

NEW
DOCUMENTARY
ECOLOGIES

Emerging Platforms,
Practices and Discourses

Edited by

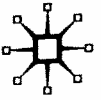
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Ceding the Activist Digital Documentary

Alexandra Juhasz

Introduction

I have been making and writing about activist documentary since my graduate work in the 1980s as scholar and maker¹ of AIDS activist video (Juhasz 1995).¹ My work moved to the Internet when it became readily available and makes the most of this technology (Juhasz 2009, 2011, 2012). Digital technologies allow me and the communities with which I work, levels of access unprecedented but often imagined, to large-scale production and dissemination of our messages. Yossarian, an Indymedia activist describes his activities on Facebook: 'It's like holding all of your political meetings at McDonalds and ensuring that the police come and film while you do so' (in Askanius 2012, p. 116). So here, I will look back – and forward – by considering today's readily available, transparent forms and forums, such as Facebook as seen through my earlier and on-going encounters with traditional, activist linear documentaries. As corporations have granted us inexpensive access to media expression our demands adapt. In the epoch of Facebook, the art of the activist documentary becomes less a matter of speaking and being heard through technologies of representation and more of an artful practice of speaking-and-seceding, voicing-and-silencing, thereby better managing how to get on-and-off of media by knowing when to both seed and cede the digital.

1. The Facebook digital documentary

From this vantage point, one might argue that what we are witnessing is not an activist community 'selling out' to capital but rather an expression of corporate media having succeeded in commodifying

the technical forms and participatory philosophy behind the user-generated media systems 'invented' decades ago by media activists seeking to counter the broadcast media of the time. (Askanius 2012, p. 118)

In the autumn of 2010, two media representations of Facebook competed for the public's attention. Aaron Sorkin's *The Social Network* (2010) did fairly well in this high-profile, high-cost battle to be both the story and the telling of one of the most powerful storytelling technologies of our time. His fiction film version of the tale went on to win three Academy Awards, grossing 225 million dollars worldwide, with a production cost of a mere 40 million dollars. Yet, at the same time, media viewers were compelled to enjoy another rival depiction of the same legend: a carefully crafted *social media campaign* by Mark Zuckerberg and his corporation – Facebook Inc. – the self-same subject of its own new media rendering. On September 24, *The New York Times* explained:

Mark Zuckerberg, America's youngest billionaire at 26, has not spent much money on himself. Forbes estimates his fortune at \$6.9 billion, but Mr. Zuckerberg, chief executive of Facebook, has yet to sell any sizable portion of his holdings in the company. ... On Friday, Mr. Zuckerberg announced his biggest expenditure to date: a \$100 million grant aimed at improving public education in Newark. ... Mr. Zuckerberg's gift, which he announced during an appearance with Mr. Booker and Mr. Christie on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, instantly propelled him to the top echelons of American philanthropy and made him something of a hero. (Helft 2010)

The heroic, new media version of the Facebook story proved to be expensive, not for something as contained or traditional as the shooting of a major motion picture, but as bride-price to the mainstream media whose function was to cast images of this generous bequest to the winds of society.

Truly needy New Jersey schools did certainly benefit. This well-timed 'contribution' did eventually buy some books and binders, albeit while also earning a varied record ('A year later, the spending of the "Facebook money" – as it's become known in Newark – has gotten mixed review' wrote the *Star-Ledger* Staff (2011)), and then even later (Kamnetz, 2013) it garnered some well-deserved muckraking into the dirty secrets of megafighting. Even so, the hundred million did effectively serve a higher function: initiating a highly orchestrated public relations blitz that

played across the mediascape at exactly the same time as the opening of what might have been considered as, by Facebook and its founder, a slanderous movie about them. Images of Zuckerberg's generosity (in direct opposition to the fictional story charting his wall-eyed social dysfunction, misogyny and greed) moved like wild-fire from Oprah to ABC's reporting about her interview, and from there to the even higher heights of *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*, diving down to the lows of *The Simpsons* ('While *The Social Network* was busy making lots of box-office friends this weekend, the real Mark Zuckerberg dropped by *The Simpsons* to extol the virtues of dropping out of college', reported the *Daily Beast* (2010)) and landing with a thunk at Zack Galifianakis's irony-dripping Internet-comedy, *Between Two Ferns*. Then, his true-life story took the expected, albeit enviable route, moving rapidly, even happily, among the depths of user-generated links to, or spoofs of, these very same mainstream homages and their dominant media takeoffs. *The New Yorker* (Vargas 2010) was pleased to report that Zuckerberg, as his own Facebook page also verified, was also quite happy to share the good news of his generosity. It was widely understood by all involved that the system is built upon (and with) this looping of generous and generative disclosures:

