Kristen Daly kmd85@columbia.edu
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Radical Potential: How New Technology and Increased Digital Literacy Is Changing Communication with Moving Images

In his 1969 essay, "For an Imperfect Cinema," Cuban filmmaker Julio Garcia Espinosa

calls for an abolition of elites in the art of filmmaking. He anticipates a time when

filmmaking will become a "popular art" rather than a "mass art," an art created *by* the

masses not by the few *for* the masses. He says that scientists, sociologists, physicians and

economists should make films, not elite filmmakers and he looks toward a future where

the masses will take over what he calls "the most elite of contemporary arts." [1] He

declares that Imperfect Cinema must "show the process which generates the problems. It

is thus the opposite of a cinema principally dedicated to celebrating results, the opposite

of a self-sufficient and contemplative cinema . . .Imperfect cinema is no longer interested

in quality or technique. It can be created equally well with a Mitchell or with an 8mm

camera, in a studio or in a guerrilla camp in the middle of a jungle." [2]

Filmmaking has been one of the most expensive art forms. Traditional barriers to

entry and hierarchies are crumbling with falling costs and a growing literacy in rich

media. Cinema has changed from an economy of scarcity to one of ubiquity. The

ubiquity and accessibility has changed how people use moving images. From a form of

ritual entertainment and art, moving images are increasing becoming a means for

interactive communication and means of negotiating power. In this paper, I will present

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[1] Julio Garcia Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," in *Film and Theory : An Anthology*, ed. Toby Miller (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

[2] Ibid., 296.

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some examples of who is making movies, what they are making and for what purposes in order to demonstrate how the potential for moving image communication is changing.

Widespread digital media literacy and the easy distribution of web video through the Internet have made us all potential creators. On the one hand, as Espinosa proclaims this universal participation may unleash our "individual creative potential." He says, "Art will not disappear into nothingness; it will disappear into everything."[3] The other side of this revolutionary coin is Jean Baudrillard who warned of the immersive and paralyzing effects of ubiquitous new media. Gilles Deleuze in *Cinema* 2 describes the agent become spectator in postwar European cinema, but Baudrillard maintains that the current digital image culture has taken us beyond the spectator.[4] He writes, "It is no longer the contagion of the spectacle which alters reality, it is the contagion of the virtual which obliterates the spectacle. . . . We are becoming not alienated, passive spectators, but interactive extras, the meek freeze-dried extras in this immense reality show."[5] As cinema has lost its aura, the rest of the world seems to take it on and we become obsessed with watching each other throw up, have sex and even die as video asymptotes to live ubiquity.[6] Is there meaning being made and communication happening or are viewers simply participating in interactive surveillance? Have we entered a period of cinematic aliteracy?

[3] Ibid., 297.

[4] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2 the Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

[5] Jean Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, trans. Chris Turner (London ; New York: Verso, 2002), 153.

[6] "Surveillance cameras, the last bastion of pure cinematic event, demonstrate the banality of such results." Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), 51. Sarah Boxer, "Watch Me Do This and That Online: In the Vlogosphere, 'Mundane Is the New Punk'," *The New York Times*, July 25, 2005.

On Espinosa's side, I will look at the growth of rich media literacy and how this has allowed new voices to enter the cultural conversation. I will provide examples of activists standing up for their rights against the established powers and the individual expressions of people and populations who had no access to this means previous to digital technologies, providing an immediacy and intimacy which is fundamentally new. With no barriers to entry we find not only physicians and sociologists sharing their vision with moving images, but terrorists and thugs as well. As the flow of moving image communication becomes uncontrolled, the promise of new technology for globalized democratization can empower not only people standing up for their human rights through peaceful means but also exposes us to other empowered individuals and groups who perhaps want to show us a world of globalization and interconnection, which we might prefer to deny.
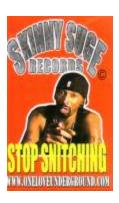
And in the spirit of Baudrillard, I will examine how the immediacy and viscerality of web video can lead to decontextualization and indeterminability. In many ways, web video embodies and best embraces all the characteristics of cinema as a new media and enacts the radical potential. Web video is easily exploited across multiple media platforms and distributed virally -- random and non-hierarchical. Web video *is* the imperfect cinema. It is a popular art, "the opposite of a self-sufficient and contemplative cinema," it is created by the masses and is "no longer interested in quality or technique." [7] Web video acts as a form of interactive communication, radically different from the ritual of traditional cinema.

