Protest Logics and the Mediation Opportunity Structure[1]

Bart Cammaerts[2]

Abstract

In this article the gap between research and theory on social movements and media and communication Studies is bridged. A conceptual framework is presented that relates both to social movement theory by referring to the political opportunity structure approach and logics of contentious action as well as to media and communication studies through the concept of mediation. It will be argued that mediation is a fruitful concept to encompass a wide variety of ways in which media and communication are relevant to protest and social movements.

Keywords: Protest movements, mediation, opportunity structures, activism, communication strategies.

> *Our masters have not heard the people's voice for generations and it is much, much louder than they care to remember.*
>
> Moore and Lloyd (2005) in V for Vendetta.

1. Introduction

Just as it is useful for social movement scholars to take notice of and incorporate theories and debates in media and communication studies, it also remains fruitful and necessary, I would argue, to draw upon the social movement literature and engage with it in view of understanding current trends in the mediation of protest and the media and

---

[1] An earlier shorter version of this paper was published in *European Journal of Communication* 27(2): 117-34.

[2] *Bart Cammaerts is associate professor and director of the PhD program in the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). He is the former chair of the Communication and Democracy Section of ECREA and vice-chair of the Communication Policy and Technology section of IAMCR. His most recent books include: Mediation and Protest Movements (eds with Alice Matoni and Patrick McCurdy, intellect, 2013), Media Agoras: Democracy, Diversity and Communication (eds with Iñaki Garcia-Blanco and Sofie Van Bauwel, Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2009), Internet-Mediated Participation beyond the Nation State (Manchester University Press, 2008) and Understanding Alternative Media (with Olga Bailey and Nico Carpentier, Open University Press, 2008).*

communication practices of activists, bridging what Downing (2008: 41) has called the persisting divorce between 'media studies research and theory and research by sociologists, political scientists, and historians'. The aim of this article is therefore to conceptually integrate insights from social movement theories with those from media and communication studies through introducing the concept of 'mediation opportunity structure', which empowers activists, but at the same time also constrains them.

Mediation is a useful, but under-used, concept to capture diverging articulations between media, communication, protest and activism (see Martín-Barbero, 1993; Thompson, 2005; Silverstone, 2002). It enables us to link up various ways in which media and communication are relevant to protest and activism; the framing processes in mainstream media and by political elites, the self-representations by activists, the use, appropriation and adaptation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by activists and citizens to mobilize for and organize direct actions, as well as media and communication practices that constitute mediated resistance in its own right.

While the process of mediation is dialectical – balancing potential opportunities and structural constraints – it is also asymmetrical and uneven; some actors are more equal than others (Silverstone, 2002: 762). Despite this, mediation does attribute a degree of agency to those resisting, to those watching or using – 'meaning making is an open ended, and an ongoing, process' (Thumim, 2009: 619). Here the double articulation of mediation, as put forward by Silverstone (1994), is useful. Silverstone pointed out that processes of mediation apply just as much to media as a material object with reference to technology and the everyday as it does to the symbolic, the discursive, with reference to Gramsci's ideological war of position (Livingstone, 2007). This double articulation of mediation enables us to consider media and the production of content in conjunction with technology as well as communication strategies and media practices of citizens and activists. In doing so, mediation processes challenge and complicate the analytical distinctions public/private and producer/user by introducing processes of self-mediation and co-production.

There is an urgent need to theorize and encompass the various ways in which media and communication are enabling and constraining for activists and activism in

2

the current ultra-saturated media and communication environment; how they become instrumental in terms of articulating collective identities, disseminating movement frames, and the mobilization as well as coordination of direct action, but also how they become constitutive of direct action in their own right. In this article, I contend that combining theories of mediation with social movement theories that assess the opportunities and structural constraints for social movements as well as the logics they attribute to their protest actions, is a fruitful way forward in this regard. First, the concept of opportunity structure will be addressed, which will be followed by an analysis of the different repertoires and logics of contentious action. After this, the mediation opportunity structure will be related to these different protest logics and deconstructed as being comprised of a media opportunity structure, a discursive opportunity structure and a networked opportunity structure.

2. Opportunity Structures

In the social movement literature the concept of 'political opportunity structure' is a very prominent one. It refers to the '[d]imensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure' (Tarrow, 1994: 85). It attempts to explain which structural aspects of the external world, outside the control of activists, affect the development and success of social movements (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). In plain language we could speak here of the political momentum. Media resonance usually features as one of the peripheral factors that influence the degree of political opportunity for a social movement to succeed; communication practices tend to be totally absent. In this regard, Koopmans (2004: 369) notes that one 'looks in vain for index entries such as "mass media," "public sphere," or "communication"' in the literature on protest movements and contentious resistance.

This does not mean, however, that there are no social movement scholars who addressed the role of media and of communication strategies plays for social movements. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) provided some early insights in this regard.

They concluded that social movements are dependent on mainstream media for three inter-related purposes; to mobilize political support, to increase the legitimation and validation of their demands and to enable them to widen the scope of conflict beyond the likeminded. The extent to which movements are able to achieve this and get their message across in the mainstream media or not, their degree of cultural influence in the public sphere, which invokes issues of access to the media, could be described as the media opportunity structure.

Following on from this, the conceptualization of a discursive opportunity structure, analytically semi-separate from the political opportunity structure, has been gaining strength (Ferree, et al., 2002). The role of the discursive in protest has been ignored for many years as an important 'medium of social conflict and symbolic struggle' (Koopmans and Statham, 1999: 205). Protest movements are important producers of new ideas and prime agents in contesting old ways of seeing and/or doing things as well as constructing collective identities (Melucci, 1996). A good illustration of the growing importance of discourse in the study of social movements and protest is the increased attention for framing strategies, which are deemed not only relevant for ideological positioning, but also affecting recruitment, mobilization and the degree of action readiness (Benford and Snow, 2000).

Besides this, while not described as such in the literature, we can also discern a networked opportunity structure being invoked since the end of the 1990s. Various studies of political science as well as media and communication scholars, emphasizing the inter-connected networked environment in which social movements operate today, addressed the impact of ICTs on the ability of movements to organize and mobilize (transnationally), to recruit, to coordinate actions and to disseminate counter-frames independent from the mainstream media (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Diani, 2001; Surman and Reilly, 2003; van de Donk, et al., 2004; Bennett, et al., 2008).