Zuckerberg's business model depends on our shifting notions of privacy, revelation, and sheer self-display. The more that people are willing to put online, the more money his site can make from advertisers. Happily for him, and the prospects of his eventual fortune, his business interests align perfectly with his personal philosophy. In the bio section of his page, Zuckerberg writes simply, 'I'm trying to make the world a more open place.' (Vargas 2010)

Given that most people would wish to go viral, and that to do so we, too, will need to rely upon open portals of media flow, it was pretty cool to watch how easy it was, that is, if you own the platform, control the content, have famous friends and are really rich too.

I call this second media production, the *Facebook Digital Documentary*. This is a new kind of actuality production coming into being alongside and within the very social networks it covers, shamelessly uses, and owns. *The Facebook Digital Documentary*: a creative and corporate, multipatformed, expertly networked and user-ventriloquized treatment of reality. I will suggest that for now at least, digital documentaries are being most successfully orchestrated by corporations that have access to the kinds of connections that make the most impactful social

networking possible: 'An email chain including Bill Gates, Square's Jack Dorsey, Newark Mayor Cory Booker, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg and founder Mark Zuckerberg reveals how stage-managed charity can be' (Kamentz 2013).

What can activist digital documentarians and scholars – those with more noble causes (and less cultural and actual capital) – learn from the corporation? Also, given the nature of this new documentary provenance, how, or even *can*, we make our best digital documentaries as works that function both outside and/or in opposition to corporations and the capitalist imperatives that dominate their interests and documentaries?

Rather than capital incorporating from the outside the authentic fruits of the collective imagination, it seems more reasonable to think of cultural flows as originating within a field that is always and already capitalism ... The fruit of collective cultural labor has been not simply appropriated, but voluntarily *channeled* and controversially *structured*, within capitalist business practices. (Terranova and Donovan 2013, p. 339)

In this chapter, I look to the Internet, our dominant media home, and one largely organised around evidentiary material – albeit a good deal of it fake, phony, or at least ironic (Juhász and Lerner 2006) – not as an unruly swarm of bees, but rather as a new form for documentary. I look at several corporate digital documentaries that promote *us* to string them together, creatively, from a sea of well-made and/or well-placed actuality documents. Lev Manovich writes:

It may appear at first sight that data is passive and algorithms active ... however, the passive/active distinction is not quite accurate because data does not just exist – it has to be generated. Data generators have to collect data and organize it, or create it from scratch (2002, p. 224).

When making their own *Digital Documentary*, Facebook had to first generate evidentiary data (Mark Zuckerberg is generous, and social, tool), and then also activate the production of kindred materials that needed to be edited together, or at least linked, all on behalf of the corporation. Whether such documentaries' arguments are credible, or even logical, is lost to their volume – itself a function of simplicity, familiarity and thereby 'spreadability' – and our role within this production of 'ever more'. They seed, we water, grow, harvest and market. 'In general, participatory culture

unfolds in three domains described hereafter as accumulation, archiving, and construction', writes Mirko Schäfer in his study that attempts to work past glib celebrations of the 'producing users' of Web 2.0 by analysing 'the dynamic interaction between users, corporate companies, artifacts, and socio-technical ecosystems' (2009, p. 149). They generate a grand gesture; we make much much more of it: more media, deeper feeling, impressive connections. Schäfer (2009, p. 153) continues:

The original producer and other commercial units – who are either actively involved in the process of modifying the original design or who benefit from its outcome – are also part of participatory culture.

Thanks to our many lively, loving, and dare I say, creative contributions, the *Facebook Digital Documentary's* goal of a well-timed, self-styled portrait of Facebook's founder was efficiently realized.

