

Media Development

4/2017

WACC

Digital Media and Social Memory

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In the Next Issue

The 1/2018 issue of *Media Development* will include articles in preparation for the the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, taking place 12-23 March 2018. CSW’s priority theme is “Participation in and access of women to the media and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women”.

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Memory is power and power is politics.

Traditional newspapers are often considered “journals of record”, because they try to maintain rigorous ethical standards in terms of veracity, balance, and accountability. Their editorial independence is a mark of their integrity. Consequently, newspapers have been seen as repositories of factual narratives on which national and cultural histories and identities can, in part, be built.

At the same time, there are newspapers of the tabloid variety, whose ethical principles (if any) are subservient to profit and, therefore, to the need to attract readers and advertisers. They have become “shows” similar to those popular news channels on television that mix news tidbits with dollops of “entertainment”. Tabloid newspapers, of course, are useful as indicators of the directions popular culture is taking at a given time, but that may be their sole worth.

In the heyday of public service broadcasting, media corporations such as the UK’s BBC, Germany’s ARD, the Dutch NPO, and the Japan Broadcasting Corporation, were neither commercial nor state-owned. Free from political interference and commercial pressure, they embodied the words of UNESCO, that with “pluralism, programming diversity, editorial independence, appropriate funding, accountability and transparency, public service broadcasting can serve as a cornerstone of democracy.”

In this sense, public broadcasters also became repositories of historical facts: what was on record was assumed to be true and reliable – even though thorny issues of inclusion and exclusion were often ignored. From the 1960s onwards, the rise of alternative media gave public representation and voice to some of those omissions.

Today, traditional media and other social institutions are giving ground to digital technologies and social media with a consequent reevaluation of how public memory is represented and conserved. As Joanne Garde-Hansen has noted:

“A shift in power relations is occurring, such that the powerful archiving force of the institution (museum, government, church, law or mass media) and corporations that may seek to preserve knowledge and history on their own terms seems to be challenged by the present archiving power of increasingly popular and easy-to-use digital media.”¹

It is important, therefore, to test some of the assumptions made about digital media and, in particular, to tease out potential implications for the way society sees itself, records itself, and remembers itself. That is the theme of this issue of *Media Development*.

It is well known that when oral communities made the long transition to writing, it impacted how they were organised, how they recollected the past, and how they viewed the future. They were able to keep tallies and records and lineages, which cemented social bonds and commercial relationships, establishing what directions they might take next. Writing marked a settled community with a sense of its own place in history and a sense of its own importance. In terms of political and social control, therefore, the need arose to monopolise and/or control public “statements” relating to political and social entities. And, as Michal Foucault points out in *The Archeology of Knowledge*:

“Instead of being something said once and for all – and lost in the past like the results of a battle, a geological catastrophe, or the death of a king – the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced.”

Today, public statements that lay claim to a particular status or existence, and the public forms of communication that maintain them, have been appropriated by digital technologies that seem to be shifting the nexus of power from the monopoly of authority (political or social) to that of the social collective or, indeed, of the ordinary person,

either of which can effectively challenge, make counter-claims, and organise in opposition.

Yet, as the draft report of the International Panel on Social Progress “Rethinking Society for the 21st Century” warns in its Chapter on “Media and Communications”:

“As media infrastructures become more pervasive in everyday life, they increasingly mediate the human experience of the self, the other, and the world. As they connect individuals and communities, they also structure the universe of information and personalise informational exposure. Since individual autonomy is a necessary element of any form of social progress, it is essential to consider the implications of such large-scale media-based developments for the ongoing goal of social progress.”²

In relation to the politics of memory, mediations of both individual and collective memory are likely to be heavily influenced and profoundly changed by the way digital infrastructures and protocols are designed and implemented over the next decade. It is already clear, as Anna Reading has pointed out, that digital media technologies, in combination with other political, economic, social and cultural shifts “are changing human memory practices both individually and collectively.”³

What is less clear, and will require considerable interdisciplinary study to elucidate, is how digital media technologies are transforming human relationships, human behaviour, and human beings themselves. ■

Notes

1. Garde-Hansen, Joanne (2009). “MyMemories?: Personal digital archive fever and Facebook”. In *Save As! Digital Memories*, edited by J. Garde-Hansen, A. Hoskins, and Anna Reading. Palgrave Macmillan.
2. <https://www.ipsp.org/>
3. Reading, Anna (2011). “Six Dynamics of the Global Memory Field”. In *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age*, edited by Motti Neiger, Oren Meyers, and Eyal Zandberg. Palgrave Macmillan.

Go-ogle: Gender and memory in the “globital” age

Anna Reading

For millennia humankind has given future generations access to the past by making records of events and genealogies. Now we go-ogle the past through the internet.

Historically, humankind has mediated memories of the mundane and the extraordinary, inventing mnemonic technologies and practices from rock art to stone circles, from singing songs to telling stories from everyday rituals to specialist dances. Mnemonic technologies have changed from hand written manuscripts to the mass printing of books, from the carefully etched drawing to the mass produced film. With computer technologies mediated memories are being shaken up again with the capturing and sharing of private and public memories through mobile devices and social network sites.

All technologies, as Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan observed, extend the human body: the bicycle extends the legs, the axe extends the hand. Mnemonic technologies extend our memory: the technology of the shaped flint enables visual reminders, the technology of the Internet extends the human brain.

At the same, mnemonic technologies and memory practices are socially situated and are far from gender neutral. Many women in the 1930s were “human computers” employed to do accurate calculations, their work long since transformed through networked machine computers. But while digitisation is transforming gendered memory through digital games, virtual memorials and digital archives, the main thrust of changes to mediated memory worldwide arises through the mobile phone.

While other areas of digitization are revolutionary for human memory it is through the rapid

take up of mobile and social technologies that we see the greatest changes occurring for the greatest numbers. Mobile and social technologies are now at the heart of everyday life with greater take-up per capita worldwide than the personal computer. The mobile phone has enabled poorer communities to leapfrog legacy technologies such as the land-line phone and cumbersome ICTs, acting as a portable personal memory prosthetic.

Global-digital memory or “global” memory means memories travel rapidly and easily from the individual to the collective and from the local to the global. Such mediated memories confound conventional binaries of the public and the private and of the body and the machine. Historically we know that changes in mnemonic technologies also mean new challenges and opportunities for gender inequalities.

As the Dutch academic Gerdien Yonker has shown in her study of ancient Mesopotamia, with the shift from oral technologies to the written word, women’s memories and genealogies were increasingly marginalized. The US based literary scholar Harold Weber has also demonstrated how with the technological shift from the manuscript to the printing press, women’s literary works became side-lined. So too the global age changes memories of gender and the gendering of memory.

Throughout history the cultural memory of women and girls is often erased, side-lined. Whether it is through the genealogical sinecure of female ancestors through patriarchal retention of the male surname with marriage or the gender privilege of being written into history books and national cultures, the achievements, activities and exploits of boys and men are routinely mediated into private and public memories in ways that those of girls and women are not. Museums, memorials and a mass media record, commemorate and archive the exploits, artefacts, images and voices of men and boys. But with digital media, how and by whom human memory is captured, stored and circulated is changing and so, too, the gender of memories, and memories of gender.

Mediated memories are now made, stored and shared through “global” memory. The once

personal one-off diary is now the publicly shared blog; the discrete letter is an email chain; the photograph album is a mobile and social gallery on our mobile phone. Atrocities once unrecorded are witnessed through mobile phones and made public through the Internet. Global memory has become a field of action which enmeshes us within patriarchal capitalism. This “global” memory field reaches inside our bodies through medical and security imaging and extends to the far reaches of the universe sending back recorded sounds and images of a universe long past.