Figure 1: The Mediation Opportunity Structure
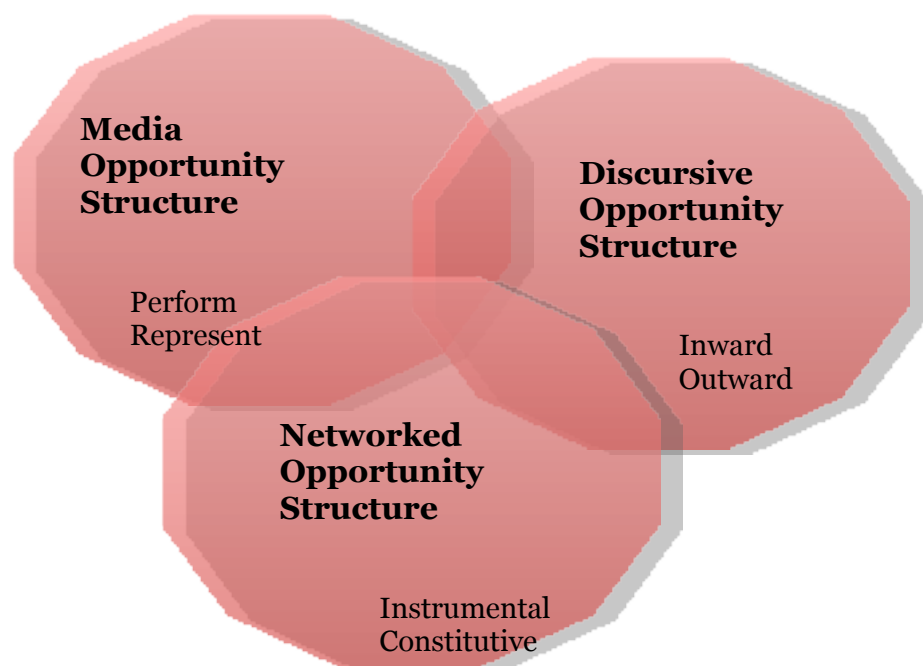
What is being proposed here is to adopt the mediation opportunity structure as an overarching concept, semi-independent from the political opportunity structure, and comprised of the media opportunity structure, the discursive opportunity structure and the networked opportunity structure (cf. Figure 1). Inevitably the relationship between these three interrelated opportunity structures is circular – they each impact on each other in various ways.

The mediation opportunity structure enables us to differentiate between different media actors with different forms of organization, adopting various formats and different ideological frames. Furthermore, the mediation opportunity structure is inclusive of communication strategies of activists in their self-mediation efforts and it also brings the active user and technology as a source of and as an enabler of resistance into the picture.

This triad of media and communication related opportunity structures making up the mediation opportunity structure shall be fleshed out further by relating mainstream media representation, self-mediation and resistance through technology to the various repertoires and logics of contentious action. First, however, these various repertoires

5

and logics of contentious action will be outlined.

3. Repertoires and logics of contentious action

Social movement scholars often point out that more political opportunities or legitimacy for certain types of protest leads to activists seizing those opportunities, resulting in an increase in these types of protest (Meyer and Minkoff, 2004). Similarly, it is argued here that activists will assess the mediation opportunity structure in relation to the tactics they employ and to some extent choose a tactic for which the mediation opportunity structure is favourable, or at least consciously choose to contest the limits it imposes. In other words the mediation opportunity structure also has an impact on the available and imaginable repertoire of contentious action, it can even become constitutive of protest.

Repertoires of contentious action are the potential political performances enacted by members of protest movements. It refers as much to the creative imagination of activists and the limitations of the possible at any given moment in time. Tilly (1986: 391-2) delimits two historical periods with distinctly different repertoires of contentious action. The Feudal repertoire of action – prevalent from the mid-17th until mid-19th Century, was characterized by protest actions that were parochial, mocking elite events and often directed at local dignitaries rather than at the higher powers they represented. After that a Modernist repertoire of contentious action emerged, which was more national in scope and direct actions were organized autonomously from the powers that be (Tilly, 1986: 395). The Modernist repertoire introduced new protest tactics such as strikes, uprisings, riots, rallies, boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and mass demonstrations.

With regard to repertoires, a debate is ongoing as to whether the emergence and appropriation of ICTs by activists has heralded a new repertoire of contentious action. On the one hand, Tilly (2004) argued that the current repertoire of sententious action does not differ from the modernist; mass demonstrations, occupations, boycotts, petitions and insurrections remain the pre-dominant protest antics today. On the other hand, authors such as Brett (2005), Chadwick (2007) as well as Van Laer and Van Aelst (2010) claim that a 'new' electronic, digital or networked repertoire has emerged.

6

Regardless of where you stand in this debate, it is undeniable that recent changes at the level of the overall media and communication environment have greatly enhanced activists' repertoires of action and opportunities for resistance, as also Cottle (2008:

> Today's media ecology arguably contains more political opportunities for dissenting voices and views from around the world than in the past and these are communicated globally through complex networks linking alternative and mainstream news media and other communication flows. (2008: 853 - 872).

Besides identifying expansions at the level of the available repertoire of contentious action, mainly induced by the networked opportunity structure enabling new forms and a larger scope of resistance, della Porta and Diani (2006: 170) also point to three distinct, but not mutually exclusive, logics that activists ascribe to their protest actions when deciding from the available repertoire of action:

- **Logic of Numbers:** mass demonstrations, petitions
- **Logic of Damage:** property destruction or large-scale disruptions
- **Logic of Bearing Witness:** public performance and non-violent civic disobedience

Mass demonstrations are modes of social performance that, while not being their prime goal, produce a spectacle of numbers – the 'public space [is] where dissent becomes visible' (Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005: 798). The 1963 March on Washington DC, the massive anti-nuclear demonstrations in Europe in the 1980s and more recently the 2003 global anti-war demonstrations held simultaneously in over 60 countries with millions of participants worldwide, are iconic examples of this.

Mass demonstrations have, however, become highly routinized and police forces have long-standing expertise in managing, disciplining or containing protest events (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2001; Mitchell and Staeheli, 2005). As predicted by political opportunity theories, the 'negotiated management model' (della Porta and Reiter, 1998) referring to states adopting an accommodating strategy towards mass demonstrations within certain limits, has led to an increase in the number of demonstrations in the West

7

in recent decades. For example, Washington DC hosts on average about 1.000 demonstrations per year, while Brussels counts between 500 and 600 demonstrations on a yearly basis (Smith, et al., 2001; Tormans, 2008).

Despite a strong pacifist non-violent tradition in protest movements, political violence and the logic of damage have historically been instrumental in many struggles for social and cultural change. Democracy itself, it could be argued, is an outcome of sustained political violence by the subordinate classes (Honderich, 1989). The reason for this is that political violence has two inter-related components, its actual use and the threat of its use. Often, the aim of political violence is to make the threats of violence credible, ultimately pushing elites to compromise and implement change (Nieburg, 1962: 865).

