By drawing attention to a single version and regarding film degradation as a loss of quality, this theoretical approach has supported and influenced film historical methodology by making ecdotic procedures and philologically accurate film restorations necessary to the work of film historians (in this regard, see Venturini 2006, 16–19).

12 For a debunking of the rhetoric of 'innovation' and 'digital accessibility' in the film heritage sector and its lurking economic rationale, see Antoniazzi 2017.

Film Restoration Summit, an event convened by the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and dedicated to the "challenges of film preservation" (Lerman 2019), Fremaux deployed a familiar scaremongering discourse, warning of the desertification of theatres, and took on the defence of film culture to teach it to younger cinephile generations: "you have to make sure that the great classic films can be seen anytime, anywhere with DVD, but also in a movie theatre" (quoted in Saperstein 2017). Similar rallies to save 'classic films', those digitally restored and 'rediscovered' at festivals (Fremaux's *Cannes Classics* sidebar being one of the main global platforms for such purpose), are conventionally coupled with an emphasis on the educational goals ("to carry the cinephile flame on to the next generations") of film restoration initiatives, but hardly mention their main driving impulse: "the direct or indirect economic exploitation of collections," to say it with Luca Antoniazzi (2019, 83). Whilst the ubiquity of 'classic films' such as *A Fistful of Dollars* (*Per un pugno di dollari*, Sergio Leone, 1964) – whose 4K restoration was presented and celebrated at the 2019 Film Restoration Summit – may lend some financial earning in return, less known films tend to require institutional legitimization to accrue critical and public interest. For the re-connection of films with the present, festival events have been crucial through their presentation of the new premiere of 'old' films that may have slept out of cinephile memories. Accompanied by critical paratexts (brochure, interviews, catalogue entries, reprinted articles, etc.) and merged into larger thematic retrospectives dedicated to auteurs, waves, intellectual movements or historical periods, within festivals films can be set for a significant return in the now. That is the case for films and auteurs generally included in the global art cinema category. In this vein, we are prompted to consider what benefits archives and festivals are likely to gain in return when they take ownership of the restoration of so-called 'world cinema'.

MAKING HISTORY: FESTIVALS' (SELF) PRESERVATION AGENDA AND THE LOGICS OF CINEMATIC REDISCOVERIES

Within the retrospective expansion of the art cinema market through digital distribution means (Hediger 2005, 142-43), we have observed that A-class festivals and their retrospective sidebars have become institutional guarantors of the quality and 'authenticity' of cinematic rediscoveries. Furthermore, we have framed these events as key legitimising actors and (both symbolic and commercial) value-adding forces to film restoration initiatives. Hence, to fulfil this essay's goal – that is unravelling how festivals can contribute to shaping film histories and canons retroactively – let us consider how film restoration initiatives gear significantly with film festivals' retrospective programming. In this regard, I have chosen to consider several titles selected and restored by

The Film Foundation (TFF)[13] and the Cineteca di Bologna/L'Immagine Ritrovata: these films were later circulated through the Cannes, Venice and Berlin festivals and the North-American and European arthouse exhibition networks, thus being distributed in DVD and Blu-ray by companies like Criterion (USA), Carlotta Films (France) and Trigon-Film (Switzerland). Significantly enough, these films had been either the subject of major festivals' discovery or related to the oeuvre of acclaimed auteurs, and, following their restoration and rediscovery, have climbed back to critical attention, being both re-circulated and re-distributed.

Let us consider, for instance, *Insiang* (1976) by Lino Brocka, a film which, whilst having been a box-office flop at home, was known as "the first Filipino movie to be shown at Cannes" (Dupont 2015, 78). After receiving critical acclaim and several awards at the Manila Metro Film Festival (1976), the film sparked a heightened debate, since its representation of the harsh living conditions in the Manila's slums jarred with the idyllic and beautified image purported by the then-dictator of Philippines Ferdinand Marcos and his first-lady Imelda Marcos, a debate that resulted in the film's censorship (Capino 2020, 50—52). This dramatic climax aroused the interest of Pierre Rissient, Cannes' artistic consultant scouting in South-East Asia, who strongly recommended Brocka's film for the Director's Fortnight (1978). Rissient's and Cannes' clout abetted *Insiang* theatrical releases in France (de Montremy 1978) and throughout the European arthouse exhibition network (Lo 1978). Brocka earned critical praise as a 'new' auteur in the world cinema pantheon, being compared with Luis Buñuel, Yasujiro Ozu and Vittorio De Sica for the 'truly revelatory' and 'authentic' representation of Manila (Capino 2020: 55). Rissient recalled that:

> *In 1977 I was in Sydney for the film festival. Before going home, I zigzagged my way back through Jakarta, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong-Kong, Manila and Seoul, to discover a new filmmaker and an unknown film:* Insiang *by Lino Brocka.*[14]

Introduced by Rissient's personal memory of discovery, Insiang was restored in 2015 and rediscovered at the Cannes Classics, the same year. Brocka's 'authentic' visions of Manila was married with its no-less-authentic restoration which, carried out at L'Immagine Ritrovata, conveyed a second layer of truthfulness to the rediscovery of *Insiang*: it is now more real than it has ever been. This restoration further cements Cannes' longstanding role of trendsetter in global

13 Founded in 1990 by director Martin Scorsese, TFF is a non-profit organization aimed at protecting US' film heritage, lobbing Hollywood studios to preserve their holdings, and to improve the quality of restoration laboratories' work. From the 2000s onwards, the scope of TFF's mission has widened as it started contributing – mostly in financial terms – to restore films 'of all subjects, genres and nationalities' through projects like the World Cinema project (2007-ongoing), and the African Film Heritage Project (2017-ongoing). See The Film Foundation (2013) *Staff/FAQ*, Available at: http://www.film-foundation.org/contents/reports/2013/2013.pdf, last visit on November 3rd, 2023.