In the global age, wherever we are on the planet, we are born, live and die within, painfully astride or outside of an unevenly wired world: where once museums and archives were locked within buildings for the privileged few, and memorials were made to stay in their commemorative place, with the Internet, mobile phones and social media our mediated memories are captured and mobilized to travel, mutate, and stick our past together in new ways.

Pregnancy and birth

The memory of gender and gendering of memory has changed through the impact of medical imaging, particularly the obstetric sonogram. Since the advent of the sonogram in the late 1950s feminists have critiqued how the technology promotes a Hobbesian view of humankind in which the foetus is isolated from the rest of humanity with women and the womb simply background noise. Medical facilities now sell the image of the foetus to parents who then mobilize her or him through their social networks.

Where once a gender neutral foetus could snug-up in the dark for nine months in a mother’s womb, it is now routine for the sonogram to make visible the foetus, including their biological sex which then begins pre-birth the human’s gendered life story through a social birth witnessed on-line with family and friends. At the same time studies show that it is now at the point of the obstetric sonogram that male partners in heterosexual relationships feel for the first time a palpable connection to their offspring, with the visual image forming a keystone in their remembered fu-

ture narrative of the gendered baby, overriding the physical organic memory of the mother.

Digital technologies also change how parents remember pregnancy loss. The experience of miscarriage – marked historically by a notable absence of memorialization in Western culture in comparison with East Asia – is now often shared through the digitization of the foetal image. There are now on-line memorial websites dedicated to the babies that died before term or who were still born. The organic, embodied, felt memory and grief of the parents during the pregnancy has for many become a networked fixed image on screen in which grief is socially networked and shared.

Yet, the mnemonic resource of the networked, digital memory of the unborn is like all world resources unevenly distributed and unequally accessed. Ultrasound is a routine part of obstetric care in early pregnancy for women in the global north, but in the global south, especially in rural areas, access to obstetric ultrasound is poor. Even within the richest countries access to ultrasound is uneven: African American and Latin-American women are twice as likely as white American women to receive late prenatal care with no ultrasound in the third trimester. Such gendered narratives of the unborn are thus *global* – digitally mnemonically uneven – as a result of economic inequalities.

Everyday life

Social networking, on-line photo sharing sites and the mobile have unevenly changed the recorded story of a family's everyday life. The mobile phone in late capitalist society enables the human body to be "clothed" in networked digital memories carried in pockets, in the hand, in a handbag. Such technologies provide new possibilities for what is remembered of our everyday lives: in research I conducted in a London primary school women used their phones to capture and share with partners seemingly prosaic moments of life. Yet an ordinary image of an empty plate may be read as a metonym for the labour of a meal planned, shopped for, cooked and fed to the baby or toddler. An image of a child in a seemingly ordinary playpark is a metonym for all the daily routinized

trips of the mother or father to the park as well as signifying the privileged place of peace and security in which that particular child is being raised.

Such imaged memories before mobile phones were rare: most domestic photographic images figured around important events – holidays, namings, weddings – not the everyday and ordinary. Where once the mundane repetitive domestic and emotional labour done largely still by women worldwide went unrecorded, we see new memories of gender on record.

Public death

Mobile and social technologies have also changed public witnessing and news gathering. Atrocities can be casually witnessed through bystanders using mobile and social media, with images of terrorist attacks and state repression being circulated from the local to the global in a matter of minutes and hours. We also see the use of the phone for collective live witnessing: MACHSOM Watch, a women's organisation uses mobile and social technologies to witness and monitor the challenges faced by Palestinians going through Israeli checkpoints.

Women and girls are also able to gain a foothold in the world's media through micro and social media. Bana Alabed, known as Aleppo's tweeting girl, who was seven when she started tweeting about her experiences of the bombing in Syria, had her story picked up by mainstream press around the world. Farah Baker, a young woman in Gaza who tweeted her thoughts and emotions during bombing raids by the Israeli Defence Force on her home was interviewed by NBC and numerous newspapers.

Actions – feminist memory

The global age while reproducing gendered divisions and social inequalities also enables new kinds of feminist memories to mobilise action around injustice. The Parramatta Female Factory Precinct Memory Project in Sydney Australia, which I have followed for some years, has drawn attention to the injustice and abuse of girls that took place at Sydney's longest standing site of female containment. Over more than 150 years girls were raped, humiliated, abused and used as forced



*Raw Europium in a lab.
Image: Alchemist-hp Wiki-
media Commons.*

labour at the site in its various Church and State run guises as a female factory, asylum, orphanage and girl's home.

Part of the work of the "Parragirls" survivors of the time when it was a girls' home in the 1970s and 80s has involved using digital media to remember, archive and campaign, thus drawing national and international attention to the human rights abuses that took place at the site. The site is now recognized as a member of the International Sites of Conscience.

There is a darker side to global-digital or global memory. For every wifi connected iphone there is a global supply chain involving materials mined from the earth, transported and wrangled into the parts that go into devices and infrastructures that make our digital memories possible. The commercial rhetoric of the "cloud" obfuscates the fact that digital memory is not cheap, green or abundant. It comes at a cost to the world's poorest and at a cost to the planet.

To see that vibrant red colour on your computer screen requires the rare earth Europium, mined by companies that are frequently situated on indigenous people's lands. In Western Australia, despite regulation, the living memories of rock forms and rock art sites many thousands of years old are being destroyed through the mining of rare earths. The mineral is shipped thousands of

miles to "special economic zones" to be processed, which causes radioactive waste that if not properly managed leaks into water systems destroying communities' livelihoods and damaging the DNA of future generations.

It is also worth remembering where all our digital memory gadgets go when they die. The bulk of the world's e-waste is processed in China mostly by women and children. As they work they breathe in toxic chemicals released as the plastics are burnt off from our digital gadgets so that the labourers can retrieve for low pay the precious metals within. Those women will not remember our Facebook "like" of a meal about to be eaten and to remember them in our Facebook post or this article is already too late.

Digitized and globalised technologies mediate and implicate human memory in important ways. This creates new challenges for gender equality and for media development. It also creates new possibilities for different kinds of gendered memories to be activated and mobilized to make a difference. ■

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Asylum seekers, new media, and society's memory

Noam Tirosch

More than 60 million people were forcefully displaced from their homes in recent years, making the contemporary refugee crisis the most significant human tragedy of contemporary times. At the borders of "Fortress Europe", in huge camps all through the Middle East, asylum seekers' cry for help is reshaping societies' politics. While the refugee crisis emerges for a variety of reasons and materializes in different ways – in the meaning of shelter, the international human rights regime and its weaknesses (to list only few) – this article deals with a somewhat less explored relationship between the asylum seekers' need to be recognized as refugees and its relation with society's memory in the new media era.

According to the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is a person that "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" is forcefully displaced from his country of origin and is unable to return.¹ Alongside defining who is a "refugee", the convention requires host countries to protect refugees' livelihoods, and appoints the international community to supervise the upholding of these obligations. Consequently, the term "refugee", is not only a mere descriptor, but rather it is an aspired legal status with normative and ethical implications, crucial to asylum seekers' well-being. Indeed, it is the act of approving (or more commonly disapproving) an individual

asylum seeker's request to be recognized as a refugee, that stands at the heart of the asylum seekers' plight wherever they may be.

Alasdair MacIntyre, the Scottish philosopher, has already stipulated that human beings are above all "storytelling animals" (MacIntyre 1984). According to him, being able to construct, reconstruct and mediate unique memories and life stories is an integral part of any individual's well-being. This is even more detrimental when it comes to contemporary asylum-seekers and their quest to be recognized as refugees. Stories asylum seekers tell are the data that is being used by host country authorities to determine whether an individual is indeed someone who escaped from persecution for "reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" as she or he is claiming. These stories are evaluated on the national level as part of the "Refugee Status Determination" (RSD) process that should include a thorough and strict examination, which helps state official determine whether an asylum seeker is indeed a refugee.