While conceptually and morally a clear distinction should be made between violence – directed at people – and damage – directed at property, legally and certainly in its mediated representation and public perception, this distinction is often not made. As a result of this, damage to property is uniformly represented and punished as violence. Keane (2004: 34) calls this 'the modern bourgeois conviction that violence against things is somehow equivalent to violence against people'. In this article attention will be drawn on political 'violence' embedded in a logic of damage to property.

The final protest logic is that of bearing witness to injustice, which ties in more with a Feudal tradition of contentious action focused on the performative, latching onto elite-staged events or creating your own happening. The non-violent tactic of civic disobedience – 'knowingly breaking what are considered unjust laws', consumer *buycotts*[3] or tactics of 'symbolic provocation' are typical for the logic of bearing witness (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 175). Bearing witness is furthermore relevant as a protest logic in terms of personalizing the political, constructing collective identities and developing bottom-up horizontal structures – semi-autonomous zones to develop alternative lifestyles and values. The logic being that the structural will never change

---

[3] Examples of this are fair trade products or product Red addressing AIDS, see: http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/ and http://www.joinred.com/red/ (last accessed 23/08/2013)

unless the personal changes first.

In what follows, it will become apparent that these three different protest logics – numbers, damage and bearing witness – hold quite distinct opportunities and activists have to overcome different constraints in terms of their mediation opportunity structure.

4. Protest logics and the mediation opportunity structure

From a mediation perspective, an ultra-saturated media and communication environment provides ample opportunities for activists to resist, to exert their agency, to self-represent themselves and to defy the structural constraints. At the same time, activists also have to take into account these structural constraints inherent to mediation such as a mainly negative bias of mainstream media, a highly volatile public opinion or the limits imposed by technology. At three interlinked levels of analysis the opportunities and constraints in terms of mediation will be explored, each addressing the different logics of action.

The first level of analysis corresponds to the media opportunity structure and relates to the mainstream media representation of protest, focusing on the various ways in which activists attempt to catch the attention of the media mainly by producing spectacle through a show of numbers, through inflicting damage or through bearing witness to injustice. The second level reflects more the discursive opportunity structure and focuses on strategies of self-mediation geared towards producing counter-narratives and disseminating them independently from the mainstream media organizations. The third and final level that will be addressed here concurs with the networked opportunity structure and addresses resistance practices mediated through technology. This ties the discursive back to action as ICTs increasingly sustain movements, coordinate direct action and have become tools of direct action in their own right.

4.1 Media Representations

The strategy of accommodation towards mass demonstrations, as briefly described above, is foremost designed to contain and neutralize dissent, leading to the

9

normalization of demonstrations, and ultimately reducing 'the novelty and disruptiveness of protest' in general (Oliver and Maney, 2000: 467). The problem for activists, from a mediation perspective, is that 'as protest becomes less unconventional, it also becomes less noticeable and newsworthy' (Dalton, 1996: 71). As a result, standard protest and demonstrations are perceived as dull and receive less and less media attention, unless the numbers are really spectacular – hence the frequent contestation of number of protesters between police and organizers. All this, has prompted activists and protesters having to be more inventive in order to make their direct action salient and newsworthy, leading to more spectacular actions. One of the most easy ways to make a direct action spectacular is by appropriating the logic of damage.

The type of tactics used by protesters following the logic of damage often conforms to the longstanding Anarchist tradition of 'propaganda by the deed' (Brousse, 1877). Typically, activists will tend to cosmetically attack symbolic properties and provide spectacle at the fringes of a demonstration. Tilly (2002: 23) denotes this type of public collective violence as 'dispersed resistance'. By overcoming the fear of state violence, activists enact indirect and small-scale resistance practices geared towards 'inflicting damage on authorities or inciting violent reprisals from authorities', and thereby delegitimizing them. A good example of this is the black bloc tactic applied by militant activists during demonstrations carefully targeting certain brands or interests and provoking violent police reactions (cf. Figure 2).

Figure 2: Black bloc demonstrators at Malcolm X Park, Washington, D.C. – January 20, 2005.

Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Ben Schumin

Political violence from a mediation perspective is an extreme speech act – a crying out for voice and visibility. Its mediation is inherent to the performativity of resistance without which the political act of damage would have only a minimal impact. It is well documented that the majority of mainstream media, without essentializing them, tend to privilege the frames of the economic and political elites by whom they are owned and whose values, interests and ideologies are often opposed to those of activists and protesters (Chomsky, 2002; McChesney, 2008). It is being argued that mainstream media uphold liberal and capitalist values and will typically condemn political violence in a democracy. Such a post-Althusserian perspective of the media as being an ideological apparatus dominated by state and capitalist interests and structurally biased against social and protest movements is unsurprisingly also very prevalent in activist circles (McCurdy, 2010). This critique of the 'biased' mainstream media also concurs with earlier evidence of hostility by the mainstream media towards protest and social movements, certainly when they turn violent.

Halloran, *et al.* (1970) concluded many decades ago that UK media employ an inferential structure of bias against protest, primarily focusing on incidents of violence rather than on the large majority of peaceful demonstrators, the causes they promote or

11

the messages they try to convey. Gitlin (1980) found similar patterns in the US, as did the Glasgow Media Group in relation to the reporting of UK-based industrial actions in the 1980s. Eldridge (1995: 212) argues that what is being presented as neutral reporting, is in fact 'an array of codes and practices which effectively rest upon a cultural imperative to hear the causes of disputes in one way rather than another'. Media are, in other words, 'not neutral unselective recorders of events' (Oliver and Maney, 2000: 464)

However, while many mainstream media outlets do conform to the analysis of the critical tradition in media studies, not all mainstream media are at all times docile actors in the service of state and/or capitalist interests, as suggested by the domination and propaganda models. 'The media' is by no means a monolithical actor. Some mainstream media do at times report favourably on social movements or promote a progressive cause; for example positive representations of the women rights movement, defending an anti-war stance or supporting student protests (Van Zoonen, 1992; Cottle, 2008; Cammaerts and Carpentier, 2009).

The mainstream media is in other words not always exclusively negative towards protest movements and direct action. Furthermore, focusing on the 1999 dramatic disruption of the WTO meeting in Seattle, DeLuca and Peeples (2002: 140) even conclude that '[f]ar from discrediting or drowning out the message of the WTO protesters, the symbolic violence generated extensive media coverage and an airing of the issues'. Similar conclusions were drawn in terms of the 2010 student protests in the UK which turned violent, but led to an enormous increase in media attention and more militant students were given more voice than moderate ones (Cammaerts, 2013a).