What can be gained by calling this new, distinct set of representational procedures a (digital) documentary? Might this kind of media project, as would be true for so much of online corporate and user-made material, be understood better as marketing or public relations? In the neo-liberal condition, is all (self-)expression branding (Baner-Weiser, 2012)? However, historically, neither marketing nor public relations share documentary's special provenance with the truth; in fact, quite the opposite. Holding these new media practices in conversation with the tradition of documentary's truth claims highlights that the objects being made are structured – consciously, carefully, artfully – from what are understood to be contemporary actuality fragments. By understanding these projects as digital documentaries we can consider the unique and/or traditional ways that such media practices broker in truth claims, albeit on the Internet to audiences who enact a 'new attitude towards documentary' (Ellis 2011): distrustful, sceptical and active. 'Viewers of documentaries have changed', explains John Ellis. 'Easy access to digital photography and video technologies has brought a new sense of familiarity with the basics of filming and being filmed' (2011, pp. 2-3) that is manifested in a two-way stream of production/reception, and through the contemporary audience's scepticism. Certainly, beyond their large part in *making* the *Digital Facebook Documentary*, the new audience of documentary also accomplished the associated task of *reading* it: immediately, intelligently, and effectively writing about and critiquing this corporation's efforts as the public relations stunts they were. This important task already completed within the blogosphere, my contribution will take a different direction: through my career-long commitment to making and thinking about

activist media. In light of the excellent critiques being produce in the blogosphere, what does it mean to Internet scholars 'to pick up your game in terms of Facebook criticism?' asks Robert Gehl (2013). He suggests that we should learn from, and be in conversation with, online criticism and then add our discipline-specific training in providing economic, historical, cultural and political context. But more so, by thinking of these linked, corporate practices as the *Facebook Digital Documentary*, I ask documentary studies (might we say 'old media studies'?) to speak to and learn from Internet studies ('new media studies') where political-economic analyses of neo-liberal labour practices and conditions necessarily speak to post-structuralist critiques of meaning production and post-identity political approaches to social justice activism. In this case, we are compelled to see and account for what has become increasingly obscured throughout user-generated Web 2.0: the ownership of these technologies has significant consequence given that users have virtually no control over the interface, and yet everything to do with the making, editing, criticism and distribution of digital documentaries: 'Google's empire is based in the link work that others put into their websites and documents', cautions Geert Lovink (2011, p. 15). Zuckerbergs' Digital Documentary of himself demonstrated the failings of old-fashioned big-media narratives (both fiction and documentary) in our time of digital storytelling and experience. Watching Zuckerberg and his articulate, powerful friends and colleagues with their various media machines artfully put their spin on the 'reality' of his unfolding life, business practices, and excesses, which we then spun for them some more, was ever more formally apt than Sorokin and Fincher turning his life into a generic boomer morality tale:

Neo-liberalism is understood as a particular mode of socioeconomic organization based around the primacy of the market – a process that is translatable into every single aspect of contemporary life ... The dubious dimensions of 'going Facebook' in the broad sense of the terms touched upon in the above seems to be registered and reflected ... as a certain transformation of the format or 'genre' of media practice traditionally linked to political activism. (Askanius 2012, p. 117)

II. The activist digital documentary

What are alternatives to Facebook that disentangle the social from the for-profit motive? ... we need to now consider that free communication

among users should not be entirely equated with positive transformation and liberation. (Langlois 2013, pp. 51, 54)

Scholars and makers of committed documentary and socially-networked activist media (myself included), have focused upon and then often celebrated the emancipatory potential of self- and community expression through committed, low-end media practices. Of course, historically this writing was about film and video because those were the formats that were most desirable to activists (although generally not easily available). Activists used these technologies to make alternative media that sat outside (although always in interaction with) dominant media. But the digital has altered both where and how activists work. In her book on YouTube and video activism, Askanius (2012, p. 95) understands this as a shift of place:

Within recent years, the mediated spaces of action and debate in political activism have to some extent shifted from taking place in an independent media environment in small-scale alternative media to increasingly occurring in the context of large corporately owned spaces such as YouTube, MySpace and Facebook.