The RSD process, however, is never conducted in a social vacuum. It is highly affected by public perceptions about asylum seekers and the perceived truthfulness of their life-stories. In Israel, for example, there is an intense debate regarding asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea and their "refugeeness". As part of this debate, state officials refer to asylum seekers as "illegal infiltrators" seeking work in a prosperous country. No wonder Israel only recognized a handful of asylum seekers as refugees, even when the UNHCR claims that most people coming from these two countries are indeed refugees.

As such, and as part of their attempt to be recognized as refugees, asylum seekers struggle to have their life stories, narratives and collective memories acknowledged by respective authorities and heard in the public sphere. Mostly, this struggle takes place in the media. Through media, citizens of the host society encounter the stories of asylum seekers, and it is this encounter that eventually shapes public attitudes towards asylum seekers and refugees.

Asylum seekers, media and memory

Among other institutions, the host society's media serve as a crucial arena in which asylum seekers' stories are evaluated by other actors. Within the Israeli media sphere, both the asylum seekers and the Israeli government try to influence what Israeli society knows about local asylum seekers and their past. Indeed, when asylum seekers claim that they have survived genocide and escaped to Israel due to the risks they faced in their home countries, they are telling Israeli society a story according to which they are entitled to be recognized as refugees by the Israeli government.

Conversely, when the Israeli government claims that they are in fact "economic migrants", who have illegally crossed the Israeli border, it tells Israeli society a very different story – a story that may include financial deprivation or other forms of injustice, but is insufficient for granting African asylum seekers official recognition as refugees.

The story of the infiltrator is indeed a totally different story from the refugee's. While a refugee's identity is constructed as such through experiences that begin in their home countries, an infiltrator's identity is constructed through a story that begins at the moment of crossing a host country's border. The "infiltrator's" former life-story is not relevant any more. In this case, a new and unwanted identity is imposed on the asylum seeker.

These clashing narratives operate within a mediated scene that is not neutral. In recent studies (Tirosh, forthcoming; Tirosh & Klein-Avraham, forthcoming), we demonstrate that local media outlets actively engage in the debate about asylum seekers' and refugees' rights. While using intrinsic professional capabilities (textual and visual framing techniques, in our case) media cause harm to the asylum seekers' attempt to be recognized as refugees by the authorities. The way newspapers report about refugees and their protests, we discovered, diminishes, alters and often negates the refugees' narrative.

We reveal that while traditional media may be an important arena in which society engages and debates asylum seekers' narratives and rights, asylum seekers themselves stand in a weaker position at this encounter. This is a direct outcome

of traditional media's inherent characteristics, and might be solved with the unique affordances of contemporary media.

About "old" and "new" media

Traditional media have been mostly interpersonal, unidirectional, stationary, and limited in their capacity to carry information. Most importantly, it is the media owners, and those serving as "gatekeepers" on their behalf, that grant access to the media. In the case of asylum seekers this access is limited and insufficient – as their voices are subverted and weakened. Yet, contemporary media may potentially change this unequal playing field.

Contemporary media contain novel characteristics (Schejter & Tirosh, 2016). In contrast to traditional media, contemporary media are characterized by their mobility, abundance, multimediality, and interactivity. They enable communicating at will from a variety of locations; there is an abundant amount of information available through them, virtually an infinite number of "channels" to access this information, and a wealth of space to store it; an individual can mediate a message utilizing any or all of a variety of forms of expression, including text, still photos, graphics, sound and video, or any combination at will; and their *interactivity* enables users to contribute to the content of the communication process in which they are involved, and to create and design their own mediated environment.

Evaluating how these new characteristics may have already altered society's memory, prominent scholars have claimed that contemporary media changed the whole meaning of memory and created new ways to operate within society's memory field. The question, then, is: if asylum seekers are in need of having their life stories shared and heard in society's memory sphere, how can new media contribute to their struggle?

Asylum seekers, new media, and memory

Asylum seekers use contemporary media throughout their migration process. These technologies enable them to intermingle within the new world that they are joining. They search the internet for information, communicate with their friends



An Eritrean family in Israel. Photo: Steven Wilson courtesy of +972 Blog.

using social media and use their smartphones to navigate in new and unfamiliar locales.

Alongside these daily mediated practices, asylum seekers may use contemporary media as part of their struggle to be recognized as refugees. For example, an individual asylum seeker from Eritrea, seeking shelter in Israel, can use his Facebook account, the most prominent social media platform in Israel, in order to detail his life story. In many cases, these stories are comprised of forced recruitment to the Eritrean army for an unknown period of time and life-threatening attempts to escape such constraints.

Others say that they were regarded as political opponents of the Eritrean dictator, Isaias Afwerki. As Eritrea is constantly considered one of the countries that systematically infringe its citizens' human rights,² fleeing the country after being labelled an opponent of the regime is a valid reason to be recognized as a refugee in a shelter state.

While traditional media may subvert these narratives, contemporary media grant asylum seekers with new powers and capabilities to share their stories and to gain "voice" in the public sphere. Contemporary media's capability to voice individual asylum seekers blurs the distinction between individual memory and "collective" or "cultural" versions of society's memory.

In the mediated environment of the past, reaching out to mass audiences when offering society a historical narrative was a privilege reserved for those already powerful. In the new media environment, new agents operate in society's new memory sphere – which is accessible to society at large. In other words, when many more individuals, also those less powerful, can share their personal narratives and life stories with their respective society, while using new media outlets, they turn individual historic narrative into an integral aspect of society's memory.

As such, through contemporary media, and

asylum seekers' ability to turn them into public arenas where they can share their stories, host society citizens can encounter often negated asylum seekers' narratives. This encounter, as already discussed, can potentially impact what society thinks about asylum seekers and may increase their chances to be recognized as refugees. This, I believe, demonstrates how contemporary media may be used as tools for those dealing with memory ethics — the normative aspects of how society remembers, what society forgets, and who are the actors that may influence these delicate process.

In this article, I argue that there is an inherent connection between asylum seekers' narratives, their ability to share these narratives and their recognition as refugees. Contemporary media have the potential to be a fundamental tool at the hands of asylum seekers when they struggle to obtain this recognition. Taking this perspective into account, asylum seekers and activists who struggle for their well-being should start thinking about asylum seekers' media and communication rights, and to consider them as an integral part of their demand to be recognized as refugees. Facebook is not only the virtual arena where asylum seekers spend their free time; it is where they can influence discussions about their rights and legal status.

As such, those who wish to help local asylum seekers should demand a new media policy that addresses the question of asylum seekers' access to media and their ability to use media in their daily life. This may assist asylum seekers in realizing their "right to memory", overcoming bureaucratic obstacles that deny them the protective legal status they aspire to: that of refugees. ■

Notes

1. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html>
2. See the Eritrea page on the Human Rights Watch's website. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/eritrea>

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Video games, transmedia, and cultural memory

Colin Harvey

I've played video games for as long as I can remember. From the electronic games like Munchman and Astro Wars developed by the British and New Zealand manufacturer Grandstand in the 1970s and 1980s, through my first Atari computer in 1983, to arcade games and consoles like Sony's PlayStation and Microsoft's Xbox, games have been a recurring feature of both my personal and professional life.

As well as playing games, along the way I've worked in the games industry as a writer and narrative designer for companies including Sony and Rebellion, set up Britain's first undergraduate course in Game Cultures, written for leading game industry magazines like *Edge* and *Develop*, and completed a PhD exploring the interrelationship of story and play in video games using ideas of affect and memory.

I've grown with games as they've moved from cartoonish, abstract approximations with simplistic levels of interaction to heavily realistic character and environments with increasingly complex mechanics. When I became a man, I certainly didn't put away childish things – instead I chose to weave them into my life.