Radical protest coalitions are also increasingly aware of the need to cope with and manage the media in some way; have spokespersons, issue statements, concede interviews, grant access to journalists, etc. Activists' websites and their social media profiles have furthermore become primary sources for the mainstream media looking for a juicy quote or to find out more about a direct action (Lester and Hutchins, 2009). All this has prompted radical activists to set-up counter-spin collectives, as documented by McCurdy (2009) in relation to the 2005 G8 protests in Gleneagles (UK). The role of these teams tend to be two-fold, on the one hand to monitor the mainstream media's

12

representation of them and produce instant rebuttals and on the other hand manage the interest from journalists, be a gatekeeper as well as opener, a buffer between the media and the movement. This strategy of partial adaptation to the media logic inevitably creates tensions within radical networks between those that advocate for complete abstention from an autonomous perspective and those that argue for adaptation to the media logic in order to increase positive exposure (Rucht, 2004; Hewson, 2005: 147-8; McCurdy, 2010).

The logic of bearing witness is also prevalent in many current activist tactics geared towards receiving media attention. This could be through the hijacking of elite-staged media events such as the meetings of the WTO, G8 summits or Economic World Forum, not only to contest these elite events, but also to deflect some of the mainstream media's limelight on the elite event towards the contestation against it (Routledge, 2005). Besides this, activists and social movements also produce and perform what we could call DIY media spectacles. These can either be geared towards receiving positive media attention (cf. Greenpeace) or towards creating publicity regardless of whether it is positive or negative exposure. In case of the former, DeLuca (1999: 3) spoke of 'tactical image events', whereas the latter refers more to a disruptive dissent event or 'a political gimmick' (Scalmer, 2002: 175).

Finally, we can also refer to Debord and Wolman's (1956) influential *'Mode d'emploi du détournement'* in this regard and the application of their tactic of serious parody in the 1968 Paris student revolt providing a creative inspiration to the punk DIY-culture in the 1980s, the early hacking ethos, billboard activists in the 1990s and current culture and political jamming techniques aiming to intrude into the mainstream public sphere (Cammaerts, 2007).

4.2 Self-Mediation

Besides engaging with or attempting 'to hack' the mainstream media, social movements also invest resources – human, technological as well as financial – into 'being the media' rather than hating it, to paraphrase a famous slogan of Indymedia. Many activists are aware that 'in techno-industrial culture media become the ground of

13

Being' (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002: 132). The internet and ICTs provides them with extensive mediation opportunities to inform independently, to debate internally, to link-up directly with those interested in their cause in a cost-efficient way, potentially across the time-space continuum (Cammaerts, 2005). Besides this, community radio stations, often nodal points in social movement networks, also became important actors in countering the mainstream framing of movement messages and protest actions, facilitating the process of self-mediation and thereby giving rise to a third type of media, relatively independent from market and state and embedded in civil society (Bailey et al., 2008).

Another important facet of the process of self-mediation relates to the production of protest artifacts, which has become much easier and more cost-efficient due to the pervasiveness of digital photo and video recording devices (Baringhorst, 2008: 82-3). This has led protesters to photograph and film what they are seeing and experiencing, subsequently posting everything on social network platforms, sometimes even in real-time, and thereby producing an ever expanding archive of images and self-representations of protest events. The material and permanent nature of these protest artifacts enables symbols and discourses embedded in them to be culturally transmitted on a long-term basis, feeding the struggle and contributing to the construction of a collective memory of protest. In doing so, they effectively become 'epistemic communities' (Lipschutz, 2005), transferring knowledge and potentially influencing other movements through what is called 'movement spillover' (Meyer and Whittier, 1994). Movement spillover can occur at the level of ideas, tactics and symbols. The Arab Spring, but also the links that can be discerned between the Indignados movement in Spain and the Occupy movement in New York and London are recent examples of the spill-overs of ideas and tactics. The appropriation of the Guy Fawkes mask from the cult-movie *V for Vendetta* by the hacker collective Anonymous, by WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, by the Occupy protesters, as well as protesters in Turkey and Brazil or the naming of the 2013 Brazil protest movement *V de Vinagre* are all examples of the spill-over of symbols.

The negative perception in Western public opinion towards (political) violence

14

in combination with the negative framing in the mainstream media of the logic of damage as an illegitimate protest tactic does not prevent political violence from happening, as the black bloc or the recent student protests throughout Europe show (Cammaerts, 2013a). It is clear that the lack of public support for such tactics is a structural constraint which often results in conflicts within protest movements concerning the logic of damage (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002; Sullivan, 2005). Those acting from a logic of damage serve, according to some, to discredit the legitimacy of the movement by willingly catering to the violent mob frame which the media is eager to over-expose (Donson et al., 2004). It also feeds a common strategy of the liberal media of distinguishing between 'the good' protester who is civic, peaceful and legitimate and 'the bad' protester who is disruptive, uncivic, violent and illegitimate.

From a self-mediation perspective, those promoting insurrectionary violence would, however, claim that genuine direct action inevitably provokes heavy-handed police intervention, showing the true violent face of liberal democracy and that some limited and targeted forms of property damage are indeed legitimate forms of resistance in a democracy (K, 2001; Jazz, 2001). As such, radical activists will often echo Galtung's (1969) 'structural violence' thesis, as this blogpost from a radical US activist illustrates:

> People seem to be caught up on the damage done by the very few protestors. What about the damage that has been done by the police, the military and the G20 countries that have oppressed people all over the world? The real violence and criminal activity is being perpetrated by those countries whose leaders have to meet behind a police fortress to shield themselves from the rage of the people who they continue to rob and oppress. (txwordpounder, 2010: np)

Symbolic acts of cosmetic violence, such as smashing windows of banks, fast food restaurants, retail chains who do not pay taxes or, as was the case in the UK, forcefully occupying and vandalizing the Conservative party headquarters in December 2010, concur to some extent with the logic of bearing witness as well; a symbolic public performance against perceived injustice embroiled with discourses of civic disobedience, but not really structurally threatening. A few years ago a radical activist

15

coined this type of disruptive resistance as 'working class art' (Jazz, 2001: 96). What this also indicates is that most of the violence or tactics of damage enacted by activists today are highly symbolic and performative in nature.