14 https://festival.ilcinemaritrovato.it/film/insiang/, last visit on November 2nd, 2023.

art cinema, by re-introducing a 'classic' of Filipino film culture that, having been premiered or awarded at the *Croisette* and in other A-list festivals, added a new flag in the map of the international film culture.

Another case in point is that of *Touki Bouki*. Hailed as one of sub-Saharan African cinema's 'lost classics', the film's restoration had been championed only a year before by prominent film critics and scholars (for instance see: Cousins 2007). Restored in 2008 by the World Cinema Foundation,[15] *Touki Bouki* was introduced at the CR by Peter von Bagh, the then-artistic director of the festival:

> *[...] the restoration program promoted by the World Cinema Foundation has become one of the finest points of our program, both for the individual films–unknown or little-known films from Third World Countries–and as an idea that will change 'the face of film history', which has always been too preoccupied with films that are easily accessible* (Von Bagh 2008, 14).

Yet *Touki Bouki* had, in its initial release, hardly been an 'unknown' film, but was rather a major festival's discovery: it found distribution in European and North American arthouse networks after being selected at Cannes, garnering multiple awards[16] and entering 'festival cinema' canons.[17] The film's return to festival screens in 2008 was hailed by critics praising the 'subversive energy [that] made Mambéty a one-man African New Wave' (Bradshaw 2020), Mambety's representation of Colobane's youth through an original appropriation of Nouvelle Vague – especially Godardian – aesthetics (suggesting a visual familiarity with, yet essential difference from, European art cinema – see Mambu 2018), the film's pre-established cultural and artistic value – citing Mambety's awards at Cannes and Moscow (Gilbey 2018).

Touki Bouki would go on the same year to be screened at festivals like the International Film Festival Rotterdam, the BFI London Film Festival and the Locarno Film Festival. Shortly thereafter, this digitally restored version of the film was released on DVD and Blu-Ray editions by Criterion,[18] Trigon-Film[19] and Carlotta Films[20] – respectively the US, German and French language home-video

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15 Renamed World Cinema Project, this is one of the most important outputs of Scorsese's TFF and the Cineteca di Bologna, having drawn attention towards the precarious conditions of the developing countries' film heritage. For more information, see https://www.film-foundation.org/world-cinema, last visit on November 12th, 2023.

16 Premiered and awarded at the Cannes 'Directors' Fortnight' in 1973, *Touki Bouki* was also selected at the Moscow International Film Festival the same year, obtaining the Winner Diploma and the FIPRESCI prize. See Ukadike 2000, 186–87.

17 Lindiwe Dovey uses "festival cinema" to refer to non-mainstream films, with minimal commercial edge, characterised by aesthetic experimentation, framed as auteurial filmworks, and dependent of the financial support and symbolic value provided by European film festivals (Dovey 2015, 4–5).

18 https://www.criterion.com/films/28412-touki-bouki, last visit on November 2nd, 2023.

19 https://www.trigon-film.org/en/movies/Touki_Bouki, last visit on November 2nd, 2023.

20 https://carlottafilms.com/films/voyage-de-la-hyene-le/, last visit on Novem-

distribution companies which often focused their efforts on global art cinema. Since its digital edition became purchasable on Amazon Marketplace[21] *Touki Bouki* has been ranked on *Empire's* world cinema chart[22] and listed second in the 'Twenty Best African Films' by *The Guardian* (Bradshaw 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

These recuperations of global art cinema attain special relevance as they have reignited and reconfigured a film historical past that had arguably slept out of cinephilic memories, film histories and the spectrum of the relevant. Equally bound to Cannes' legacy of cinematic discoveries is *Chronicle of the Years of Fire* (Algeria, 1975) by Mohammed Lakhdar-Hamina, the first African auteur to win the *Palme d'Or*. This is not to mention other films and filmmakers who share similar trajectories of historic discovery and contemporary rediscovery within the European festival circuit, such as *Black God, White Devil* (*Deus o Diablo na Tera du Sol*, 1964) by Glauber Rocha, *The Night of Counting the Years* (*al-Mummia*, 1969) and *The Eloquent Peasant* (*Al Fallah al Fasih*, 1969) by Abdel-Salam Shadi, *Soleil Ô* (1970) by Med Hondo, *A Brighter Summer Day* (*Gŭlĭng jiē shàonián shārén shìjiàn*, 1991) by Edward Yang, or *The Boys from Fengkuei* (*Fēngguì lái de rén*, 1983) by Hou Hsiao-Hsien. Primarily, titles such as these all have historically marked the international critical recognition of 'new' national waves and auteurs, via the legitimization of major European film festivals – Cannes above all. This is often restated in presentations of their rediscoveries, celebrating the historical role of major festivals as pivotal trendsetters of cultural and aesthetic quality in global art cinema.

Observed from this angle, these cinematic 'rediscoveries' seem to sustain rediscovery of festivals' own deeds in the historic developments of art cinema. This complex dynamic sees A-class festivals committed to support the preservation of 'world cinema' as part and parcel of their own "memory narratives" (Stringer 2003, 83). This is congruent with some of Aleida Assmann's insights on how and the reasons why (political, civic, cultural) institutions construct certain memory narratives:

> *Institutions [...] do not possess a memory like individuals;* [...] *They make one for themselves with the aid of memorial signs such as symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places, and monuments. Together with such a memory, [...] institutions 'construct' their identity. Such a memory is based on selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful from not useful, and relevant from irrelevant memories* (Assmann 2008, 216).

ber 2nd, 2023.

21 http://amzn.to/2jFi6sg, last visit on November 2nd, 2023.