Memory types

Like any cultural artefact, subjective memory is a crucial component of how games are made, engaged with and perceived. This can range from remembering where a particular object is located in the environment or a piece of advice given to the player by an NPC (Non-Playable Character) to calling back to an event the player-character experienced in a previous adventure, to fondly re-

calling playing *Asteroids* relentlessly with my sister's then boyfriend and my future brother-in-law.

The game itself is constantly remembering too: remembering where the player is on the screen, what weapon the avatar is carrying, how many enemies have been dispatched, when to play a particular sound effect of piece or music, the list is extensive, because contemporary video games are such complex ecologies.

But memory comes in many guises. Subjective memory is constantly shaped by collective memory, so much so that it's not always easy to spot where one begins and the other ends. According to neuroscientist Steven Rose, at the root of all memory activity are the biological factors determining bodily remembering, from "circulating hormones, physiological processes, the immune system", all of which are engaged in an ongoing, reciprocal state of interaction (2003:7).

Our bodies are energetic and material containers interacting with other energetic and material containers. Machines possess memories but they're also memories themselves, of previous models, interacting with software that similarly remembers prior iterations. Processes of updating, of patching, are often an effort to reconcile remembering between technologies.

The complexity of these interactions between different kinds of memory are hard to underestimate. I remember the kind of game I could play on my first home computer – an Atari 800 I won in a national competition to design the "House of the Future" – being heavily proscribed by the amount of RAM (Random Access Memory) the machine possessed. At the same time, the disc drive that I'd won never worked, meaning that I had no way of storing any of my work on my computer. This meant that if I typed in a program from a magazine, book or the document supplied with the computer, perhaps to produce an image of the American flag or blues musical tune, there was no way of saving my work.

Operating my computer, situated in the fug of a family living room in which my disabled father chain-smoked cigarettes, was a live performance. The computer couldn't remember, meaning we had to. Together these were such issues that I

lobbied my parents for the next generation of the same computer, replete with 64K and a disc drive, knowing this would open up a vast array of new gaming opportunities, while also allowing me to save my own creativity. The recall of this itself lingers, as one of my most powerful memories of my late father.

History repeating

In a peculiar inversion of the evolution of visual art, video games have largely eschewed the abstract representation of their early years – *Pong*, *Pacman*, *Asteroids* – in favour of verisimilitude. This can even extend to remembering mistakes: car racing games emulate lens flare, a flaw in how cameras process light, to make the immersive experience more akin to televisual presentations of racing.

The tension between video games as interactive stories and video games as recreations of reality has been much discussed within the field of game studies, probably because the tension remains a pertinent and challenging one within the games industry itself. War games struggle to understand whether they're simulations or playable dramas, sometimes ill-advisedly attempting to be both.

Players seeking to recreate the exact specifics of using a particular kind of weapon and seeing the resultant havoc are not necessarily interested in being reminded of the human cost of their actions. At least this is often the assumption on the part of game developers. With notable exceptions, it's assumed that players don't want to see portrayals of the human suffering arising from war, of murdered or maimed civilians, especially children, of displaced people, of genocide.

To some extent this arises from an ongoing issue of how video games are constructed by the wider culture. *911 Survivor*, a "mod" built using the Unreal Engine by a group of artists and game designers, attracted opprobrium for using the video game medium to engage with the terrorist attacks on America on 11 September 2001. In contrast, similar criticisms were not levelled at either the Oliver Stone film *World Trade Center* (2006) or Philip Greengrass' film *United 93* (2006), both of

which essayed fictional representations of the epoch-defining events of that day, albeit in cinematic form.

Though cinema in its early days was considered a vaguely pornographic, low-culture medium, it has now developed into one evidently capable of dealing with difficult subject matter. Some theorists have suggested video games will undergo a similar transformation, though the associations of play and childhood inherent in the word "game" may render such a transformation more fraught than might be superficially assumed, if it happens at all. Video games, as a cultural form, are remembered as games first and foremost, and games are childish, at least for dominant discourse in Western culture.

A mainstream World War Two game attempting to portray and engage with the reality of the Holocaust remains difficult to envisage for a variety of complex, interweaving reasons. Indeed, French film-maker Claude Lanzmann found fictional filmic representations of the Holocaust like *Schindler's List* objectionable, utilising witness statements to an almost exclusive extent in his own masterpiece *Shoah* to avoid using constructed material such as archive footage.

The moniker "game" suggests play, and playfulness – with its connotations of triviality – would seem to make engagement with such horrors both an intellectual and humanitarian impossibility. An associated, though more fundamental commercial reason for games not to engage with the Holocaust is that some territories around the world classify video games as Entertainment rather than Art, and therefore forbid discussion of this particular topic.

Arguably, however, in an era in which Fake News has warped dominate discourse to the extent that it's producing political and economic results inimical to the functioning of liberal democracy, the need for a truly popular – *populist* – medium like the video game to engage with historical reality has become increasingly pressing. A number of mainstream and independently produced video games have engaged with issues of atrocity. *Freedom Cry* (2013), the downloadable content for the fourth *Assassin's Creed* game entitled *Black Flag*

and developed and published by Ubisoft, allows the player to personify the character of Adéwalé, a freed slave from Trinidad, and explicitly engages with the brutality of the slave trade in the Caribbean of the eighteenth century.

This War of Mine (2014/2016), developed and published by 11 bit studios and inspired by the Siege of Sarajevo in 1992 to 1995, deals explicitly with the experience of a civilian population in a war zone, rather than the familiar gun-toting action hero stereotype.



Above: *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag: Freedom Cry* (Ubisoft, 2013). Below: *This War of Mine* (11 bit studios, 2014/2016).



What these examples suggest is that video games are eminently capable of remembering accurately and engaging seriously with difficult subject matter, if the subject matter in question is appropriately handled. As the medium matures, video games set in the geographical arenas and historical epochs in which atrocities occurred but which do not engage with the realities of those atrocities might start to be accused of a sin of omission, of deliberately non-remembering, to adapt a term used by Anna Reading (2014), a fellow contributor to this issue of *Media Development*.

Transmedia memory

A further way in which memory studies understands video games relates to their increasing role in transmedia ecologies. “Transmedia” in its contemporary sense emerged in the work of Marsha Kinder, who explored children’s consumption of media, suggesting that young consumers move cheerfully between different kinds of media while simultaneously remaining engaged with a consistent storyworld throughout (1993:47). Henry Jenkins extends the idea to postulate “transmedia storytelling” (2003), which he has himself subsequently refined on a number of occasions and which has been critiqued and redefined by a variety of successive theorists and practitioners, including Christy Dena, Matt Hills, Jason Mittell, Andrea Phillips and myself.

A transmedia network or ecology might comprise video games but also films, television shows, comics, novels,

short stories, audio plays and varieties of User-Generated Content (UGC). Notable high-profile examples include *Star Wars*, *Doctor Who*, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe, tend to sit within the science fiction and fantasy genres, as I've explored in my own academic book on the subject, *Fantastic Transmedia* (Palgrave-Macmillan 2015). Arguably this is because the kinds of fans science fiction and fantasy franchises tend to attract are also the kinds of tech-savvy people who enjoy tracking down the various parts of a storyworld across multiple media.

Additionally, expanding a franchise trans-medially often results in contradictions in terms of plotting, characters and timelines, and science fiction and fantasy material often provides in-built ways of dealing with such contradictions, rooted in time travel, parallel universes and magical powers.