Further evidence of this performative nature is provided from within the social justice movement where the status of radicals, the distinct dress code and the tendency of some radical activists to move through a crowd en bloc are appropriated by other groups without being violent and thus internally subverting the Black Bloc's public performance. A prime example of this is the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), founded in 2003 to 'welcome' George W. Bush Jr. to the UK, but there are others as well such as the pink fairies or the Tute Bianchi/WOMBLES[4] movement (Sullivan, 2005). By dressing-up as clowns in army uniforms, as fairies or in white overalls, they not only take the performativity of protest to the extreme, but also critique the performative nature of the elite meetings and of the police deployment that accompanies them (see Routledge, 2005 and Figure 3).

Figure 3: G8 protester in Rostock (2007) asks police: "Where is your heart?"

Source: Wikimedia Commons, photo by Salvatore Barbera

---

[4]   White Overalls Movement Building Libertarian Effective Struggles

In doing so, groups like CIRCA also aim to 'bring the personal back into the centre of radical political action' (Kolonel Klepto and Major Up Evil, 2005: 247). They deploy a strategy called tactical frivolity, which according to Rhythms of Resistance, a samba band responsible for providing a party atmosphere at many demonstrations, can be seen as a symbolic provocation that 'exists in the gap between total compliance and violent confrontation'[5].

The mediation of tactical frivolity and bearing witness often depends more on self-mediation through movement media, on alternative lifestyles and on the construction of collective identities than it does on mainstream media exposure, which tends to focus more on the spectacular symbolic acts of violence and those that act from a logic of damage.

4.3 Resistance Through Technology

As pointed out earlier, various studies concluded that the internet as an information and communication infrastructure produced an impetus in terms of facilitating the organization of and mobilization for protest, especially at a transnational level. An over-emphasis on the internet as a platform, however, tends to obscure the importance and increased use of mobile technologies and text messaging to facilitate, organize and coordinate protest (Hermanns, 2008).

In recent years, market-based social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have emerged as powerful tools for activists and movements to distribute counter-narratives and to facilitate mass mobilization; a potent example of the social shaping of technology (Kavada, 2010). During the UK student protests of 2010, commercial platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Google Maps were used extensively by protesters to mobilize and to keep track of police movements and to avoid being 'kettled' or contained (cf. Gardham, 2010 and Figure 4).

Figure 4: Live Protest Map on Google Maps – 9/12/2010

[5]   See: http://www.rhythmsofresistance.co.uk/?lid=116 (last accessed 23/08/2013)
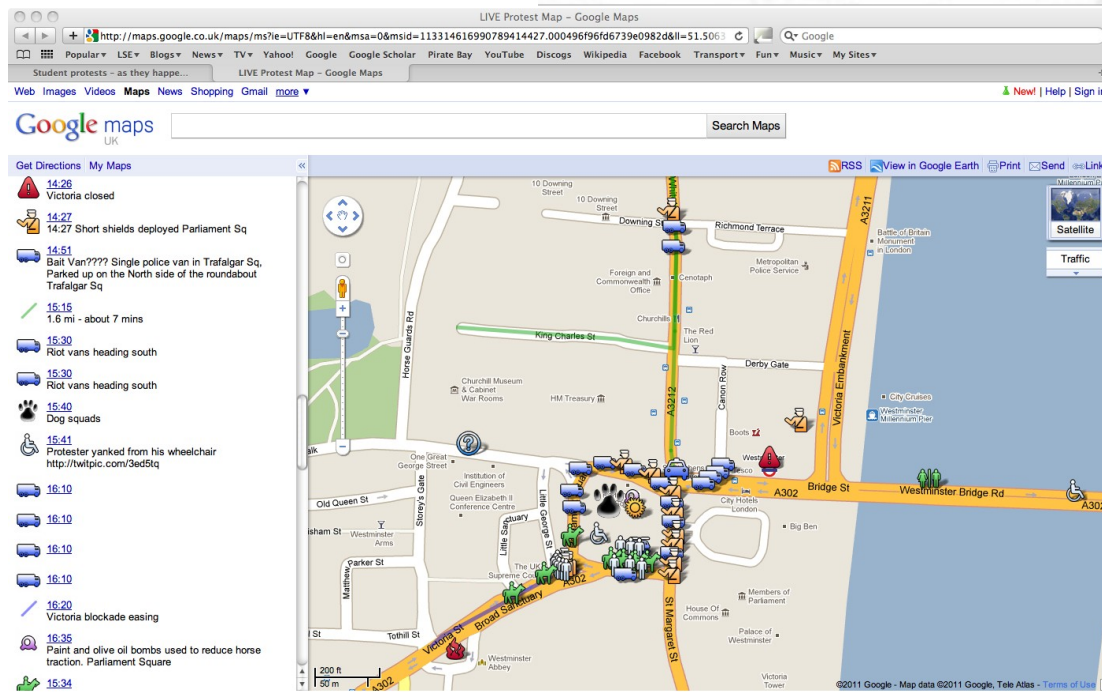
Source: Google Maps

The pervasiveness of handheld cameras in the hands of protesters also enables so-called sousveillance tactics – surveilling the surveillers or bottom-up surveillance by the citizen/activist on the state or public figures. Sousveillance is the result of what Mathiesen (1997) calls the synoptic viewer society, the many watching the few. Filming and photographing police behaviour during demonstrations is mainly employed as a counter-tactic to expose police violence as was the case in the wake of the G-20 protests in London in 2009 when footage emerged of unnecessary police brutality leading to the death of Ian Tomlinson (Lewis, 2009). YouTube is used extensively by protesters to post their own visual narratives of contestation[6].

Communication practices by activists are, however, not merely limited to the use of media and communication as discursive weapons, nor can the use of ICTs by activists be reduced to mere facilitators of protest in the offline world, ICTs have also become instruments of direct action in their own right, as hacktivist tactics or even the Free and

---

[6] For examples from the 2010 UK student protests, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUHzSQgayXY or http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MCFRGXQoqqY (last accessed 23/08/2013)

Open Source Movement demonstrate (Jordan and Taylor, 2004; Söderberg, 2007). The hacker collective Anonymous is a very recent example of this. Through 'Distributed Denial of Service' (DDoS) attacks they targeted organisations such as the Church of Scientology, but also state and corporate actors in protest against the clampdown on WikiLeaks (BBC, 2010). As a result, Twitter closed the account of Anonymous called *#Anon_Operation*[7]. Hence, the WikiLeaks/Anonymous case also exposes serious structural constraints to the over-reliance of (radical) protest movements on market-based internet or mobile platforms. These platforms are not secure and the companies that run them can for whichever reason decide to close down an account, delete the content, withhold funds and/or violate the privacy of their users (Cammaerts, 2013b).