22 https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/100-greatest-world-cinema-films/, last visit on November 2nd , 2023.

Whilst A-class festivals largely purport the idea that the preservation of cinema's past serves an educational purpose, this essay has sought to unearth other underlying rationales governing the logics of festivals' cinematic rediscoveries. In this regard, emphasis has been put on the fact that, by selecting and revisiting their own memorable achievements and favouring the restoration, recirculation and remembrance of 'festival cinema' (i.e., films with secured success within the festival circuit and arthouse cinemas), these cinematic rediscoveries sustain autopoietic processes in retrospect, revamping the relevance of the festivals' findings in and contributions to global film culture. In other words, these memory narratives, shaped through dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, are constructed so as to historicize, legitimate and thus perpetuate the essential role which European festivals have played and continue to do so in defining global art cinema, both in the future and in retrospect. As Cannes and major European festivals seek to merge their own past with that of global art cinema through their cinematic rediscoveries, such attempts of retrospective self-glorification consolidate their historical role as film quality regulators and, thus, keeps 'the system, which legitimised their social function, up and running' (de Valck 2012, 33). In this vein, these observations of the film historical agenda of A-Class festivals further confirms what Marijke de Valck has labelled as the "self-referencing" strategy of festivals' programming practices, which favours the restoration, circulation and re-distribution of 'festival cinema', and reinforce the value system (auteurism, art, universalism) upon which the domain of festivals has dwelled and thrived thus far.

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REVIEWS/COMPTES-RENDUS

Antony Loewenstein

The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World

London-New York: Verso, 2023, pp. 272

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Antony Loewenstein's book, *The Palestine Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation around the World*, traces a history of diplomatic and military links between Israel and other nations as well as dictatorships, highlighting how it has exported weapons, surveillance technology and methods of domination. Palestine is Israel's laboratory for methods of control and separation of populations, of course.

Loewenstein opens his first chapter on Israeli state complicity in Pinochet's regime, considering the story of Daniel Silberman, who was six years old when the coup occurred in Chile. He and his family left the country for good and settled in Israel in 1977. Daniel sought news regarding the disappearance of his father, who had been kidnapped from a Santiago prison in 1974 and never seen again. After some research, Israel refused to disclose relevant information to Silberman's relatives concerning his disappearance. Later on, it became clear that Israel had an important role in Pinochet's brutality, training Chilean personnel to aid the repression of its own people and supplying arms. After that, working closely with the US for decades, Israel supported the police forces of Guatemala, El Salvador, Argentina, Honduras, Paraguay and Costa Rica during the Cold War, for instance, or trained and armed death squads in Colombia in the 2000s.

"Israeli history can be split into two eras: before and after 1967" according to Loewenstein. "Before the Six-Day War (1967), Israeli policy was not noble but at least gave the rhetorical impression of (sometimes) opposing repression" (60). In 1963, referring to apartheid in South Africa, for instance, Israeli stated that it opposed policies of apartheid, colonialism and racial or religious discrimination wherever they exist since Jewish people understand what it means to be victims. Moreover, at that time, in the mid-1960s, Israel bonded with newly independent African states as well, supporting their postcolonial freedoms—even though its advocacy was basically a way to go against what it perceived as Arab and communist defamation.

After the Six-Day War in 1967—with combat experience and having tested weapons, equipment and an ideology of domination through the occupation of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, The West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights—Israel gained a new, important position as a military powerhouse. Furthermore, the 1982 Lebanon War served as a warning of the limits of Israel's power because of a series of attacks and counter-attacks that had caused civilian casualties on both sides.

11 September was "good for business", as Loewenstein provocatively suggests in the title of the second chapter, since "terror attacks on New York and Washington turbocharged Israel's defence sector and internationalized the war on terror that the Jewish state had been fighting for decades", as the author writes (85). Prime Minister Netanyahu himself has stated more than once that the assault strengthened the bond between the two nations since Israel had experienced over so many decades the same terror that the United States was experiencing at that time. The *Israelification* of US security services accelerated immediately after that. Israel wanted to show the World how to fight a War on Terror. In the 21st century, it began to play a key role under the radar in supporting different regimes (such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar) in their ethnic cleansing, negotiating deals for drones, mobile phone-hacking systems, rifles, military training, and warships. Israel is exporting what Loewenstein calls the "politicide", a process it is employing against Palestinian people, in order to dissolve their existence "as a legitimate social, political, and economic entity" (105). In the third chapter, titled "Preventing an Outbreak of Peace", the author refers also to Israel's positioning during the Syrian Civil War. It maintained a close relationship with Russia, negotiating a drone program developed by the company Xtend. These drones could be remotely controlled, using Israeli intelligence and augmented and virtual-reality technology, and then armed with Russian missiles.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to mark another turning point, offering the perfect opportunity for Israeli surveillance firms to attract business. Israel's response to COVID-19 was unprecedented in the Western world. Indeed, the country used the internal security service, the Shin Bet, to track and monitor potential COVID cases and social media posts to scout for any evidence of social gatherings. By April 2020, Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett announced that the government was partnering with the spyware company NSO to tackle the pandemic. After that, Israel started using its arsenal of surveillance capabilities and hired private firms to provide extra controlling services. Moreover, since 2019, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) has used extensive facial recognition with a growing network of cameras and mobile phones to document every Palestinian in the West Bank, through the Blue Wolf app, which serves to capture faces and compare them to a massive database of images on social media. In 2022, the IDF installed a crowd remote-controlled system, with the ability to fire tear gas, sponge-tipped bullets, and stun grenades, as well as a modular light remote-controlled weapon station (LRCWS) that recognizes the target and can predict its movements through advanced image processing. This equipment was sold to more than a dozen countries.