In *Fantastic Transmedia*, I argue that entries within a transmedia network are effectively engaged in a process of “remembering” elements from elsewhere in the storyworld in question. For instance, in the case of *Star Wars*, the character of the golden robot C3PO is remembered from medium to medium, undergoing a process of translation in each instance: the audiovisual image from the *Star Wars* films is remembered textually as words in a *Star Wars* novel, as a still graphic in a *Star Wars* comic, or as a heavily stylised computer graphic in the *Star Wars Rebels* television series (though in the latter example retaining the voice of the original film actor, Anthony Daniels, from the film series).

The interactive nature of video games means that as a medium they tend to exist in a different relationship to the rest of a transmedia network than other, sequentially organised media such as novels and television programmes. For instance, the forthcoming *Star Wars: Battlefront II* (2017), comprises a wide variety of levels set within the milieu and extensive time frame of the *Star Wars* universe, but also tells a story intended to bridge the gap between the events of *Star Wars Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* (1983) and *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* (2015).

The events of the *Battlefront II* “campaign”

are deemed “canon” by the *Star Wars* Story Group, established to identify which elements of the sprawling *Star Wars* franchise remain canon from the past and going forwards. To achieve the canon ending, a player must work through the game in a specific way, since this is the ending that the collective memory of the franchise will recall in the future; playful activity in the other elements of the game, no matter the fidelity of the audiovisual elements involved, is not deemed canon and will be consequently forgotten.

Conclusion

Memory is a central component of engagement with the video game sphere and manifests itself in multiple ways. Games remember where a player is geographically located in an environment, what they've accomplished and what they've missed; players remember these things too, using their experience to plan a way forwards through the game. Games are intertextual, remembering other media, and sometimes the specifics of a transmedia network in which they operate.

Throughout the fifty-year history of commercially available video games, they've been repeatedly called upon to remember real-life events. Like any fictional construct, they struggle to do this with fidelity. The supreme irony is that games, which seemingly privilege the subjective experience above all else, might offer a compelling means of experiencing objective truth. That will only happen, though, if we as players demand it of games and game-makers. ■

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Digital narratives: me, us, and who else?

Karen Worcman

"I'm here to tell you a little bit of my story, and I'd like you to please read to the end. My name is R, I'm 29 years old and I'm from a working class family - or perhaps I should say from a very poor family. I've fought long and hard to get where I am today.

When I was just nine, my parents and I lost everything we had: they burnt our house down and we were left with nothing. My mother, father and I all went out begging, then a year after the fire my parents separated, and I went to Ibirapuã, Bahia, north of Brazil, with my mother. Once again I went out begging, because we didn't have a penny. When we got to Ibirapuã, my grandmother didn't want me in her house and sent me away to live with some people in Teixeira de Freitas, also in Bahia. I stayed at that house for a year; the woman beat me and I still have scars on my body because of the bad way she treated me. My grandmother took me away from there and gave me to a family that was well-known in the town. They played a big part in me getting to where I am today. My mother, poor thing, became an alcoholic and was in no condition to look after me, but even so, she got pregnant again. I was already 15 years old, and I couldn't stand that way of living any more. I often thought about taking my own life, but God wouldn't let me carry on with that way of thinking. When I was 18, I went back to Mato Grosso where my father was. He was very ill, but didn't want any help. I had to change my life, I needed to study and make something of my life, so I decided to turn things around and dedicate myself to my studies. When I was 23, I took

the Enem [university entrance] exam in Aparecida do Taboado (MS). I passed and was awarded a full scholarship to study pedagogy. That same year I lost my father. I had to get over it and, three years later, on January 25, 2011, I finished university. On February 6, 2011, mother died, just when I thought I was in a position to provide a better life for her... She was simply gone, leaving me and an 11-year-old child to take care of. Once again, I came back to Bahia. These days I am living in Vila Juazeiro, and a month ago my brother went to live with an aunt of ours in Espírito Santo. I'm working at a company near to Vila Juazeiro."¹

This is just one of the stories that forms part of the digital collection at the Museu da Pessoa, a virtual and collaborative museum of life stories. Since its founding in São Paulo in 1991, it has aimed to make any life story a source of knowledge and connection between people and social groups. The Museu da Pessoas's platform allows anyone to become a museum curator by organizing his/her own "digital exhibition".

To date, more than 155 exhibitions have

been created and shared by the community. Among these, Valeria Tessari's exhibition *Fabrics, clothes, shoes, fashion: material memory*, brought together nine life stories, six images, and a number of videos selected from the Museu da Pessoa's collection. Valeria described her exhibition as "a collection of memories based on everyday objects, produced by people that produce human relationships."² She indexed the collection herself, using tags to allow searches by other Internet users. She also completed her collection by uploading some of her own stories.

From the 18,000 stories of the Museu da Pessoa's archive, around 4,000 were sent in via the Internet and 74% of the total number of 209 online exhibitions were produced by the public. When the entire logic of capturing a story is inverted and the Internet becomes the biggest collaborator in the construction of the Museu da Pessoa's collection, it is obvious that the process changes. But does the quality of the narratives remain the same? What do we lose and what do we gain from this inversion?



From cabinets of curiosities to modern-day museums

Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish writer awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, wrote a manifesto which, in his opinion, should be used as a guide for museums in the 21st century. He points out that, “the measure of success of a museum should not be its ability to represent a state, a nation, a society or a particular history. It should rather be its capacity to reveal the humanity of individuals” (Pamuk, 2012: 58)

The Internet and social networks have definitively altered the individual’s role in the production of content, which has, in turn, had an impact on the collective production of memory. Blogs, books, television and radio programs have started to include the experiences of individuals as part of their content. Though these facts can represent a new opportunity for museums and memory producers, it is important to think about the quality of the new content. How can we guarantee that the impact of the narratives - both in the collection process and in its dissemination - is not lost or turned into practices that trivialize the process and turn the content into a set of data swimming in a sea of information without any sort of criteria or hierarchy?

Museu da Pessoa has started by taking oral history as its basic methodology. Oral history can have many approaches. The Museu da Pessoa has worked mainly with life story interviews (Thompson, 2000), taking as its starting point the belief that each person’s narrative is, at the end of the day, an expression of their singularity. None of the interviewees is treated simply as a source of “information” on the subject, but rather as a person who has experienced a part of a moment in history and personally taken something from that experience. The interviewee is considered the main author of his/her narrative, but the success of the interview depends a great deal on the relationship established between the interviewee and the interviewer. The focus is on the quality of the listening.

It is essential that we evaluate the new opportunities that the digital world has enabled for the production and use of these memories.

Story circles that are a traditional part of oral societies have been revitalized as a basis for the production of digital stories, a resource that is used for the mobilization of social groups throughout the world. The same thing occurs with the production of personal memories. These are new forms of recording, preserving and, above all, distributing memories. The different contents reflect different productions, and the question of how to access all this material only gets bigger. But the most important question concerns the quality.

Joanne Garde-Hansen, Andrew Hoskins and Anna Reading (2009) explain that, during a large part of western history, the preservation of collective memory was carried out with enormous effort by society. From scribes to copyists, from painters to photographers, from cabinets of curiosities to big national museums, great efforts were put into the conservation of memory. As such, museums, above all in the West, demonstrate what our societies “understand” or “consider” to be of value. It is a fact that this “effort” implies a process of selection, registration and preservation. Naturally, it also implies the need for resources and, as such, that which is preserved in museums, books, and historic monuments results from the vision of a certain group.

In so far as new technology drastically reduces this “effort”, individuals have started to record their own stories and to share them, be it on the pages of Facebook or in collective spaces, such as that of the Museu da Pessoa. Both as a society and as individuals, we were used to being spectators of large events, great facts, whilst we were simply actors in our own lives. We shared our narratives with a small group of friends and our family. The new means of digital production have brought with them the idea that our small circle of friends and family can expand. It has modified our concept of the group and territory.