While some of these ICT-mediated resistance practices clearly pertain to the logic of damage, others can also be situated at the level of the logic of bearing witness. Regarding the latter, some internet-mediated mobilisation practices enable more passive forms of engagement and participation, which are critiqued by some as click- or slacktivism (Morozov, 2009). Avaaz.org or Change.org are organisations that potentially enable the mobilisation of millions of global citizens around a variety of causes. Similarly, Facebook's iLike option is also increasingly used by social movements to garner support, construct collective identities and connect directly with potential sympathisers (Kavada, 2010).

These forms of internet-mediated participation through organizations such as Avaaz.org or the 'iLike' button in Facebook, could be seen as insignificant or as a too easy way of pledging support for something without actually engaging actively, as Morozov laments. However, in terms of mediation clicktivism is highly relevant and seems to resonate with many citizens who often fail to make time in their everyday lives for 'active' activism. From this perspective, such forms of internet-mediated resistance bearing witness to injustice do contribute to the building of collective identities and global awareness and enable asynchronous participation.

5. Conclusion

---

[7] See: http://twitter.com/#!/Anon_Operation (suspended on 8/12/2010)

The mediation opportunity structure for protest movements and activists cannot be separated from the wider political and economic opportunity structures – they are clearly enmeshed with each other, but I argue that there is certainly a case to be made for the distinct nature of the mediation opportunity structure as not only facilitative or instrumental, but also constitutive of direct action. It both enables and closes down opportunities for resistance and activists increasingly take this into account when surveying their repertoire of contentious action. In Table 1 an overview is provided of the opportunities and constraints identified in the analysis above.

Table 1: The Mediation Opportunity Structure and Protest Logics

	Numbers	**Damage**	**Witnessing**
Media Representation	*Opportunities:* • The Spectacle of numbers • Media management	*Opportunities:* • Attracts media attention • A demonstration of seriousness	*Opportunities:* • Producing media spectacles • Invading the media structures
	Constraints: • Normalization • Lack of media interest • Internal resistance against media	*Constraints:* • Liberal condemnation • Loss of public support	*Constraints:* • Ritualistic • Becoming part of the elite event • Co-optation
Self-Mediation	*Opportunities:* • Producing counter-narratives and –frames • Archiving protest artifacts	*Opportunities:* • Deeds that speak • Making resistance real and credible	*Opportunities:* • Mocking elites and elite spectacles • Constructing collective

	• Potential for movement spill-over		identities • Promoting alternative lifestyles
	Constraints: • Lack of resonance of counter-frames • Speaking to public sphericules	*Constraints:* • Internal conflicts • Risk of repression and escalation	*Constraints:* • Inward-looking • Little direct engagement with formal politics
Resistance through Technology	*Opportunities:* • Recruitment • Mobilization	*Opportunities:* • Hacking • Coordination of militant action	*Opportunities:* • Sousveillance • Clicktivism
	Constraints: • Digital and skills divides • Transferring online to offline	*Constraints:* • Dependency on market-based online platforms • Digital footprints	*Constraints:* • Contributing to the panoptization of society • Minimal participation • Weak ties

Regarding mainstream media, the mediation opportunity structure is to a large extent determined by the degree of openness or hostility of the mainstream media towards a protest movement. Mainstream media predominantly tend to focus on violence and on the spectacular rather than on the message or cause that is being conveyed; such are the structural journalistic routines (DeLuca and Peeples, 2002; Donson, et al., 2004). Activists and movements, however, do not remain passive to this structural impediment, but actively develop strategies of agency, drawing upon their

21

lay-knowledge of how the media operate and how technology can be appropriated; they 'counter-spin' (McCurdy, 2010). Some activists will take this even further and attempt to hack into or permeate the mainstream media sphere. The structural constraints here are manifold and vary; they include a lack of media interest because of the normalization of protest and a too exclusive focus on violent direct action, resulting in a loss of public support. Internally there is the danger of conflicts regarding the use of violence and the degree of accommodation to the media logic.

Lay-knowledge of how the media operates and (new) media savviness also serve to distribute oppositional discourses through independent channels of communication, activating processes of self-mediation. This is most apparent in the efforts of activists and protesters to self-represent their actions, to produce counter-narratives to mainstream representations, to contribute to a global archive of protest artifacts and to construct collective identities through connecting the personal to the political. Processes of self-mediation tend to be more inward looking, providing justification for certain actions and celebrating resistance. Here the main structural constraint situates itself in the danger of communicating to a small and marginalized public without paying any attention to develop upward channels of communication to the formal democratic system and to communicate beyond those that already align themselves with the movement frames (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993: 116).

However, the networked opportunity structure has greatly enhanced the opportunities for activists to communicate beyond the likeminded, not only in terms of distributing alternative discourses and thus contributing to the construction of (global) collective identities, but also in facilitating offline protest and building offline networks and connections. Mobile technologies and the internet, including commercial social networking platforms, have become potent tools in the mobilization for and organization of offline protest. Besides this, the tactic of sousveillance as well as disruptive hacktivist strategies aimed at market-actors, political elites and the mainstream media represent forms of ICT-mediated resistance that constitute in themselves a form of direct action. Some of these mediated resistance practices also enable publics that are not that politically active nor much engaged in offline direct

22

actions to express their support or donate money.

The constraints here evidently relate to the many divides in access to the internet and social networking sites, and to divides in media/digital literacies; these have not suddenly disappeared. There are also challenges in terms of transferring online engagement and enthusiasm into offline action. Furthermore, as recent cases like WikiLeaks and Anonymous demonstrate there are inherent dangers to an over-reliance on commercial online platforms, certainly for those actors within protest movements that adopt the logic of damage or at least a confrontational attitude towards capitalism and elite power. Resistance through technology also potentially contributes to the expansion of the surveillance society whereby everybody is watching everybody and it may also seem to promote minimal forms of political participation without much political consequences.

It is not possible to unpack all the intricacies of the mediation opportunity structure model in the scope of one article. As such, this is also an invitation to build on this concept and deepen it further. It is, for instance, not entirely clear what an ultra saturated media and communication environment is doing to activist identities, to their understanding of what their repertoire for contentious action is and it is also inconclusive what the precise consequences of all this are for democratic and participatory civic cultures (Dahlgren, 2009). Furthermore, one crucial aspect of mediation is under-developed and needs to be articulated further, namely the relationship between the mediation of protest performances and audiences/publics. We urgently need a more detailed understanding of how protest and its mediation is received and decoded by the fragmented populations of Western democracies; those in whose name protest is often staged. As Silverstone (2006: 42) put it, mediation is

> not just a matter of what appears on the screen, but is actually constituted in the practices of those who produce the sounds and images, the narratives and the spectacles, as well as, crucially, those who receive them.