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[7] Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema."

Amateur Filmmakers, Rich Media Literacy, and Power Negotiations

The Accidental Auteur

Rodney Bethea is an entrepreneur in West Baltimore, a severely underprivileged

neighborhood. He has a clothing line that he sells out of his barbershop called One Love

Underground. Bethea came up with the idea to invite local hip-hop artists to come to the

store and perform in the clothes and he would make DVDs to give away as a marketing

device.[8] These "One Love Freestyle" hip-hop battle sessions became extremely popular

and customers were coming into the store specifically to buy the DVDs. Bethea says, no

one had done anything like that locally before.

He decided, based on the success of these DVDs, to make a documentary. He

says he wanted to show people what his city is really like in a way that is not portrayed in

the media and as he says to "give people the chance to scream." He got local celebrity

rap star Skinny Suge to be the on-camera talent and went around all the local

neighborhoods capturing whatever happened. Bethea's documentary

would probably have been a local hit except that current NBA

basketball star Carmello Anthony happened to be visiting friends in

Baltimore at the time and appears onscreen in conjunction with a long

rant by Skinny Suge about what should happen to snitches and how he

"hopes they get AIDS in their mouth." (click picture for link) The

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[8] Some of Bethea's friends had studied filmmaking at local Towson University. Information and quotes from a phone interview, May 29, 2007 and informal store visit May 26, 2007.

controversy over the movie, called *Stop Snitchin'*, created a sensation, not only locally,

but around the country.[9]

Without any sort of formal distribution, Bethea's movies travel through the well-established distribution infrastructure for underground music and pirate videos. Gregory Kane, a local Baltimore journalist, interviewed a number of students from the nearby Southwestern High School, the majority of whom had seen *Stop Snitchin'* and mentioned that this is the type of videos they primarily watch.[10] According to Bethea, the notoriety of this movie has provided him a number of opportunities and in fall of 2007 he said he had three projects in production. In winter 2008, he came out with a *Stop Snitchin' 2* DVD.[11] Bethea thinks of himself as more of an entrepreneur than an artist. He uses these movies to express the views and the lifestyle of the inner city, but also to market his store, himself and, in the future, other products. And yet, almost by accident, Bethea's movies have forced new voices into the political conversation. The State's Attorney Patricia C. Jessamy distributed 500 copies of *Stop Snitchin'* to elected officials and residents to garner support for stronger anti-intimidation legislation.[12]

D.N. Rodowick, in considering the political philosophy of Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* writes, "Power in this sense has a special relation to the audiovisuality of contemporary culture, that is how our culture is defined by its particular

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[9] Skinny Suge's Diatribe http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWSsQ-CzSEM&mode=related&search= , Carmelo Anthony and friends http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnaoVV46hk4&mode=related&search=, accessed May 14, 2007.

[10] Gregory Kane, "'Stop Snitching' Dvd Puts Homegrown Nba Star in Verbal Crossfire," *blackamericaweb.com*, December 6, 2004.

[11] *Stop Snitchin'2* trailer: http://www.youtube.com/user/urlymedia, accessed November 25, 2007.

[12] Julie Bykowicz, "Thug Life -- the Sequel "Stop Snitching 2" Replicates Message," *The Sun*, December 23, 2007.

stratifications of the space of visibility with that of utterability. . . . Power organizes the horizons of seeing and the limits of saying."[13] In our contemporary culture of increasing rich media ubiquity, power relations are being renegotiated by the new media literacy. The police made a response film to *Stop Snitchin'* called *Keep Talking*. The police film shows clips of *Stop Snitchin'* featuring gang members brandishing guns and bragging incriminating information and then cuts to the police arresting that person. The movie ends with the police thanking them for making the film and saying that they are watching.[14] Two city police officers mentioned in *Stop Snitchin'* were also investigated and convicted of corruption.

The police have been experimenting with posting videos, either surveillance videos of suspects, or sketches with other evidence on YouTube to get responses with some success.[15] A group called Copwatch, originally founded in Berkeley, California but now throughout the country enables people to report on and send in video of police brutality.[16] Copwatch LA members carry police scanners and go to locations with video cameras.[17] This sort of audio-visual dialogue between power groups is in its infancy. *New York Times* reporter Elizabeth Van Ness cites *Stop Snithcin'* as "perhaps only the

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[13] David Norman Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, *Post-Contemporary Interventions* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 197.