We might also think about this as a change in form and format: 'Format denotes a whole range of decisions that affect the look, feel, experience and workings of a medium. It also names a set of rules according to which a technology can operate' (Stierne 2012, p. 6). Thus, where activist documentary practices used to happen in rarefied, separate, anti-establishment, and already potentially radical spaces of the alternative media and activist politics, and on difficult to access formats, they now also (or only?) occur in and through corporate forms. The *Facebook Digital Documentary* is a model of what we do and do not want to become given that, for better or worse, we are all now working within the same forms and format.

A growing body of digital media studies (some of it published in this anthology) attests to the empowering potentials for Internet-based documentary. For instance, Kate Nash, in her article that theorizes a different 'Facebook documentary', one that emerged from a page for 1970s hippies who hung out in India, writes:

social networks such as Facebook invite different forms of interaction and therefore raise distinct theoretical questions. In particular, *Gorilla Hippy Tribe* demonstrates the potential for the audience to engage creatively and communally with documentary. (2012, p. 1)

She explains how this particular Facebook documentary, made by and from users' past experiences and current re-visionings of earlier realist representations of their own histories, allowed for new kinds of content creation and social interaction with audience members playing a role in challenging claims and verifying the documentary's 'truth'. Similar studies also indicate that Facebook can become a tool for collaborative content creation, interactivity and affective interaction.

New online social environments offer exciting possibilities to change the nature of the practice itself. Facebook and other online social tools can enable arts collaborators the facilities and tools not just to do what they are already doing in a different way, but also to do new things in new ways. (Smith 2009, p. 189)

Similarly, my work as an AIDS activist, feminist, and queer documentarian and scholar since the mid-1980s considers community-based media praxis as central to social justice movements and individual and community change. In my *AIDS TV: Identity, Community and Alternative Media*, I waxed exuberantly about the political and personal affordances enabled by the VHS camcorder (Juhasz 1995, p. 2). This proselytising strain – about the personal and political power of mediamaking – has been a through-line in both my activist/academic/artistic career and across several sub-fields within documentary studies, most recently expressed in my work on online feminist spaces, and queer collective microbudget, communal, digital feature production (Juhasz 2012). I continue to cherish this emancipatory thrust within what Thomas Waugh (1984), at the academic field's beginning, labelled the 'committed documentary'. I respect those who research and produce within its enabling domain, and have no interest in contesting or undermining the lived and theoretical possibilities of any one activist's media making, wherever the home, whatever the medium. As I argued in *AIDS TV*, much of the activist value in low-end media making is just that: *in the making*. Identity and community construction happen in and through those lived processes.

However, lately (as I have begun to demonstrate), I have been forced to consider how, or even if, the rapidly changing structures of media ownership, and the ways that this alters access to the production and distribution of documentary – its new digital ecology – obstruct or perhaps supersede activists' attempts to contribute to our earlier projects of resistance. Looking carefully at both corporate digital documentaries and recent activist incursions on the Internet, I have been challenged

to reconsider, in particular, one of my earlier, more unabashed commitments – to self-expression as a radical end in and of itself. For most of the history of documentary, corporations and other elites owned the tools of media production and distribution. So, in the time of old documentary, the act and fact of a minoritarian or political self- and community representation was political; expression was the, or at least a, political purpose and function of activist documentary. In the digital environment, corporations own and then give away for free, these once hard-to-access tools for the production and dissemination of expressive resistance. In our time, many more of us speak, and represent, all the time. Also, now that corporations are people too, much of this self-expression online occurs in their names and voices, as recent work studying eBay has readily established (White 2012).

My current concerns stem from these new challenges to old ideals: if visibility was once a goal, what is its political function in a time of user-made image-oversaturation or, to put it differently, a time of hypervisibility for the once visually disenfranchised? If we don't seed this space are we not ceding control of our voice and its political intentions? But, once such self-visualisation and expression is widely available, how do we strategize our activism around the new forms, links, and actions that said expression takes up? And, most critically, what else might be needed beyond speaking and spreading our ideas through digital realist representations?