The final chapter of *The Palestine Laboratory* focuses on how social media companies censured Palestinian content, with the result, at times, of inciting violence and spreading disinformation. Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Twitter have accepted Israeli government requests to take down content which were critical of Israel or showed the Palestinian point of view in order to prevent violence from extremist elements. Loewenstein writes of the number of posts that have been removed in 2021, when the IDF stormed the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem as hundreds of Palestinians prayed since the geo-tagged location had mistakenly associated with "violence or a terrorist organization". The Holy site's name had been confused with the Palestinian militant group Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. On the other hand, "Israeli intelligence officers in the West Bank manage Facebook pages to promote the idea that the occupation is nonexistent, Palestinian resistance is immoral, and that Jews and Arab co-exist peacefully" (309). Loewenstein talks about *digital orientalism* as a new form of control used by Western social media companies, discriminating against people from the Middle East and North Africa, seen with

suspicion by definition. This trend seems clear comparing how social media companies viewed the conflict in Ukraine and Palestine, that "one occupier was evil while the other deserved respect" (276).

In conclusion, the book poses a question: if dictatorships such as China or Russia can be considered a threat, then why is Israeli's ideology treated more leniently? The answer could be that Israel, as an ally of many Western countries, has perfected and led the "global pacification industry", and there is currently no political or financial price being paid for maintaining this system. Our time of conflict, insecurity, wars and even the climate crisis will benefit Israel's defence industry, extending its appeal. In addition to the nations that more directly seek to obtain some of the most intrusive and lethal military equipment on the planet, ethnonationalism is growing, countries are turning against multiculturalism and liberal values, reducing democratic possibilities—and Israeli technology can bolster these tendencies. Since the re-election of Netanyahu as prime minister in November 2022, with the most extreme right-wing coalition in the country's history, there has been an increasing escalation in the threats facing Palestinians. Nowadays, after the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, it is clear how this book stands as a warning of "the frightening world that could be born if Israeli-style ethnonationalism continues its ascent" (293), since the government wants to legitimize its occupation as well as that "despotism has never been so easily shareable with compact technology" (34).

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Laura Kraicovich

Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest

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In a brief but striking paper from 1967, dedicated to "other spaces", Michel Foucault suggested an interpretation of the museum as a form of heterotopia. In contrast to utopias—i.e., spaces "with no real place" which "have a general relationship of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society"—, heterotopias can be defined as real places, according to Foucault, as effectively existing: "formed in the very foundation of society", "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (1986, 24). Among these forms, he highlights the museum space. Heterotopias are at once myths and factual disputes of ordinary spaces. *Culture Strike: Art and Museums in an Age of Protest* by Laura Kraicovich moves like a tightrope walker on this thin line that she interrogates and analyses. In her dual role as a museum director and an activist, Kraicovich examines the current state of museums and provides a map, based on symptomatic cases, of how culture and museums have inevitably come under fire in an age of protest.

The cause. At the center of the debate is the museum (along with other public exhibition spaces), but also its foundation, namely the preserved artifact, which has become both the object and subject of political contention, real as well as metaphorical, "with the specific intent of mobilizing its contents, uses and meanings" (Baldacci 2016). The author pieces together a complex puzzle that has led art museums, established initially as colonial institutions, to embody an ideology of neutrality and substantial support for capitalist values. She sheds light, through relevant case studies, on the origins of collections, curatorial processes, and the resulting plundering that determines how and whether the work is presented to the public. The cause is often the "opaque" role of the artistic director, who is subjected to power strategies. These may vary, but the former prevails in the tug-of-war between politics and knowledge. The author highlights two agents in this dynamic: (i) private or prestigious corporate funding for museums, and (ii) boards of directors composed of politicians and entrepreneurs. This has led, in most museums, to an exercise of what amounts to a kind of "cultural dictatorship", decontextualizing objects from the social context to which they once belonged, with a resulting "neutralization of art" and, inevitably, of history (Bourdieu and Haacke 1995, 98). The "ways cultural spaces are funded", Raicovich writes, are

"among the thorniest aspects of undoing unjust ideological frameworks embedded in museums, in part because the power relationships embedded in them—especially in the United States—mirrors the yawning gap in wealth and privilege between an increasingly exclusive minority and the vast majority of society" (93). Due to their dependence on philanthropy from individual donors, Raicovich argues, museums are more accurately understood as representing the cultural influence of neoliberal wealth than as institutions devoted to nurturing creative genius. Considering this, she invites us to consider the museum a public space where knowledge and collective awareness are produced. In Kraicovich's opinion, this implies keeping it alive as a place of contestation and care. All societies should balance the normalizing power of museums as cultural institutions by fostering the continuous questioning of memories and predefined classification systems. By doing so, the places and spaces of knowledge and memory (such as archives, museums, universities and the Internet) can be reconfigured as inclusive places that serve life in general. Achille Mbembe (2021) suggests that this has become one of the most urgent imperatives of our neoliberal, global, and anthropocentric present.