[14] http://www.ifilm.com/video/2846376, accessed April 24, 2007.

[15] Canadian police in 2007 posted a surveillance video of a suspect of a stabbing death at a hip hop concert on YouTube and in two weeks got 17,000 views and the suspect surrendered. The Toronto Police Crime Stoppers Unit posts one video a week with an appeal for information on YouTube. Tina Pittaway, "America's Most Wanted Home Videos," *Wired*, May 2007. www.222tips.com, accessed April 8, 2009.

[16] www.copwatch.org, accessed July 24, 2007.

[17] http://www.copwatchla.org/, accessed April 1, 2009.

most extreme face of a complex sort of post-literacy in which cinematic visuals and filmic narrative have become commonplace."[18]

Rich Media Literacy

Increasingly, rich media literacy is being considered a necessary skill. Elizabeth Daley, dean of the School of Cinematic Arts at the University of Southern California, the nation's oldest film school, compares the ability to use new media with literacy when she says, "The greatest digital divide is between those who can read and write with media and those who can't."[19] The Ghetto Film School was founded in June of 2000 by former social worker Joe Hall in the Bronx to teach high-school-age students moviemaking skills. The students learn how to shoot and edit and also work with outside companies to shoot practical videos like corporate and instructional videos. As Hall explains, the school works with the skills of expression that the students already possess.[20] Next year the Ghetto Film School will run an academically selective public high school in New York City called The Cinema School in the Bronx — the first high school in New York City to use cinema studies, film and video production throughout all the regular subjects. The Independent Film Channel [IFC] has developed a school curriculum that high school English teachers around the country use to incorporate movie analysis and video production into their lessons.[21] Educators are increasingly placing importance on the ability of students to interpret and communicate with a world of ubiquitous rich media.

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[18] Elizabeth Van Ness, "Is a Cinema Studies Degree the New M.B.A.?," *The New York Times*, March 6, 2005 2005.

[19] Ibid.

[20] www.ghettofilm.org, accessed July 24, 2007.

[21] http://www3.ifctv.com/filmschool/index.htm, accessed April 8, 2009.

Jessica Rambo, a seventh-grade English Language Arts teacher at M.S. 584 in

Brooklyn with no filmmaking background, noticed that her students were preoccupied

with moving image culture from television and movies and decided to start an after-

school program that would enable the students to create short fiction movies from script

to screen. She worked with the students over the course of the school year, resulting in

four short films that premiered at the Brooklyn Art Museum to an audience of family and

friends on June 1, 2007. [22] As she says:

> I think it's so important that these children see themselves not just in one light.
> We don't have to discuss how black children of low-income communities are
> sometimes portrayed in the media. This project was meant to be an interjection
> into that ongoing visual conversation. This project helped to showcase the beauty,
> joy, and brilliance that exists within these communities, but is not often
> displayed. [23]

Thus, for Rambo, teaching her students audiovisual skills of expression is vital to getting

them into the societal conversation. The ability to use video is being seen as a

development objective. Filmmaking courses for young people are being created in Haiti,

the Dominican Republic, Sierra Leone, Kenyan slums and refugee camps. [24] These are a

few examples of the potential for Espinosa's revolution to come to fruition as the amateur

becomes literate in audiovisual expression and can enter into the discourse and power

structures.

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[22] The students' movies dealt with subjects close to them and used language and communication from their lives. "Mad Black" by Nyima DeJesus told the story of a girl who is consistently mocked for her dark skin. She tries unsuccessfully to bleach her skin with a dangerous cream, but in the end learns that she need not judge herself by her shade of color.

[23] Email correspondence July 25, 2007.

[24] http://www.festivalfilmjakmel.com/, http://www.oneraceglobalfilmfoundation.org/, www.weowntv.org, http://www.barefootworkshops.org/, http://slumtv.subvideo.tv/, and http://filmaid.org/what/programs.shtml, accessed March 28, 2009.