UpWorthy.com, a recent project of Eli Pariser, the former executive director of MoveOn.org, seems informative here in the bold nature of its political aims and the new forms to whence these are attached. Here is another digital documentary, but this time understood in overtly political terms as 'a new social media outfit with a mission', as an *activist digital documentary*. The site empowers its users to spread content as a 'worthy' action. UpWorthy locates the Internet's quick, funny, glib – but also 'political' – bytes of reality and encourages its users to spread them. It also performs, as does so much on the Internet, its reverse: a demonstration of why the activist documentary project *cannot* happen using social media alone. First of all, social media's emphasis on both large masses of material and their speedy movement, runs counter to many of the core goals of activism: where careful consideration, the long haul, and intentional communities are definitive. The distracted practices that organise so much of our contemporary mediated existence, be they on the Internet or television, disallow the commitments of time, careful thinking, and community interaction that best suit activism. Second, moving bits of others' 'meaning' does not a politics

make. Rather, this activity might be better understood as protopolitical: a step but not a complete act, a connection but not a sequence. 'In the proliferating universe of fast media, interpretation occurs according to spirals of associations and connections without signification, and no longer according to sequential lines' (Dean 2010a, p. 182).

The sequential line is, of course, another way to name the traditional function of the edit (which is made up of cuts), a way to move media that is quite different from the link or the copy:

The additive dimensions of communication for its own sake designates an excess. This excess isn't a new meaning or perspective. It doesn't refer to a new content. It is rather the intensity accrued from repetition, the excitement or thrill of more. (Dean 2010a, p. 116)

UpWorthy, built as it is to manage all of this *more*, demonstrates a third pitfall for Internet Digital Documentary Activism: its formal imperative to recursive, regressive loops into and about itself, and one's self. While this may be useful if you are Mark Zuckerberg, the man who owns Facebook, it is not quite so powerful, or even efficacious if you are only one of a billion Facebook users. Our self-expression, our blips of cherished or even 'worthy' meaning, do not quite add up: in part this is a matter of scale, and also of attention, but mostly of intention, and, finally, form.

As capital seeds documentaries, the rest of us post, pass on, and tweet away, unable to orchestrate anything close to a 100 million dollar digital documentary from our little bleeps of meaning. Jaron Lanier (2010, p. 21) is decidedly against any such 'anonymized fragments of creativity as products'. He continues: 'It is true that using these tools, individuals can author books or blogs or whatever, but people are encouraged by the economics of free content, crowd dynamics, and large aggregators to serve up fragments instead of considered whole expressions or arguments' (p. 47). At last free to speak, we do so in innumerable losable *snippets*. I use this word with a nod to John Grierson, our 'father of documentary', who rakishly called most of the documentary movie footage of his time, just a speedy *snip-snap* of some utterly unimportant ceremony (1966, p. 145).

In our time, Lanier calls these same speedy snip-snaps of our life and world's 'natural material', a kind of 'second-order expression' that responds to or remakes the more total and complex 'first-order expression' from whence it derives. Our snip-snaps are expression all dressed up with nowhere to go but more:

First order expressions is when someone presents a whole, a work that integrates its own worldview and aesthetic ... Second-order expression is made of fragmentary reactions to first-order expression. (Lanier 2010, p. 122)

'React and forward', exhorts Jodi Dean, 'but don't by any means think' (2010, p. 3). And I must agree that I do leave Twitter feeling like none of my fragments, or yours for that matter, ever do exactly *add up*. If anything, each one takes a little bit more from me – or byte. Certainly they speak evidence of ourselves and our world, and even our actual thoughts about that world and its representations, just not in a way that is complete: the fact of our isolated expression is small. Lanier and Dean think that the construction of deep, big, total, final, full, complex objects is one solution, and I agree that is certainly one possible (if retro) remedy: write things like this scholarly article for this book, or make traditional long form documentaries. 'It's like today we can have and share insights, but these insights must add up to something like a theory that might aid us in understanding, critically confronting, and politically restructuring the present' (Dean 2010a, p. 2).

However, complexity of meaning can come through artful production, or also through creative editing, as any documentarian knows. Grierson (1966, p. 145) also thought about the accumulating mediated fragments from his world: 'They all represent different qualities of observation, different intentions in observation, and, of course, very different powers and ambitions at the stage of organizing material. I propose, therefore, after a brief word on the lower categories, to use the documentary description exclusively of the higher.' Lowly bits of evidence – like our tweets, reposts, thumbs up, photographs, and cat gifs – do not become a *digital documentary*, do not have enough meaning – until they are edited by a documentarian, and thereby organised into an argument; until they are aestheticized by being made into art.