In addition to being a common space shared by a group of people, a territory carries meaning for a community in the sense that it acquires a historical, affective and economic meaning for those that inhabit it. The new digital spaces allow us to create new territories. Our communities have expanded. Therefore, the question that we have

to ask is: when individuals share their day-to-day experiences in virtual spaces, do their opinions, in fact, occupy what we have traditionally called their narrative spaces of memory? Does this correspond to what we used to do when we organized a photograph album?

Museums and us

It would be a mistake to see all these initiatives as a simple exchange of media. Should we therefore ask ourselves what leads an individual to share their story at a museum? In a study conducted with Internet users in 2009 on what had led them to use the Museu da Pessoa's space, some answers suggested the main reasons. One of the answers perhaps summarizes and illustrates a large portion of them:

“I think that everyone imagines that they are alone when they think about talking about their personal issues, when, in fact, there is an institution like this one where there are people like you, who are a minority, who are interested in the stories we have to tell.”

To what extent does the socialization of everyday events recorded by those using the Museu da Pessoa's website result from reflections on their own path through life? I believe that we are still going through a period of transition. It is a transition that includes our notion of time - past and present - our notion of community and our relationship with our own memory. It is essential to understand that these new forms of narrative indicate changes.

The experience of the Museu da Pessoa, just as with many other similar initiatives in the digital world today, is part of work-in-progress that is very much in its early stages but whose positive responses and active involvement by the community already allows us to envisage numerous developments in the future. There will be new possibilities for museums to expand their areas of activity by reversing the traditional institutional organizational logic still perpetuated by the majority of Western museums.

By enabling members of the community to become curators of a museum's collections, it

is argued that such methods provide greater opportunities for the collective – and collaborative – construction of new memories, along with new spaces that challenge some of the established perceptions and frameworks in society. Such projects, it is argued, create new horizons and possibilities for museums to reinvent themselves, not only in the digital world, but also in the physical and symbolic spaces of society in the 21st century.

Such possibilities allow them to engage with and, if possible, to join in Orhan Pamuk's vision of museums as places for representing people and their means of expression. ■

Notes

1. Story sent in by an Internet user in April 2014. All passages quoting Internet users cited in this article are in their original form. We have only changed the names.
2. Free translation.

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Karen Worcman was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1962. She graduated in History and has a master's in Linguistics from the Federal University in Rio de Janeiro. She started working with oral history in 1997 on a special project about Jewish immigrants to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In 1992 she founded the [Museum of the Person](#), a virtual museum that connects people and groups through their stories. There (and via all the social media connected with it) every person can register his/her life story and create a thematic collection that can be publicly accessed. She has written many articles and edited many books on the issue like *Social Memory Technology: Theory, Practice, Action* (together with Joanne Garde-Hansen). She is an Ashoka fellow since 1999, a global institution that supports social innovative entrepreneurs in more than 60 countries and a member of the board of many institutions like the Center of Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter.org), Diversa and others.

Museums that travel

Aleksandra Kubica

“New museology” is a notion which has been gaining popularity in museum studies since the 1980s when Peter Vergo (1989) proposed it in a book he edited. The “novelty” of new museology concerns a shift of focus in museum work: redefining the institution from collection driven into audience-oriented (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994: 134).

As museums’ scholars observe, the museums’ focus is no longer on collecting, preserving and displaying artefacts and remembering for communities what is significant in culture and science (Crane, 2011; Macdonald, 2011). It is instead about openness, participation and inclusiveness of individuals and communities in museums’ work (Arnold-de-Simine, 2013; Simon, 2010).

Focusing on community is among the key aspects of museums’ strategies and it is perceived as a means to include and give voice to the individuals and groups who have been formerly excluded or silenced (Crooke, 2011: 410). Museums increasingly become, or represent themselves as, more accessible and democratic (Ross, 2004: 85).

Yet, although inclusiveness, openness and participation are among the most emphasized and promoted values, museums are still perceived as vital social institutions responsible for converting “living memory” into “institutionally constructed and sustained commemorative practices which enact and give substance to group identities and foster memory communities” (Arnold- de Simine 2013, 1–2).

Museums on the move

Travelling exhibitions, which this article concentrates on, are one of the ways in which museums reach out to various communities and engage audi-

ences outside the museum building, and especially outside of big cities. Over the past decades, the number of travelling exhibitions run by museums has gradually increased, in line with the richness of the educational and cultural offer accompanying these itinerant projects. As an example, the Smithsonian Institution based in Washington DC launched its Travelling Exhibition Service in the 1950s, and in Sweden a national body for preparing and managing travelling exhibitions was created in 1965.

The exhibition on tour takes the offer of the museum out of the building to broader audiences. Mobilities, constituted by developments in technology and media, are key to how the itinerant projects are constructed. They also influence the range of opportunities that the museums on tour can provide for the public, and the ways in which they can communicate or engage with audiences. In a broader context, advances in technology have always influenced human interactions, mobilities and power structures, but especially since the 1990s onwards the pace of these developments has been gradually accelerating with the rise in accessibility and affordability of digital technologies such as, among others, computers, digital cameras, mobile phones, e-readers, and navigation systems.

In scholarly investigations, such advances have been especially crucial for the “mobility turn”, which directed the interest of social scientists towards analysing how communication and the physical movement of people, including voluntary as well as forced migrations, can intersect and merge through digitized flows (Urry, 2007). Mobilities are various forms of transport, embodied movement and communication involving people, objects and data. Studying mobilities includes consideration of the infrastructures, or lack of them, which enable individuals, things and data to move, or which keep them static.

Itinerant museums are hugely dependent on mobilities: of the exhibition which has to be designed in a way that makes it suitable to travel, and which requires vehicles and roads which make the tour possible; of people – employees of the institution which runs the travelling project, but also of audiences which the museum at-

tempts to reach – who need to be able to travel to wherever the museum stops, by car, bus, train, on foot, by bike or using other modes of transport. Furthermore, movement of data is crucial for creating, promoting and engaging with travelling exhibitions. Even if the itinerant museum does not rely on interactive elements, such as videos, audio recordings or computers with touch-screens with whatever relevant content, the internet and phones are usually used to communicate about the exhibition, at least to promote it on local media websites or social media platforms.

However, including interactive elements and employing multimedia in an exhibition is an increasingly popular practice in museums, not only travelling ones. An active role of a visitor is implied – he or she is expected to make choices and put effort into creating a personalized experience in the museum space. The experience and the story that each individual visitor constructs for him or herself in the museum depend on which media they engage with (Jenkins, 2011).

Changing the visitor experience

The changing role of the visitor is on the one hand rooted in the evolution of digital technologies and media. Boundaries between consumption, production and distribution are blurred and constantly changing in museums (Kidd, 2014). Alvin Toffler in the 1970s coined the term *prosumption* to represent the interaction between production and consumption in relation to digital media (Nightingale, 2011). *Prosumption*, however, can also denote the fluid positions of visitors in the museum – who consume but also produce: either by participating in the process of creating a museum exhibition or another project or, for instance, by contributing to the museum's social media profiles.

On the other hand, the evolution of the understanding of the visitor experience is tied to inclusiveness, openness and participation promoted by new museology. Museums identify serving communities as one of their key aims, and among the modes of implementing this aim is engaging individuals from the given communities in various ways. The engagement can involve co-creation or sometimes supporting the entire process of pre-

paring and managing new projects. Yet, there is little evidence for including the complexity of the visitors' experience in considering the "social relevance" which museums seek to achieve.

Often visitor numbers are one of the main indicators of museums' "performance" (Simon, 2010) and what remains underexplored is the experience of visitors in the new museum (Kidd, 2014: 8). Yet, researching visitors, so those members of the target audience who visit the museum, as well as users who engage with the museum virtually through on-line platforms and participants who join activities organised by the museum, is a growing field within museum studies (Hooper-Greenhill, 2013; Lang, Reeve, and Woollard, 2007).