Activism and Terrorism

Activism

Digital video is increasingly used in advocacy. WITNESS is a human rights video advocacy non-profit founded by Peter Gabriel in 1992 in the wake of the Rodney King beating. That footage and the controversy it sparked brought to the forefront amateur video technology and its potential for human rights work. Gabriel realized that "Cheap and readily available technology meant that the victims of crimes, both here and abroad, could document their plight through compelling images."[25] At the time that WITNESS was founded, digital movie cameras were just reaching a cost threshold where the organization was able to give cameras and training to their partner groups for use in documenting human rights abuses for national advocacy as well as international exposure on the WITNESS website.[26]

Until 2002, staff in New York did the editing and post-production for the videos thus maintaining a level of central control over content, but the declining costs of editing software and economically feasible yet powerful computers have enabled them to also distribute computers with editing equipment and provide training so that the whole moving image language is in the hands of the partner groups around the world. Distribution too has become much more accessible with the Internet. The power to communicate with moving images has moved from WITNESS headquarters in New York out to the peripheries to their partners in Burma, Guatemala, Afghanistan and elsewhere

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[25] Elizabeth Angell, "Witness to Change: Peter Gabriel's Organization Harnesses the Power of Putting Human Rights Coverage on Film," *the independent*, January-February 2006.

[26] www.witness.org, accessed March 30, 2009.

around the world. This is a powerful new tool for advocacy as moving image literacy becomes global.

In Egypt, a popular blogger, Wael Abbas, posted cell phone video of torture performed on citizens in Egyptian police stations.[27] This has brought about a number of investigations and in at least one case, a police officer went to jail for the torture of a microbus driver, which was caught on video. Although local and international groups like Amnesty International have long known and publicized that the Egyptian police employ torture, it was not until the video emerged that action was taken.

In 2007 in Morocco, a series of videos called "Western Sahara Intifada" were posted on YouTube, which question and criticize the government's treatment of the people of the Western Sahara. The YouTube website mysteriously went down in Morocco prompting international media attention. Recent video out of Zimbabwe prisons has demonstrated incontrovertible evidence of the inhumane conditions and the skeletal prisoners prompting international attention after years of failed attempts by former prisoners and their families to bring these conditions to light.[28]

These amateur filmmakers around the world are fulfilling the radical potential of digital technologies as the camera asymptotes toward omnipresence and where distribution is viral and electronic boundaries are porous. This has both a positive and negative aspect in that activists are empowered, but on the flip side terrorists are as well. The flow of moving image communication becomes uncontrolled.

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[27]http://misrdigital.blogspirit.com/archive/2007/06/06/%D9%85%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AC%D8%A3%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D8%AC%D9%84%D8%B3%D8%A9-%D9%85%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%83%D9%85%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%87.html, accessed March 30, 2009.

[28] Producer Godknows Zare secretly made contact with prison guards and instructed them on how to take footage. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zo1BfLNHZWQ&NR=1, accessed April 8, 2009.

Terrorist Auteur

In a creepy development seemingly straight out of a J.G. Ballard story, we now have the terrorist as auteur.[29] These videos are readily available both on the Internet and on DVD in markets and stalls in the Middle East. One can see similarities between the broadcast news background banners and the terrorist productions with pop-up graphics and fluttering flags in the background. (Click to connect to video) Philip Kennicott of the *Washington Post,* in reference to the June 4, 2007 insurgent video featuring two missing soldiers' ID cards and effects, argues that these videos were demonstrating an "advance of professionalism" in the "level of tone, drama and pacing."[30] Thus what was a matter of just recording and showing has become increasingly a language and style of cinema, better able to communicate with rich media literate audiences and better able to represent the goals of the filmmakers and their organizations.

In the feature movie *Paradise Now* (2005), shot in Palestine, one of the would-be martyrs is dressed and posed with a machine gun carefully for his final video statement. He gives a terribly moving goodbye speech, only to find out that the camera had a glitch and he must start over -- Take II. By the time they restart the observers are busy eating lunch and he stops his message to give his mother some last shopping advice. The scene emphasizes the unexceptional nature of this video use. Later in the movie, we see that

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[29] Michael Ignatieff, "The Terrorist as Auteur," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 14, 2004 2004.

[30] Philip Kennicott, "Iraq Militant's Skillful Video Colors Perception of the Enemy," *Washington Post*, June 5, 2007. http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7908562920876613828&q=insurgent+video+of+captured+u.s.+soldiers&total=49&start=0&num=10&so=0&type=search&plindex=2, accessed July 24, 2007.

video shops and stalls in the market sell these tapes as well as the tapes of the execution of Palestinian traitors, which are even more in demand and, as a slap in the face to the soon-to-be martyrs, are even more expensive.