We might look to storify.com as a tool that promises to do just that as its tagline attests: 'Don't get lost in the noise. Discover the voices worth sharing.' Using this easily accessible digital tool, any author can let an algorithm compose a longer and larger story from the endless bytes of self-expression scattered across the Internet. 'Storify users tell stories by collecting updates from social networks, amplifying the voices that matter to create a new story format that is interactive, dynamic and social'. But are these collections of strung-together bits 'art'? Are they the *digital documentaries* of whence I speak? Judi Dean doesn't buy it. She suggests that breezy linking is itself a form of 'secondary orality': aggregative,

repetitive, conservative, polarised, and tending to be experiential or empathetic rather than analytical, just as are the snip-snaps from which it works (Dean 2010a, p. 49). Linking, unlike editing, creates associations without depth. 'This tendency to remain on the surface, touch a topic, point to an article without ever giving a proper opinion about it apart from it being worth mentioning, is widespread' (Lovink 2007, p. 30).

Excessive expression can no longer be the political goal not just because the corporations that build, own, dominate, and seed the Internet can do it better and bigger than us, but because the Internet and its titans allow us to see what might have always been true: by attending to the fact of documentary expression (through image-making or editing), the necessarily linked commitments to a larger intention, its communal execution, and an understood theory, have often been obscured. We might call this entire amalgam – of the form and the extra-textual realities of the committed documentary – the *art of the digital documentary*.

III. The art of the activist digital documentary

Any judgment on the political potential of the Internet, then, is tied not only to its much vaunted capacity to allow decentralized access to information but also to the question of who uses the Internet and how. (Terranova and Donovan 2013, p. 340)

Who makes and uses the *Digital Documentary* and how? Well, I do, and you do, of course. Franco Berardi (2009) explains how our 'labour as artists and intellectuals in this time of 'Semio-capitalism' is 'a part of the autonomous process of capital' (Berardi 2009, p. 21) because it is now located on the Internet and occurs every time we type. We are all complicit to the needs of capital when we produce actuality objects online without a further plan of action. Clearly, such writing, tweeting, or image-making can be a profoundly important first documentary step, just as its editing is a second. However, the *activist digital documentary* cannot stop there, in reality-based online expression. Yes, evidentiary things must be made within an activist framework and then aggregated with activist montage practices. However, most critically, these projects must then be used in a political way. Thus, our greatest challenge for the *activist digital documentary* will prove to be how to generate political practices from our artfully placed and digitally linked evidence. Given that our production and editing of online digital material is also, already, servicing the needs (and documentaries) of large corporations, how do we rethink or relink this (activist) digital documentary labour?

As just one sorry example, let's take a peek at my Facebook page (documentary?). During the summer of 2012, there was a mad rush – via reposting, liking, tweeting – that zipped one particular blog post across my social media spectrum, again and again. 'On Leaving Academia', by Associate Professor of Computer Science Terran Lane (2012), seemed to be in my everywhere for several days, carefully, eloquently, and cogently spelling out, in leftist terms, how the neo-liberalisation of academia had, finally, made the University of New Mexico an inhospitable place for him to work:

As almost everybody knows at this point, I have resigned my position at the University of New Mexico. Effective this July, I am working for Google, in their Cambridge (MA) offices. Countless people, from my friends to my (former) dean have asked 'Why? Why give up an excellent [some say 'cushy'] tenured faculty position for the grind of corporate life?' Honestly, the reasons are myriad and complex, and some of them are purely personal. But I wanted to lay out some of them that speak to larger trends at UNM, in New Mexico, in academia, and in the US in general. I haven't made this move lightly, and I think it's an important cautionary note to make: the factors that have made academia less appealing to me recently will also impact other professors. I'm concerned that the US – one of the innovation powerhouses of the world – will hurt its own future considerably if we continue to make educational professions unappealing.