One of the ways in which travelling museums seek to provide social relevance is by encouraging some form of participation among targeted audiences. The Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, which runs a number of international travelling exhibitions and projects, trains local youth to guide their peers through the exhibition. In this way, locals are invited to contribute some of their knowledge and perspective to the narrative offered by the House and in this way make the story more relevant to local audiences.

The Swedish Travelling Exhibitions (STE) initiative places high importance on "the development of better forms of collaboration regarding joint projects" (Hjorth, 1994: 104), which should begin at the planning stage. A travelling museum run by the Museum of History of Polish Jews POLIN, which is elaborated more in detail in the next section, engages local activists in towns that the museum visits to help with logistics and to organise accompanying events.

Case study: Museum on Wheels

Warsaw's Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN, through its exhibitions, educational, cultural and research programs as well as outreach initiatives, seeks to re-shape how Jewish history in Poland is narrated both in the country and abroad. The declared mission of the institution on its website reads: "To recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews, contribut-

ing to mutual understanding and respect amongst Poles and Jews as well as other societies of Europe and the world”(POLIN Museum 2017a).

From the way the museum’s main goal is stated, it is apparent that the social relevance of the institution’s work and serving the public is a key concern for POLIN. The museum’s activities are shaped in the context of new museology – promoting inclusiveness, openness, giving agency to the visitor, providing opportunities for participation in various stages of planning and preparing specific projects.

Museum on Wheels (MoW), the largest outreach project of POLIN emerged in this context – as an initiative designed to leave the museum building and the city to work with locals and provide educational content for audiences in small towns around Poland. *Museum on Wheels* seeks to fulfil the institution’s primary mission in small towns of up to 50,000 inhabitants, but it also travels to certain festivals on Jewish culture or history

in larger urban centres around the country.

The core of the project is a travelling exhibition sited in a mobile pavilion (that can be dismantled and placed on a truck for transport) and an educational program. Both are designed specifically for audiences in rural Poland, where Jews for centuries formed from few percent to more than 50% of the local population. During the Holocaust, most of these Jewish communities were annihilated and at present there are no or very few Jews left in these towns. The material remnants of Jewish presence are often dilapidated and expunged from local memory politics.

MoW started touring in June 2014 and by April 2017 it had visited 65 cities, towns and villages, ten to twenty each year. Its largest component is a pavilion: a cube of 35 square meters. In order to host *MoW* in their town or village, interested local activists (usually NGO workers, teachers or employees of local cultural institutions) need to respond to the call for applications issued by

Museum on Wheels in Kłpno (2015). Photo taken by Filip Basara for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN. Used with the permission of the Museum.



the POLIN. The activists have to propose a programme to accompany the three-day visit of *MoW*.

When on tour, in each town or village, the pavilion is accompanied by POLIN's staff: one coordinator, two educators, one technical employee and one watchman who guards the exhibition at night. The exhibition in the pavilion consists of "permanent" elements, such as a timeline of Jewish presence in Poland or a 3D model of a Christian-Jewish town from the early 20th century; and location-dependent components, of which the central one is a local interactive map indicating sites related to the Jewish community formerly inhabiting the town.

The project aims to teach about the Jewish past and present in Poland as well as to support local leaders who are involved in promoting this knowledge locally, and who engage in restoration or protection of Jewish material heritage (POLIN Museum 2017b). Cooperation with locals is declared to be one of the central elements of *MoW*, but the way it happens is subject to a structure created by the itinerant museum's curators and coordinators at POLIN.

The role of local activists cooperating with *MoW* is for instance to help arranging the logistics and infrastructure for the *MoW* visit and running accompanying events during the *MoW*'s stay related to Jewish culture and history. They also can provide photos, texts or video material to be presented on one of the screens in the exhibition's pavilion and they are consulted in the process of creating the interactive local map.

Local activists receive support and some coaching from the educators as well as POLIN's staff before and during the visit of *MoW*. Some of the activists stay in touch with POLIN afterwards, but the project is not about long-term cooperation but rather a one-time intervention which provides a space for three days for exploring the history of Jews locally and in Poland.

The approach adopted by POLIN is one among many that large institutions take in creating travelling exhibitions. What connects these itinerant projects is the engagement of mobilities of people, data and objects which contribute to identifying the relevance of museums for society

and provide new ways for engaging with audiences. ■

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The political economy of historical digital games

Emil Lundedal Hammar

The late science-fiction author Octavia Butler once wrote in her unpublished work Parable of the Trickster that: “There’s nothing new / under the sun, / but there are new suns.”

With this epigram, Butler was referring to the imaginary of science-fiction and the possible worlds that the literary genre provides readers with. While our current Sun shines light on a world fraught with oppression, poverty, injustice, extinctions, we can use our imagination to build abstract, metaphysical, immaterial worlds with different suns and different societal modalities. It is through these new suns that we allow ourselves to imagine a better world without pain and misery, and thereby shift our present world towards a better future. Simply put, Butler’s words highlight the fact that another world is possible.

But while Butler is referring to visions of possible futures, we can likewise attempt to imagine our past in different ways. What if History had turned out differently? What if, instead of South East Asia and Africa being colonized by European powers, the invaders had cooperated with and communicated as equals with the colonies? What if capitalism in the US and Western Europe had been dismantled and replaced with a more just economic system during the Cold

War? What if Native North and South Americans had fought back and repelled the colonial invasion and the ensuing genocides?

Just at hinting at these questions, already our imaginations run wild with scenarios free of the grand histories we have been unquestioningly taught. No longer shackled by the history that brought us to this point, our imagination wrests us from a hegemonic past that binds our societies in traumatic legacies. Perhaps it is even fruitful to emancipate ourselves from the grand history and its reliance on hegemonic victors, who decided how the past should be retold in the future. Thus, we might follow Butler’s advice on new suns.

Yet, to imagine may require stimulation via communication – as literature and prose are used to stimulate our emancipatory imagination, so do film, monuments, archives, calendar dates, graphic novels, data networks, theatre plays, and games help us imagine differently. And with the proliferation of digital technologies among those of us with sufficient income and our neo-feudal national identity, we can virtually imagine and play with past suns.

This virtual historical imagination is evidenced in digital games (colloquially known as video or computer games). There, people are able to *play* histories and imagine new suns. While play



In Attila: Total War (Creative Assembly, 2015), players are able to command armies to defeat other nations in the historical period 395-453 in Europe.

has always been part of culture and even animal nature, it is also in relation to digital technology that games have been given a popular and highly commercial audio-visual form for some people to engage with.

In digital games, people are able to play historical scenarios where a past is usually depicted for the pleasure and stimulation of players. For example, they are able to command a medieval army in the European Middle Ages, they can build up Empires in the Middle East to conquer and dominate the known world, or they can traverse Italian renaissance architecture and encounter popular historical figures. Players are able to perform in these virtual environments where the computer (console/phone/digital device) acts as the mediator of the game rules and systems.

Thus, the popular genre of historical digital games gives players the opportunity to “play” with history, usually in either a bird’s eye perspective of historical processes or in a one-character perspective. In the former, players can establish empires under the chronology of (Western) history and change the direction their Empire will take when it comes to the development and conquering of other nations. In the latter, players play the past from the perspective of one or more historical characters, in which there is an emphasis on the audio-visual detail of the virtual environment and its reference to the historical period.

The fact that these virtual worlds have to be built entirely from scratch via software tools ought to permit a wealth of creative and emanci-

patory new suns, which would be divorced from the oppressive conditions of our own sun. Yet, despite the possibilities of virtual environments, digital games are nevertheless still constricted by the context of production. Just as mass cultural films have to pass through a host of processes in order to end up on the screen, so mass cultural digital games require vast amounts of labour and approval through power relations.