The SITE Institute used to track many of the jihadist websites. A perusal of the site on April 15, 2007 brought up a video of Saddam Hussein's dead body in an ambulance, his head protruding clearly out of the open top of the body bag; the video will of a grandmother Hamas suicide bomber; and an oddly beautiful night bombing of an ammunition facility in Baghdad.[31] This could not be farther from the "cosmic humanism" that Carey and John J. Quirk quote Marshal McLuhan as saying what the "electronic age" would bring.[32] More like the electronic sublime of a cosmic *anti*-humanism. In response to the leak of the Abu Ghraib photos came a string of well-publicized beheading videos. Israel, in late 2006, declassified some of their military footage of the summer war in Lebanon. They did so to counter accusations that they had purposefully targeted civilians. The footage shows Hezbollah fighters acting out of and hiding in civilian areas, which then explode when bombed by Israeli planes.[33] There is even footage literally transmitted by missiles on their way to the targets – bomb as auteur. So the moving image war begins in earnest and parallels the high-tech *and* low-tech guerrilla technology of contemporary warfare.

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[31] www.siteinstitute.org, accessed April 15, 2007.

[32] James W. and John J. Quirk Carey, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution " in *Communication as Culture : Essays on Media and Society*, *Media and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 116.

[33] http://video.on.nytimes.com/index.jsp?fr_story=bd59f99c8db08f027497ecc61168970d6166a9d8, accessed May 14, 2007.

Viscerality, Immediacy and Decontextualization

Web Video

Web video enacts a new form of moving image communication, with the democratization of production, low barriers to entry and the interactive, unfettered nature of Internet distribution and exhibition. Most web videos tend to be non-narrative. The appeal is often the thrill of going where one has not seen before, whether that be a teenage girl's bedroom or an Iraq humvee, but unlike the thrill of early cinema, an added factor is that the viewer can interact with these videos and be a part of a new form of narrative and community. The amateur nature, as Espinosa predicted, allows a more visceral exposure to reality.

The Iraq War provides an interesting example as American soldiers have been taking video and posting it online almost real time. As James Poniewozik of *Time* puts it about many of the videos created by American soldiers in Iraq, "the poor composition, lighting and sound of these videos conveys the confusion of war better than traditional composition."[34] To a much smaller extent, due to access to cameras and the Internet, Iraqis too have been posting video. A popular blog by Salam Pax (his blogging name) got so much attention that in 2003 the BBC gave him the equipment to produce a series of video blog entries [vlogs] to be shown on the BBC online.[35] His videos can also be seen on his blog and at Journeyman Pictures, which distributes video news and documentaries from around the world online.[36]

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[34] James Poniewozik, "The Beast with a Billion Eyes," *Time*, December 26, 2006-January 1, 2007.

[35] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/newsnight/3733464.stm#Video accessed July 17, 2006. See also http://riverbendblog.blogspot.com/ accessed July 17, 2006.

[36] http://justzipit.blogspot.com, / http://www.journeyman.tv/?lid=56445, accessed May 14, 2007.

Click on Picture to Launch Video

The website aliveinbaghdad.org publishes one short video a week made by an Iraqi civilian. These videos feature real life under occupation as it happens from the Iraqi point of view featuring funerals, evidence of torture, health issues and home life.[37] The immediacy and accessibility and lack of traditional editorial control of these videos in a time of war are completely new and allows for a multi-directional conversation of the experience of war.

At the same time, the very immediacy of many web videos decontextualizes them. There is often no caption or reception structure (i.e. organizational website) to tell viewers where these videos are from or how they should be received. Baudrillard has explored the fundamental uncertainty of truth in real time. He writes, "Information long ago broke through the truth barrier and moved into the hyperspace where things are neither true nor false, since everything in the realm of information depends on instantaneous credibility. . . . We no longer have any standards of truth or objectivity, but a scale of probability."[38] Moving images, as web video are participating in this situation of uncertain real-time information. With mobile technology these videos become

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[37] http://aliveinbaghdad.org/, accessed May 17, 2007.

[38] Baudrillard, *Screened Out*, 86.

increasingly immediate and decontextualized. The images are transmitted and delivered au hazard — reaching us by uncontrolled accident, virally and immediately.