While Lane goes on to explain that changes in academia have lessened his/our opportunities to make a difference, or manage workload and family/life balance because this is a time of increasing authority and hyper-specialization, decreasing autonomy, poor compensation, and a mass production of education, he turns none of this critical gaze on the corporation, Google, to whither he flees. And, let's face it, *they* didn't seed the *Google Digital Documentary* that stitched hitherto-unknown computer scientist Terran Lane to my Facebook, then to my Wordpress blog, and via me, to many other sites that I frequent, like this page in this book: *Lane and I did*. If we celebrate or even criticise Google inside of itself, is this different from criticising the public-relations effort that is the *Facebook Digital Documentary*? Aren't corporations still the enemy, using us to make their documentaries? Of course they are! With Lane as my co-captain, I watched and then participated as Google gave us the digital forms from whence we wrote and made their leftist documentary about our work. In her writing on communicative capitalism, Dean

explains: 'Specific or singular acts of resistance, statements of opinion, or instances of transgression are not political in and of themselves. Rather, they have to be politicized, that is, articulated together with other struggles, resistances, and ideals in the course or context of opposition to a shared enemy or opponent' (2010b, p. 106).

Singular acts need be made, edited, and then politicised, by linking to other histories, communities and practices both on and off the Internet. That means two things: we need to continue to be critical of the Internet inside the Internet, and we also need to *leave it* by linking (or editing) out to the world and other activists and actions and thereby into realms of behaviour, interaction, and feelings that are not ownable. Activist digital documentarians need to create linked projects of seeding, editing, and then also secession. It is in the leaving that our activist documentary begins. Luckily, we won't be the only deserters:

Facebook quitters have produced a remarkable set of critical interrogations of Facebook's worst qualities: its role in reshaping how we think about privacy and sharing our data, its commodification of user activity and emotion, its reduction of life to likes and friending, its incessant and bizarrely addictive noise, and the fact that is just not cool anymore. Moreover, by writing about the decisions to opt out, they are helping to mitigate against the compelling power of the social network that seemingly everyone is on. That is to say by writing about their choice, they help preserve and extend alternative spaces of discourse outside of Facebook. (Gehl 2013, p. 22)

Another current example of departure can be found in the Occupy movement's attempts to model a contemporary activism that attends to lived experience and embodied actions while also judiciously seeding the mediated bits that these actions produce into social media. They remind us that a critical lesson for activist digital documentary work is that some of it must fall *outside representation*:

In a way, it was these myriad smaller, undocumented conversations among new acquaintances where the Occupy movement realized its democratic potential. That is, the occupation of Zuccotti Park enabled not only a working space for the movement to conduct its official business, nor only a living space for those who chose (or were forced by circumstance) to reside in the park. Rather, the occupation's appropriation of physical space enabled the kind of politics imagined by Arendt – a space where people approached one another

as equals, recognized one another's distinct humanity and common interest, and drew up plans to act upon that interest. (Bauer 2012)

Learning from Occupy, I am suggesting that for a *digital documentary* to also be *activist* it must participate in an artful leaving of the digital so as to allow the body to also engage in a place beyond representation. This is not to say that the Internet is not a site for our *digital documentaries*, but only when linked, not to another kitty, but to a place, a person, a demand and an ethical practice of being together.

While it has never been clear how to judge the effectiveness of any documentary, let alone 'activist' documentaries, I am noting that my (our?) barometer has changed. As Jane Gaines work on more traditional documentary forms (1999, p. 88) cautions, it was never clear that activist documentaries catalysed 'activism' as much as they modelled a 'political mimesis': 'a vision of what activists look and feels like. By both seeding realist representations and then seceding from representation, by being silent online (and even elsewhere) while at the same time speaking with our bodies, we can make the activist digital documentaries that we might most need now. And this, it turns out, is the special domain of activist art, and documentaries, within the digital – to 'body back' as Gaines puts it – to model in documentary a new way of being in the digital/real world (what Beth Coleman, 2012, calls 'x-reality') in a linked and larger project of communally produced, carefully theorised, artfully communicated world-changing:

This call for a shared right to silence is thus made because it is silence that is needed to enable human voices to be heard again ... One example of this kind of engagement – and one that shows how silence may be suggestive and how it may operate to produce convivial relations – are the communication tactics of some within the Occupy movement. Particularly the gestural commentaries those listening provide in supplement – rather than interrupt – those speaking. (Bassett 2013, pp. 153–154)

The art of activist digital documentaries will be in the staying, the using and the leaving, through the voices we have wanted and gained, and then through shared silences where things are heard and felt and said without being recorded.

Notes

1. See my large body of activist documentaries: <http://pzacad.pitzer.edu/~ajuhasz>

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