The effect. In response, the author refuses to let us accept the conventional idea of the museum as a "neutral" space. Raicovich also examines how museums manage crises and the different forms of protests that follow. The volume opens with Nan Goldin's Prescription Addiction Intervention Now (PAIN) against the use of funds from the Sackler family (whose profits, Goldin accuses, come from the production and sale of addictive opioids) in major international museums. This is followed by demands for the repatriation of looted artifacts and the removal of monuments. The author casts a spotlight on the Whitney Museum's inability to respond effectively to calls for the removal of Warren Kanders—a producer of tear gas—from its board of trustees. Or, likewise, the removal of the painting *Open Casket* (2016) by Dana Schutz, depicting Emmett Till, from the 2017 Whitney Biennial, referencing the *Harlem on My Mind* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1969, which excluded Black art and artists from a show about the Black community. Kraicovich uses the event to draw attention to the manifestations of white supremacy in cultural institutions, as well as how white curators continue to uphold exclusionary practices, consistently condescending, haughty, and *whitesplaining* in support of the dominant political mindset. For Raicovich, these interruptions of business-as-usual are openings to understand and reimagine how museums operate and for whom. This examination begins with an event in which the author herself is the protagonist. As the director of the Queens Museum, Laura Raicovich helped transform the New York municipal institution into a public place for art and activism, organizing impactful exhibitions that were also political protests. Then, in January 2018, she resigned after a dispute with the Queens Museum's board of trustees and city officials became a public controversy: she had opposed the use of the museum by the Israeli government for an event featuring Mike Pence, Vice President of the United States under President Donald Trump.

Cause and, thankfully, effect. *Culture Strike* is not a new story. As part of what Hans Haacke defines as the "sociopolitical value system" (1995), the production, circulation, reception, and conservation of works of art has been the focus of Institutional Critique over the past fifty years. In a text that serves both professionals and the curious, the author's task is to map the most recent "non-neutral" forms and to make the reader aware that, on the one hand, neither artists nor cultural institutions are immune and that, on the other, resistance is not a magic shield: everyone contributes—voluntarily or involuntarily—to the maintenance and development of the ideological framework

not only within the artistic environment but because the museum is a heterotopic space within a given society. So what can be done? By naming museums as the main sites where the cultural hegemony of power is enacted, and by staging practices and exhibition logics that remind us how "museums have less to do with the past than with the future", we must keep in mind that "preservation is less about preserving the past than creating the future of public space, the future of art, and the future itself" (Steyerl 2017, n.p.).

Culture Strike: that is, seven necessary steps for creating an alternative space within which culture can thrive; a culture that relies less on oppression and exclusion to declare its excellence and more on care, generosity, and action. *Culture Strike*: a guide to creating spaces for contemplation and connection.

Perhaps, even for revolution.

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Francesco Casetti

Screening Fears: On Protective Media

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A line is often drawn between what the publishing industry calls *instant books* and works that can be considered *classics*. The former are so closely tied to a specific occasion, to a shared social event, that they lose their brilliance and effectiveness in step with its waning topicality. Conversely, classics have a more complex temporality: they maintain connections to multiple events. For them, the present is just one of the *landmarks* to leverage, while they also delve analytically into objects of the past and extend imaginatively toward the future.

Francesco Casetti's *Screening Fears: On Protective Media* is closely tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it certainly belongs to the second of these two categories of books. This is thanks to the theoretical and methodological elements that structure the book: the idea of focusing on a tendency of the present—our progressive recourse to screen technologies as a way to protect ourselves from exposure to reality and its dangers—through a genealogical approach to technical devices from the last three centuries.

The underlying thesis of the book—structured in five chapters, with four *intermezzos* and an epilogue—takes shape through the study of three screen devices, their environments, and their forms of spectatorship. First, there is the Phantasmagoria, which emerged in the late eighteenth century: a dark room where spectral images were projected onto a screen, accompanied by fade techniques and suggestive voices to create an atmosphere of fright and magic. Second, cinema: the main form of projection and shared enjoyment of moving images, whether fictional or documentary (at least until the second half of the twentieth century); always tied to an *outside*, a reality understood as a common fear and passion. Third, new media and particularly video conferencing platforms (Zoom, Teams, Meet, etc.): the tool through which, especially during the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, we simultaneously protected ourselves from and exposed ourselves to others, in both our professional and social lives. These are *bubble* systems that, well beyond pandemic-related needs, detach us from the surrounding environment in which we are physically located and engage us in the digital realm. From a methodological point of view, what determines the path through these devices is not a superficial analogy between them, nor is it the idea of a direct descent of one from the other. As Casetti repeatedly explains, working on media from an archaeological and genealogical perspective means adopting a rhizomatic approach, capable of identifying forms of repetition in difference. If Phantasmagoria, cinema, and some applications

of new media can be investigated together, it is in the name of the operations they perform on the spaces and subjects, as well as the operations they make possible for the latter.

At the core of *Screening Fears* lies the idea of complexifying Marshall McLuhan's suggestion that media primarily function as "extensions of man". Instead of constituting extensions of our brain and limbs, Casetti argues that media primarily constitute environments in which a "projection/protection complex" is in force: "echoing both its psychoanalytical and economic meanings, 'complex' stands for a set of interrelated processes and components here aimed at creating a 'protected' confrontation with the world and at the same time at 'projecting' individuals beyond the safe space in which they are located. The projection/protection complex plays hide-and-seek with reality" (14). On one hand, the screen serves to project us imaginatively towards elsewhere, towards an outside that is somehow an indispensable bond for the community of spectators. On the other hand, the screen takes on the role of shielding, protecting us from the dangers of the external world. (And it cannot be a coincidence that each device analysed in this book has a real historical trauma as its specific context: for phantasmagoria, revolutionary terror; for cinema, the shock created by the twentieth-century metropolis and World Wars; for digital bubbles, the pandemic). Rather than continuing to conceptualize technology based on analogies of the cognitive and locomotor systems, the book invites us to conceive of media in relation to the immune system, which modulates relationships between an inside and an outside—between what is external and what is internal to biological, psychological, or social bodies.