In the WITNESS 2006 year-end report, they give a timeline of what they consider major events in new video technology. They listed at the time the most recent development as the cellular phone camera reports from the London bombings in 2005, which were sent in from passengers underground to the BBC. The BBC has since set up a dedicated email address for the receipt of video recorded via cell phones. In 2007, WITNESS launched a Human Rights Video Hub.[39] Here users can immediately upload human rights violations video that they have documented. Going to the site is a very disorienting experience. The videos are generally poor quality and, like most web videos, without clear captions as to what you are watching where or when, only the web tag of the uploader places the video. In one video accessed in January 2007 on the pilot site, I saw people running, yelling in Spanish, shots fired and the cameraman fallen to the ground. This was the last video of Brad Will, an Indymedia reporter who was killed in Mexico in October 2007. On the one hand this is a much more visceral and immediate experience than WITNESS's carefully crafted videos, but on the other hand is somewhat paralyzing in its confusing lack of context. The very digital architecture and infrastructure, which affords us an almost unintended and unavoidable access to these moving images, also changes their message or the meaning they are capable of as they come to us virally and decontextualized.

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[39] http://globalvoicesonline.org/-/human-rights-video/, accessed January 15, 2007.

Live video

Although the main "specter of disaster"[40] with web video has involved snuff and porn

videos, some might find cause for worry in a society whose primary cultural form is

videos of people singing in their bedrooms and dogs sleep-running into walls.[41] The

question becomes, as moving images have become a means of communication rather than

ritual, what are we communicating and is it meaningful? Is there an important difference

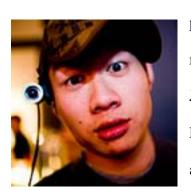surveillance and communication or as Friedrich Kittler says the *use* of media versus

literacy? [42]

With 3G cell phone networks and increasingly widespread wifi, people can create

and share video live. A   popular web craze is

"lifecasting" of which the   most well-known early adapters

in spring of 2007 was   Justin.tv. Justin Kan, then a

23-year-old in San   Francisco, was webcasting his

life live, twenty-four hours   a day. He wore a camera on his

hat and streamed from EVDO cards in his backpack that used cellphone networks. [43]

Viewers could log in and participate in Justin's life live through instant message chats.

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[40] Carey, "The Mythos of the Electronic Revolution ", 124.

[41] In the *Time Magazine* issue featuring the 2006 Person of the Year with a mirror on the front declaring, "The Person of the Year. You." Steve Johnson writes that for many observers it is, "as though the history of electronic media turned out to be one long battle between Edward R. Murrow and *America's Funniest Home Videos*, and *Home Videos* won. Steven Johnson, *Everything Bad Is Good for You : How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2005).

[42]"Total *use* of media instead of total literacy: sound film and video cameras as mass entertainment liquidate the real event." Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, *Writing Science* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 133.

[43] Evolution-Data Optimized or Evolution-Data only, is a wireless radio broadband data standard adopted by many CDMA mobile phone service providers in United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia, Russia, Brazil, and Australia. It is typically used to provide "broadband-speed" Internet access to mobile telephone subscribers. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evdo, accessed May 14, 2007.

Now Justin.tv is one of the larger live webcasters with many thousands of producers broadcasting their day-to-day lives live each on their own channel.[44]

And yet in contrast with this example of the youthful zest to share his life, is the example of the British father-of-two, Kevin Whitrick, who hung himself "live" on an Internet video chatroom PalTalk in March 2007 in front of his computer webcam. Chatroom patrons teased Whitrick, telling him to go ahead and kill himself. Others called the police when they saw what was occurring but were too late. In November 2009, 19-year-old Abraham Biggs Jr. in Florida published a suicide plan on a website bodybuilder.com and then proceeded to take a cocktail of drugs and died live on Justin.tv. Viewers commented with both "LOL"s and "OMG"s until finally, twelve hours later, the police arrived having been sent by the site moderator who had been alerted by concerned viewers.[45]

Whittrick's and Biggs' suicides live online can perhaps be read as desperate efforts to create new rituals in a world where metaphor and symbolism have disintegrated into immediacy and information. By viewing and perhaps more importantly by interacting, however casually and in passing, viewers become implicated in these lives to which they previously had no relation. When are we supposed to stop watching and act? Increasingly, life and death happen in constant random surveillance, we cannot seem to turn the camera off.

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[44] Also popular are: stickam.com, ustream.tv, mogulus.com, operator11.com, kyte.tv, and pocketcaster which allows you to livecast from any 3G cellphone.