REFERENCES

Bailey, Olga, Bart Cammaerts and Nico Carpentier (2008) *Understanding Alternative Media*. Maidenhead: Open University Press/McGraw & Hill.

Baringhorst, Sigrid (2008) 'Political Protest on the Net'. *German Policy Studies* 4(4): 63-93.

BBC (2010) Anonymous hacktivists say Wikileaks war to continue. 9/12. See: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-11935539 (last accessed 23/08/2013)

Benford, Robert D. and David A. Snow (2000) 'Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment'. Annual Review of Sociology 26: 611-39.

Bennett, Lance W., Christian Breunig and Terri Givens (2008) 'Communication and Political Mobilization: Digital Media Use and Protest Organization among Anti-Iraq War Demonstrators in the U.S'. Political Communication 25(3): 269-89.

Brett, Rolfe (2005) Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention. *Social Movement Studies* 4(1): 65-74.

Brousse, Paul (1877) 'La propagande par le fait'. *Bulletin de la Federation Jurassienne*, 5 August.

Cammaerts, Bart (2005) 'ICT-Usage among Transnational Social Movements in the Networked Society - to organise, to mobilise and to debate', pp. 53-72 in Roger Silverstone (ed.) *Media, Technology and Everyday Life in Europe: From Information to Communication*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Cammaerts, Bart (2007) 'Jamming the Political: Beyond Counter-hegemonic Practices'. *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 21(1): 71-90.

Cammaerts, Bart (2013a) The Mediation of Insurrectionary Symbolic Damage: The 2010 UK Student Protests. *International Journal of Press/Politics* 18(4): DOI-1940161213496283

Cammaerts, Bart (2013b) Networked Resistance: the case of WikiLeaks. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 18(4): 420-36.

Cammaerts, Bart and Nico Carpentier (2009) 'Blogging the 2003 Iraq War: Challenging the Ideological Model of War and Mainstream Journalism?'. Observatorio 3(2): 1-23.

Chadwick, Andrew (2007) 'Digital Network Repertoires and Organizational Hybridity', *Political Communication* 24(3): 283-301.

Chomsky, Noam (2002) *Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda* - 2nd Edition. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Cottle, Simon (2008) 'Reporting demonstrations: the changing media politics of dissent'. Media, Culture and Society 30(6): 85372.

Dahlgren, Peter (2009) Media and Political Engagement: Citizens, Communication, and Democracy. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Dalton, Russel J. (1996) Citizen politics: Public opinion and political parties in advanced industrial democracies. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers.

Debord, Guy and Gil J. Wolman (1956) 'Mode d'emploi du détournement'. Les Lèvres Nues, nº8.

della Porta, Donatella and Herbert Reiter (eds.) (1998) Policing protest: the control of mass demonstrations in Western democracies. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani (2006) Social Movements: An Introduction. Oxford/Victoria:

24

Blackwell Publishing.

DeLuca, Kevin Michael (1999) *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. New York: Guilford Press.

DeLuca, Kevin Michael and Jennifer Peeples (2002) 'From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the "Violence" of Seattle'. Critical Studies in Media Communication 19(2): 125-51.

Diani, Mario (2001) Social Movement Networks: Virtual and Real. In Frank Webster (ed.) *Culture and Politics in the Information Age: A New Politics?*. London: Routledge, pp. 117-28.

Donson, Fiona, Graeme Chesters, Ian Welsh and Andrew Tickle (2004) 'Rebels with a cause, folk devils without a panic: press jingoism, policing tactics and anti-capitalist protest in London and Prague'. Internet Journal of Criminology: http://www.internetjournalofcriminology.com/ (last accessed 23/08/2013)

Downing, John (2008) 'Social Movement Theories and Alternative Media: An Evaluation and Critique'. Communication, Culture and Critique 1(1): 40-50.

Eldridge, John (1995) Glasgow Media Group Reader, Volume One: News content, language and visuals. London: Routledge.

Ferree, Myra Max, William A. Gamson, Jürgen Gerhards, and Dieter Rucht (2002). Shaping Abortion Discourse: Democracy and the Public Sphere in Germany and the United States. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Galtung, Johan (1969) 'Violence, peace, and peace research'. Journal of Peace Studies 6(3): 167-91.

Gamson, William A. and Gary Wolfsfeld (1993) 'Movements and Media as Interacting Systems'. Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 526: 114–27.

Gardham, Duncan (2010) 'How Twitter kept protest groups one step ahead of officers'. The Daily Telegraph, 11/12, p. 6.

Gitlin, Todd (1980) The Whole World is Watching: Mass media in the making & Unmaking of the New Left, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Halloran, James D., Philip Elliott and Graham Murdock (1970) Demonstrations and Communication: A Case Study. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Hermanns, Heike (2008) 'Mobile Democracy: Mobile Phones as Democratic Tools'. Politics 28(2): 74-82.

Hewson, Paul (2005) ''It's politics, stupid'. How neoliberal politicians, NGOs and rock stars hijacked the global justice movement at Gleneagles… and how we let them', pp. 135-50 in David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott and David Watts (eds) Shut them down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the movement of movements. Leeds/New York: Dissent!/Autonomedia.

Honderich, Ted (1989) Violence for Equality: Inquiries in Political Philosophy – 3rd edition. London/New York: Routledge.

Jazz (2001) 'The tracks of our tears', pp. 80-99 in Anonymous (eds) On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-Capitalist Movement. London: AK Press.

25

Jordan, Tim and Paul A. Taylor (2004) Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a cause?. London: Routledge.

K. (2001) 'Being black block', pp. 31-35 in Anonymous (eds) On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-Capitalist Movement. London: AK Press.

Kavada, Anastasia (2010) 'Image, Bonding, and Collective Identity Across Multiple Platforms: Avaaz on Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube'. Paper presented at the International Communication Association Conference, Singapore, 22/06.

Keane, John (2004) Violence and Democracy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Keck, Margaret E. and Kathryn Sikkink (1998) Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics. Ithaca: Cornell University.

Kolonel Klepto and Major Up Evil (2005) 'The clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown army goes to Scotland via a few other places', pp. 243-54 in David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott and David Watts (eds) Shut them down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the movement of movements. Leeds and New York, NY: Dissent!/Autonomedia.