Casetti situates cinema and media at the core of the human sciences, engaging media theory with contemporary philosophy (most notably, Peter Sloterdijk and Roberto Esposito, in their respective investigations of the relationship between community and immunity, but also Sigmund Freud, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway). After engaging with these philosophical and theoretical issues, the author emphasizes the need to develop "an interpretation of media in terms of immunity" (155). Instead of applying concepts developed elsewhere to the media, *Screening Fears* contributes to a shift in perspective. Whether in the eighteenth century, the twentieth century, or as a part of more recent developments, screen devices have not simply assumed, on occasion, a protective function with respect to the dangers of reality. On the contrary, they structurally assume that very function. In this regard, although Casetti decides to gloss over this aspect, it might be possible to argue that much of the misunderstandings and blunders into which many analysts and commentators of the recent pandemic experience have stumbled are due to a failure to discern the links between *mediation* and *immunization*.

The last part of the book reckons with the evidence that a media theory is also necessarily a political theory. As already pointed out by the philosophers mentioned above, immunization practices are aimed at protecting the resilience of a community against a threat, but they are at the same time in danger of backfiring. As in the case of autoimmune diseases, excessive immunization attacks and damages the social body. Chapter 5 and the Epilogue of *Screening Fears* explicitly address the risk of overprotection. Along this line, beyond Phantasmagoria, cinema and digital platforms, the book seems to continue beyond the last page. It continues to write itself into everyday experience, in contact with the hopes and fears we inevitably harbor as we look to the near or coming future. To speak of a "projection/protection complex" means, after all, to come to terms with the securitarian tendencies of daily life as well as the ways geopolitical spaces are technologically controlled and managed to the detriment of those who dwell on the ground. These issues may seem futuristic but, to a large extent, they are already structuring our time.

As Gilles Deleuze wrote in *What is a Dispositif?*,

a critical inquiry is expected to combine an analytical attitude and a diagnostic one. In its capacity to tie the analysis of the past and the diagnosis of our time, *Screening Fears* has the air of being a contemporary classic.

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PROJECTS & ABSTRACTS

ABSTRACT PRIN 2017

Transatlantic Transfers: The Italian Presence in Post-war America (1949-1972)

Polytechnic University of Milan: Gennaro Postiglione (Principal Investigator)
University of Eastern Piedmont "Amedeo Avogadro": Maria Cristina Iuli (Research Unit Leader)
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The aim of the multidisciplinary research project *Transatlantic Transfers: The Italian Presence in Post-war America* (1949-1972) was to shift the research agenda from charting the cultural Americanization of Italy to retrieving context-specific instances of the "Italianization" of cultural production and consumption in the U.S.A., as well as from a national/international to a transnational/global framing of the history of relations between Italy and the U.S.A.

The research has been designed to trace the emergence, manifestations, and meanings of an Italian style which became internationally known in the 1950s and 1960s, and whose visibility has depended on a complex international and intercultural infrastructure for cultural, political, and economic exchange between Italy and the U.S.A.

The project has been designed to investigate how specific Italian works of art, architecture, literature, film, design, fashion, food and popular culture were introduced to American audiences, and how a recognizable Italian "modern" style was appropriated as a marker of cultural distinction in the identity formation of an upward mobile, cosmopolitan, affluent American middle class. In those years, to put it briefly, new taste regimes have taken shape, and a modern, both cultural and economic "Made in Italy" has been established.

Over a three-years period, meetings and conferences have gathered Italian and American scholars from different thematic and methodological domains. The University of Gastronomic Sciences Research Unit started with an international conference on modern consumerism and commercial cultures (Pollenzo - CN, June 2021], June 2021); the Polytechnic University of Milan followed with one concerning architecture, design and fashion (Milan, April 2022); the University of Eastern Piedmont focused on literature and modern translations Pallanza - VB, June 2022); and the Roma Tre University ended the cycle with two conferences, respectively on film (Rome, November 2022) and on visual arts (Rome, November-December

2022).

A digital Atlas started mapping the relationships between Italian and American people, works and infrastructures; and a virtual exhibition was opened in 2024. Moreover, the new book series *Transatlantic Transfers. Studi e ricerche interdisciplinari* (Mimesis edizioni: https://www.mimesisedizioni.it/catalogo/collana/855), has initiated publications with five open-access books related to the research project: *The Italian Presence in Post-war America, 1949-1972*:

Architecture, Design, Fashion (2023, 2 voll., edited by Marta Averna, Gennaro Postiglione, Roberto Rizzi), *Un oceano di stile. Produzione e consumo di Made in Italy negli Stati Uniti del dopoguerra* (2023, edited by Simone Cinotto and Giulia Crisanti), *Transatlantic Visions. Culture cinematografiche italiane negli Stati Uniti del secondo dopoguerra* (2023, edited by Enrico Carocci, Ilaria A. De Pascalis, Veronica Pravadelli), *Narrazioni atlantiche e arti visive. Sguardi fuori fuoco, politiche espositive, identità italiana, americanismo e antiamericanismo* (2024, edited by Lara Conte and Michele Dantini), *Trame transatlantiche. Relazioni letterarie tra Italia e Stati Uniti, 1949-1972* (2024, edited by Cristina Iuli and Stefano Morello).

ABSTRACT PRIN 2017

Archives of the South. Non-Fiction Cinema and Southern Landscape in Italy 1948-1968

University of Calabria:
Daniele Dottorini (Principal Investigator from December 2022; Roberto De Gaetano, Principal Investigator until December 2022)
Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples: Augusto Sainati (Research Unit Leader)
University of Palermo: Alessia Cervini (Research Unit Leader)
University of Catania: Stefania Rimini (Research Unit Leader)

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The aim of the research was to investigate, collect, and analyze Italian documentary production between 1948 and 1968, where the landscape of the southern regions is depicted and portrayed. The research aimed to analyze how the cinematic image of the southern landscape was conceived during this significant phase in the history of Italy and Italian cinema. Through the selection, analysis, and study of various types of documentary materials from audiovisual archives located across Italy, the research focused on how the landscape was represented through images and narratives and on the signs of transformations and changes in life practices, as well as the memory and perception of the South. In particular, the research focused on a period when some of the most important geographical, cultural, political, and economic transformations of Republican Italy , and especially in the South, occurred.