[45] LOL is "Laugh out loud." OMG is "Oh my God!"

Action and Implication

Deleuze in <u>Cinema 2: the Time-Image</u> defined the new optical and sound situation of neo-realism where "the character does not act without seeing himself acting, complicit viewer of the role he himself is playing."[46] This, he says, makes the distinctions between the banal and the extreme, the subjective and objective lose their value and even validity.[47] In this case, he says, "We run into a principle of indeterminability, of indiscernability: we no longer know what is imaginary or real, physical or mental, in the situation, not because they are confused, but because we do not have to know and there is no longer any place from which to ask."[48]

An Iraqi artist living in the United States confronted these questions of watching, acting and responsibility. In 2007 he conducted a live experiment of Paul Virilio's dictum that technology has created a situation where we can not only *see* objects at a distance, but can *act on* them.[49] Wafaa Bilal moved his living room to an art gallery in Chicago and locked himself in for one month, twenty-four hours a day, with a paint-gun set up so that it could be controlled by anyone who accessed his website.[50] The project called "Domestic Tension," (although originally called "Shoot an Iraqi") was set up as a comment on long-range warfare and mediation. Bilal's brother's death from shrapnel in Iraq as well an article about soldiers in the Colorado remotely firing missiles in Iraq motivated his experiment.

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[46] Deleuze, *Cinema 2 the Time-Image*, 6.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., 7.

[49] Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema : The Logistics of Perception* (London ; New York: Verso, 1989).

[50] Marco Werman, "World Technology Podcast 224: Iraqi Net Art," in *World Tech Podcast*, ed. Clark Boyd (PRI, 2008). http://www.theworld.org/pod/tech/WTPpodcast224.mp3, accessed April 1, 2009. http://www.crudeoils.us/wafaa/, accessed April 1, 2009.

Bilal was shot at point blank range (the guns are made to shoot 200 yards and his was in a living room) 64,000 times by people in 136 different countries. He spent his savings on more paintballs and a "philanthropist" donated a server when Bilal's went down from overuse. Users could chat on the site while they shot. Some simply wanted to see if they could actually shoot the gun from many miles or continents away. Some failed to see the point. Others wrote ethnic slurs. Some shot out his only light and destroyed his computer. On the other hand, some people recognized the reality of a fellow human being shot and acted positively.   A former Marine brought Bilal a new table lamp when he saw his was destroyed. On Day 21, Bilal says he was in the height of the shooting and noticed that the gun was missing him to the left. He asked his technician what was going on and learned that there was a group of people sitting behind their computers dedicating themselves to his protection by directing the gun to the left. On the chat room he asked who they were and they said they were a group of 39 people who were there to protect him as his "virtual human shield."

Bilal's experimental artwork directly confronts many of these issues of virtuality, interactivity and implication. He wanted to bring the war home to people who despite a plethora of images did not seem to be affected. By placing a high-powered paint gun in a living room, Bilal's piece begs the question what is banal and extreme, what is virtual and what is real.

Conclusion

In many ways, digital technologies in cinema have brought us closer to Espinosa's fruitful world of individual artistic expression and fulfillment where people can stand up for and represent themselves around the world. This is causing systems of power and

hierarchy to be renegotiated as individuals and groups use rich media technology to outwit political and economic hegemonies. These are portents of the revolutionary potential for greater and more meaningful communication. From middle-schoolers in Brooklyn to Middle East martyr videos, people from outside the norms of cinematic literacy are expressing themselves and being seen. At the same time, the immediacy and decontextualization of the video makes it hard to create meaning even though the viscerality and potential for interactivity implicates us as viewers.

Yet the current failure of some of our new technologies to communicate meaning should not make us lose hope. Many new people are working together with many new tools, aesthetics and cinematic forms who might be able to find new kinds of practice or language, which are meaningful and powerful. We must not ignore the fact that access does not equal literacy, but new languages are emerging made available by the collaboration with computers, new technologies and new communities of producers and users. Increasingly, users are providing the solutions to the contextualization of real time web. Users are adding keywords and providing research and links which will help create meaning from the morass of video. The openness and disorder, which the infiltration of digital and computer technologies have introduced, to what was the structured, ritualistic world of cinema, has enormous potential.[51]

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[51] This paper adapts some content from a forthcoming article entitled "Remediating War in Iraq" for *Peace Review*.

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