Koopmans, Ruud (2004a) 'Movements and Media: Selection Processes and Evolutionary Dynamics in the Public Sphere'. *Theory and Society* 33(3/4): 367-91.

Koopmans, Ruud and Statham, Paul (1999) 'Political Claims Analysis: integrating protest event and political discourse approaches'. Mobilization: An International Journal 4(2): 203-22.

Lester, Libby and Brett Hutchins (2009) 'Power games: environmental protest, news media and the internet'. Media, Culture and Society 31(4): 57995.

Lewis, Paul (2009) 'Video reveals G20 police assault on man who died', The Guardian, 7 April. See: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/07/video-g20-police-assault (last accessed 23/08/2013)

Lipschutz, Ronnie D. (2005) 'Networks of Knowledge and Practice: Global Civil Society and Global Communications', pp. 59-80 in Wilma de Jong, Martin Shaw, and Neil Stammers (eds.) Global Activism, Global Media. London: Pluto.

Livingstone, Sonia (2007) 'On the material and the symbolic: Silverstone's double articulation of research traditions in new media studies'. New Media and Society 9(1): 16-24.

Martín-Barbero, Jesús (1993) Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From the Media to Mediation. London: Sage.

Mathiesen, Thomas (1997) 'The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's "Panopticon" Revisited'. Theoretical Criminology 1(2): 215-34.

McChesney, Robert W. (2008) *The Political Economy of Media: Enduring Issues, Emerging Dilemmas*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

McCurdy, Patrick (2009) Mediation, Symbolic Contests and Spectacular Action: Dissent!'s Mediated Resistance to the 2005 G8 Summit. Doctoral Thesis. London: LSE.

McCurdy, Patrick (2010) 'Breaking the spiral of silence: unpacking the "media debate" within global justice movements. A case study of Dissent! and the 2005 Gleneagles G8 summit'. Interface: a

26

journal for and about social movements 2(2): 42-67.

Melucci, Alberto (1996) Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meyer, David S. and Debra Minkoff (2004) 'Conceptualzing Political Opportunity'. Social Forces 82(4): 1457-92.

Meyer, David S. and Nancy Whittier (1994) 'Social Movement Spillover'. Social Problems 41: 277-98.

Mitchell, Don and Lynn A. Staeheli (2005) 'Permitting Protest: Parsing the Fine Geography of Dissent in America'. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 29(4): 796-813.

Moore, Alan and Lloyd, David (2005) *V for Vendetta.* London: Titan Books.

Morozov, Evgeny (2009) The brave new world of slacktivism. Foreign Policy, 19/05. See: http://neteffect.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/05/19/the_brave_new_world_of_slacktivism (last accessed 23/08/2013)

Nieburg, Harold Leonard (1962) 'The Threat of Violence and Social Change'. American Political Science Review 56: 865-73.

Oliver, Pamela E. and Gregory M. Maney (2000) 'Political Processes and Local Newsarticle Coverage of Protest Events: From Selection Bias to Triadic Interactions'. American Journal of Sociology 106(2): 463-505.

Routledge, Paul (2005) 'Reflections on the G8 Protests: An Interview with General Unrest of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA)'. ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies 3(2): 112-20.

Rucht, Dieter (2004) 'The Quadruple "A": Media Strategies of Protest Movements Since the 1960s', pp. 29-58 in Wim van de Donk, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon, and Dieter Rucht (eds.) Cyberprotest: New Media, Citizens, and Social Movements. London: Routledge.

Scalmer, Sean (2002) *Dissent Events: Protest, the Media and the Political Gimmick in Australia.* Kensington: University of New South Wales Press.

Silverstone, Roger (1994) Television and Everyday Life. London: Routledge.

Silverstone, Roger (2002) 'Complicity and collusion in the mediation of everyday life'. New Literary History 33(4): 761-80.

Silverstone, Roger (2006) Media and Morality. Cambridge: Polity.

Smith, Jackie, John D. McCarthy, Clark McPhail and Boguslaw Augustyn (2001) 'From Protest to Agenda Building: Description Bias in Media Coverage of Protest Events in Washington, D.C'. Social Forces 79(4): 1397-423.

Söderberg, Johan (2007) Hacking Capitalism: The Free and Open Source Software Movement. London: Routledge.

Sullivan, Sian (2005) 'We are Heartbroken and Furious!' Violence and the (Anti-)Globalisation Movement(s)', pp. 174-94 in Catherine Eschle and Bice Maiguashca (eds) Critical Theories, IR and 'the Anti-Globalisation Movement: The Politics of Global Resistance. London and New York:

27

Routledge

Surman, Mark and Katherine Reilly (2003) Appropriating the Internet for Social Change: Towards the strategic use of networked technologies by transnational civil society organizations. New York: Social Science Research Council.

Tarrow, Sidney (1994) Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Mass Politics in the Modern State. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thumim, Nancy (2009) 'Everyone has a story to tell': Mediation and self-representation in two UK institutions. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12(6): 617-38.

Tilly, Charles (1986) The Contentious French. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Tilly, Charles (2002) 'Violent and Nonviolent Trajectories in Contentious Politics', pp. 12-31 in Kenton Worchester, Sally Avery Bermanzohn and Mark Ungar (eds) Violence and Politics: Globalization's Paradox. London and New York: Routledge.

Tilly, Charles (2004) *Social Movements, 1768-2004.* Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.

Tormans, Stijn (2008) 'Fatsoenlijke mensen betogen niet' ['Decent people do not protest']. Knack, 11 December, p. 28.

txwordpounder (2010) 'Black Bloc takes direct actions at Toronto G20 meeting'. Prairie Fire Journal, 28/06. See: http://prairiefirejournal.com/blog1.php/2010/06/28/black-bloc-takes-direct-actions-at-toronto-g20-meeting (last accessed 23/08/2013)

Van Aelst, Peter and Stefaan Walgrave (2001) 'Who is that (wo)man in the street? From the normalisation of protest to the normalisation of the protester'. European Journal of Political Research 39(4): 461-86.

van de Donk, Wim, Brian D. Loader, Paul G. Nixon and Dieter Rucht (eds) (2004) Cyberprotest: New media, citizens and social movements. London: Routledge.

Van Laer, Jeroen and Van Aelst, Peter (2010) 'Internet and Social Movements Action Repertoires: Opportunities and Limitations'. *Information, Communication & Society* 13(8): 1146-71.

Van Zoonen, Elizabeth A. (1992) 'The Women's Movement and the Media: Constructing a Public Identity'. European Journal of Communication 7(4): 453-76.