This period corresponds, among other things, to a time when our cinema (both art-house and genre) gained enormous artistic strength, an awareness of its role within world film production, as well as great international success.

The work on archives and the possibility of analyzing films that have not been the subject of previous research was a chance to use a new methodology and open an important field of research with enormous potential for the study of our country's cultural identity. Each unit carried out and studied a selection of the audiovisual archival material, based on the thematic pairs that articulate the project and that were used to divide and analyze the collected material - Interior/Exterior, a thematic pair investigated by the research unit of the Suor Orsola Benincasa University of Naples; Speed/Slowness, investigated by the unit in Palermo; Land/Sea, investigated by the unit in Calabria; Myth/Narrative, investigated by the unit in Catania. In this initial phase, the work was also structured in multiple directions: identification of physical and/or virtual archives to be examined; access to materials; cataloging of materials through specific in-depth cards; organization of a shared database accessible through one of the access

keys present in the cards (authors, theme, year, places, names mentioned, etc.).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the research was mainly focused on materials available in digital form. The second phase of the research saw each unit share the materials found and already organized according to the established criteria through a specific platform. Initially, the sharing tool was a database on which the various research participants, including personnel specifically recruited for it, worked to refine the criteria according to which the platform with all the results and scientific production of the project was later designed and built.

A shared common work characterized the first part of the research: identifying archival material, differentiating it according to the specific themes of the individual units, and the skills of the members of the various research units. The division of themes by research unit took into account not only the skills that the members of all research units had regarding the general horizon of research (relationship between Italian cinema and forms of life, documentary cinema, archive analysis, etc.), but also the specific skills of the individual units regarding the chosen theme.

The creation of the database as a common working platform allowed each research unit to access materials relevant to the chosen theme. These materials were then available to the researchers involved for the development of the themes of all research units. In the last year, the goal of each unit was to develop the chosen theme through the available materials and through continuous comparison with the work of the other groups. This process took place through seminars, conferences, symposiums, and publications (two books and numerous essays published in journals and collective volumes), as well as through artistic reuse practices of archival material: a documentary, created by the research unit in Palermo in collaboration with the Experimental Cinematography Center - Palermo Branch, was produced in the final phase of the research. The showcase website (https://www.archividelsud.com/) and the research platform "Sguardi del sud" (https://www.memoryscapes.it/it/serie/28_sguardi-del-sud) were further outcomes of the research. Other editing works of audiovisual materials are planned as part of the dissemination of the research results, following its conclusion.

ABSTRACT PRIN 2017

A Private History of Italian Film Criticism: Public Roles and Private Relations. The Institutionalization of Film Criticism in Italy from the 1930s to the 1970s

University of Bologna: Paolo Noto (Principal Investigator from July 2022)
University of Parma: Michele Guerra (Principal Investigator until July 2022), Jennifer Malvezzi (Research Unit Leader from August 2022)
University of Udine: Andrea Mariani (Research Unit Leader)

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The research project *A Private History of Italian Film Criticism: Public Roles and Private Relations: The Institutionalization of Film Criticism in Italy from the 1930s to the 1970s* was conducted by the universities of Bologna, Parma, and Udine. The overall objective was to understand and make accessible to a specialized audience, as well as to film lovers and cinephiles, the history of Italian film criticism and its cycles of institutionalization through private and oral sources. Whenever possible, these sources were not only studied but also retrieved, cataloged and reproduced to allow broader availability to other scholars.

Participants in this project included Michele Guerra (PI until July 2022), Jennifer Malvezzi, Sara Martin, and Marco Zilioli for the University of Parma; Paolo Noto (PI from July 2022), Michael Guarneri, Stella Scabelli, and Giulio Tosi for the University of Bologna; and Andrea Mariani, Maria Ida Bernabei, Simone Dotto, Enrico Gheller, and Sara Tongiani 'from the University of Udine. The research benefited from the interest and collaboration of institutional archives such as the Biblioteca "Renzo Renzi" at the Cineteca di Bologna, the Biblioteca Statale Isontina and Mediateca Provinciale "Ugo Casiraghi" in Gorizia, as well as private archives from the heirs of prominent critics Umberto Barbaro and Lorenzo Pellizzari.

The central research question concerned the characteristics and role of film criticism during a significant period from the 1930s to the 1970s. To address this question, the researchers chose to complement sources typically employed in the intellectual history of criticism (magazines, articles, volumes produced by critics), by investigating materials usually overlooked such as letters, photographs, ephemera, editorial and working materials, and interviews. The focus on relationships, professional routines, and interpretive communities aimed to uncover aspects such as the role of women, intellectuals, and cultural operators in constructing and managing professional networks, the drive towards internationalization, and the complex system of relationships with other political and cultural institutions.

This process led to focus particularly on the following archives:

- Fondo "Guido Aristarco" at the Cineteca di Bologna, where researchers contributed to reorganizing, updating, and requalifying over 780 files. These files include correspondence, work materials, notes for university teaching, and editorial documents from the magazine "Cinema Nuovo". The most relevant materials (over 2000 documents) have been scanned.

- Fondo "Mino Doletti" at the Cineteca di Bologna, where the inventory and description of the collection have been commenced. A portion of the documents, particularly those related to Paola Ojetti's contribution to the creation and management of the journal "Film", has been digitized.

- Fondo "Lorenzo Pellizzari" (private), where approximately 500 letters written to or received by film critics or cultural operators, as well as work documents related to the journal "Cinema e cinema" (1974-1993), have been digitized.

- Fondo "Ugo Casiraghi" at the Biblioteca Statale Isontina and Mediateca Provinciale in Gorizia, where the description of the 147 files has been completed and the correspondence with Jusik Achrafian (Glauco Viazzi) has been reconstructed and fully transcribed.

- Fondo "Umberto Barbaro" (private), where private and non-inventoried correspondence between Umberto Barbaro and art historian Roberto Longhi has been digitized.

Among the primary outcomes of the research are the volumes and collections edited by Maria Ida Bernabei and Andrea Mariani, *Attorno al film. La corrispondenza e le sceneggiature inedite di Caravaggio e Carpaccio*, Enrico Gheller and Sara Tongiani, *Album Casiraghi. Parole e immagini di un critico cinematografico*, Jennifer Malvezzi and Marco Zilioli, *Cinquant'anni di corrispondenza. Il cinema di Lorenzo Pellizzari*, Andrea Mariani and Simone Dotto, *Ugo Casiraghi, Glauco Viazzi. Il cervello di Carné. Letterario 1941-1943*, Marco Zilioli, *Pagine rosse. Cinema, politica e stampa comunista* (1945-1960).

Malvezzi, Mariani, and Noto also edited a special issue of *Cinergie* titled *Repositioning Film Criticism. Critical Displacements among the Film Critics from 1930 to 1970: Space, Connections, Movements* available as open access, https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2280-9481/v12-n23-2023.

Interviews were conducted with critics and witnesses of the cultural and intellectual period studied during the research. Based on these interviews, a documentary titled *Come la vita* was produced. The complete interviews, along with the edited documentary and the digitized materials, organized according to four thematic paths devised by the researchers (professionalization, internationalization, gender relationships, institutions), but also the online catalogs of the studied archives the will be made available through the website http://archividellacritica.cinetecadibologna.it.

ABSTRACT PRIN 2017

F-ACTOR. Forms of Contemporary Media Professional Acting. Training, Recruitment and Management, Social Discourses in Italy (2000-2020)

University of Udine: Francesco Pitassio (Principal Investigator)
University of Bologna: Luca Barra (Research Unit Leader)
University of Turin: Mariapaola Pierini (Research Unit Leader)
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The project PRIN2017 F-ACTOR. *Forms of Contemporary Media Professional Acting. Training, Recruitment and Management, Social Discourses in Italy* (2000-2020) focused on acting within contemporary Italian film and media industry. It gathered scholars from four different national institutions, i.e., University of Bologna, Sapienza University of Rome, University of Turin, and University of Udine, which coordinated the four different units. The main lens to scrutinize the subject was the notion of 'work', and the fields of inquiry are the education and training actors receive, the access and permanence on the job market, and social discourses around them, to validate, enhance, and promote their personalities.

F-ACTOR brought together different perspectives, such as production studies, stardom and celebrity studies, performance studies, and an overall expertise of the four PIs (Luca Barra, Emiliano Morreale, Mariapaola Pierini, and Francesco Pitassio, who coordinates the project) on Italian film and media industry.

The project particularly pinpointed the role institutions and practitioners play in devising actresses' and actors' careers. Accordingly, a general census of training and educational initiatives available in Italy has been produced, providing researchers with an additional tool to scrutinize where and in what ways performers are prepared to enter the job market. Specific surveys and interviews have been made on acting methods, schools, institutions, ranging from renowned Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia and Accademia d'Arte Drammatica "Silvio D'Amico" to new-born initiatives such as Scuola d'arte drammatica "Gian Maria Volonté". Archival research on the genealogy of teaching methods has been carried on, for specific and influential case studies, such as the "Costa Method".

Furthermore, research has been undertaken on the function below-the-line intermediaries hold in facilitating, launching, and managing actresses' and actors' careers. Agents, acting coaches, casting directors, and producers, notwithstanding the growing grey area of self-promotion, are almost unexplored areas of inquiry. Through interviews, seminars, and participant observation on TV and film

production sets researchers achieved a much deeper understanding of the work surrounding the production of the performers' image and its maintenance.

Finally, career pathways require social discourses to raise awareness. Film and TV criticism, grassroots discourse, awards such as the David di Donatello or film festivals have a paramount importance in drawing attention to film and TV performers, acknowledge them, and consecrate their relevance. Through qualitative interviews of key players among film festivals and awards practitioners, researchers achieved an in-depth knowledge of the function actresses and actors play within their organisation, as cogs of an articulated machinery which through celebrity is magnified, while enhancing it. Particular attention has been devoted to film festivals and awards during the Covid crisis, which badly affected film and TV practitioners, and namely performers.

Among the chief deliverables of F-ACTOR we should list:

- A Dossier of reference journal *The Italianist*, which Luca Barra and Francesco Pitassio edited in 2021: *Studying Film and TV Actors (and Their Intermediaries): A Cultural and Industrial Approach* (https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/yita20/41/2).
- A special issue of reference journal *Cinergie*, which Luca Antoniazzi, Cristina Formenti, and Giulia Muggeo edited in 2022: *Actors and the Covid Pandemic in Italy* (https://cinergie.unibo.it/article/view/15055).
- A website, collecting all the main outcomes, including interviews and surveys, produced during the project (https://italianperformers.it/it/).
- A collection, *Contemporary Italian Screen Performers*, edited by Luca Barra, Cristina Formenti Mariapaola Pierini, and Francesco Pitassio, deemed to be published in 2024 in open access by Palgrave, in the series *Studies in Screen Industries and Performance*, edited by Cynthia Baron.
- Seminars, webinars, and conferences which each individual unit, in cooperation with the others, set up.
- Papers presented at key conferences, such as the American Association for Italian Studies-AAIS, the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies-NECS etc.

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