Thus, the context of production constrains the meaning potential of historical games to the extent that these new suns are incredibly similar to our own oppressive sun: Most mass cultural games are US- and Eurocentric depictions of the past with largely hegemonic forces at large. To return to Butler’s quote: new suns are possible, but only once they have managed to navigate the various power relations and material conditions in contemporary society. For example, before a game even begins development, the decision-makers and those in economic power will doubtless ask: Does it sell? Who are its main demographic audiences? Are there prior examples of such a title selling? Will it generate any backlash?

Another problem is that the majority of the most popular and widely disseminated games are

The game Phone Story (molleindustria, 2011) highlights the four stages of production of game devices – from extraction of conflict minerals via slave labour to atrocious working conditions at Chinese labour camps to the consumerist demand for these digital devices to the toxic extraction of the dumped “obsolete” devices.



developed in North America and Europe with the (cheap) help of outsourced software development in South East Asia. The main development team will be comprised of similar identities across race, class, gender, nationality, and sexuality. This homogenous composition of Western developers likewise ensures that the people in decision-making positions are young, white, male, and heterosexual – thus, working environments of your common mainstream game developer primarily foster certain life experiences and attitudes divorced from the realities of others.

In turn, such environments are conducive to fostering certain visions of the past, while those in the margins are forgotten or ignored. We see this repeatedly, where historical digital games always centre on European or US-American cultures and viewpoints; the chances are that new suns are few and far between, if not non-existent.

Then, when resistant voices and marginalized identities highlight and criticize this state of affairs and propose historical games that are diverse and multiple in the views and experiences they offer, they are met with lip service, denial or opposition by decision-makers and investors. Concurrently, they face a specific hegemonic consumer culture that has been constructed and cultivated via marketing efforts in the 1990s and early 2000s, where industry companies doubled down on assumed consumer preferences and fostered values, norms, and expectations in regard to who gets a voice, who gets represented, and whose viewpoint is important.

In turn, enthusiast game consumers implicitly identify their camaraderie, preferences, and values with multibillion companies. By extension, any criticism of the games and the company that produced them, becomes a criticism of themselves. This combination of identity-specific norms in the games (Western-centric white supremacist heteronormative patriarchy) and corporate identification (consumerism via capitalism), means that the discursive environment is explicitly hostile to criticism of any kind, especially if it originates from marginalized voices.

So, whenever journalists, critics, community members, academics, etc. speak up about the

injustices and silencing of other perspectives and voices during the production and marketing of historical games, they are faced with an organized collective of enthusiasts who sustain their hegemony, the multibillion companies, and the products that they identify with. This ensures stability for companies where they do not necessarily need to engage with criticism from minority voices and those at the periphery, and instead allow a hostile and reliable hegemonic consumer group to maintain the economically predictable status quo.

Thus, the possibility of creating and fostering new suns in the domain of digital games is a painful, terrorizing, and tough road that many have undertaken. This road to different pasts via virtual environments is predicated on economics, on identity-norms, on power structures, and fundamentally on the material and global networks that allow those of us with access to the infrastructure to play in these virtual environments.

Signs of change?

At the same time, there are glimpses of games that manage to escape the political economy of the games industry and consumer culture. In *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry* (Ubisoft Montreal, 2013) players are able to take the role of a black freedom fighter from Trinidad, who violently opposes and attempts to dismantle the 18th century French colonial transatlantic slave trade in the Caribbean, thus echoing the Haitian revolution and liberation.

In *Mafia 3* (Hangar 13, 2016), players adopt the role of Lincoln Clay in 1960s New Orleans against the backdrop of the Civil Rights era in which systems of US white supremacy and black power movements are simulated and encountered. In *80 Days* (Inkle Studios, 2014), players are positioned as the Other when they travel across the world and come across a multiplicity of identities and cultures in a digital reimagining of Jules Verne's classic story.

Such games offer a historical virtual space that allows players to emancipate themselves from the usual hegemonic articulations of the past and instead to play with the past in such ways that imaginations of new suns are made possible. While



Set in 1960s New Orleans, Mafia 3 (Hangar 13, 2016) let's players fight against white supremacist law enforcement in the Southern USA with the help of a black liberation movement.

torical digital games, the optic of power relations still allows us to acknowledge the significance of allowing marginal positions to be enacted and performed via such digital games of Empire. If power fantasies are afforded to the hegemonic

Europeans and Americans, why should fantasies of liberation and emancipation of the past not be promoted and available to those under the boot of capitalist, colonial, and racist power?

Being able to play out and appropriate such stories is predicated on their economic and material conditions – i.e. the question is not whether or not the subaltern can speak, but instead can it shop? Games like *Empire: Total War*, *Mafia 3*, and *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry* are produced in relation to a number of factors, chief among them whether or not it is financially viable for investors to fund such games. Thus, our playing in new suns appears to be restricted by our own Sun and the economic and historic conditions in which we are embedded. ■

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different in budget and production scope, they nevertheless indicate an occasional willingness by creators and producers to break down the economic and demographic walls of hegemonic production structures. Although some of them might be criticized for having residues of contemporary power structures, they still allow players to play against History and offer individual and collective articulations of resistance via play.

This means that players are able to individually and collectively appropriate games for their own pleasure and preferences, even if the developers never intended such forms of play. The literary game scholar Mukherjee exemplifies such a strategy in the historical strategy game *Empire: Total War* (Creative Assembly, 2009) where Indian players play the Indian Empire and invade and conquer most of Europe and, more importantly, the United Kingdom.

Yet the possibilities in most major mainstream games are still those of Empire, i.e. while it might be possible in a few instances of resistance to take up the position of the subaltern or the historically oppressed as illustrated in the above examples, players are still constrained by the mechanics of games to perform Empire in the sense that only invasion, conquest, and domination of other spaces are possible in these games. Players still murder other people, they still invade other countries, and they still suppress and dominate other cultures.

Nevertheless, while this criticism is fruitful in identifying the one-dimensional actions in his-

It's Time ... a speech that shaped a life and Australia

Asha Chand

The following article is part of a memories project being carried out with a local council in Sydney, Australia, recording memories of senior citizens in a city that has changed culturally and geographically and in many other ways. Stories are recorded in video format and posted on the council's website with other layers of investigation and research as well as full transcriptions of the interview.

She moved to Blacktown in 1971. A year later, Gough Whitlam delivered Labor's policy speech "It's Time" at the Blacktown Bowman Hall (photo above right). Kathie Collins has vivid memories of watching, in awe, this turning point in Australia's history. In this conversation with Asha Chand, Kathie, a household name in Blacktown for her roles in politics and on social and volunteer fronts, widens the lens of her experiences in a city that is undoubtedly the lead contender for Australia's multicultural capital.

Describing Australia's citizenship test as "ridiculous" for expecting migrants, particularly those who are fleeing their own country, to know about Australian history and sportsmen, Kathie says better questions could relate to the contributions the newcomers could make to the country they want to call home. Kathie maintains that the focus should be on how the newcomers can make Australia an even better place.

Australia introduced tougher English language proficiency tests to ensure that "aspiring citizens are fully able to participate in Australian life by speaking English, our national language," Immigration Minister Peter Dutton told Parlia-



ment. According to a June 15, 2017 news report by the Australian Associated Press, Dutton said, "English language was essential to economic participation and social cohesion."

Kathie's comments came at a time when the Australian political arena was reeling with the revelation that some of its 226-member parliamentarians have dual citizenship in contravention of section 44 of the constitution. ABC News reported that "this section disqualifies someone from holding office" if they are entitled to the citizenship of another country. The cases of Deputy Prime Minister, Barnaby Joyce, Fiona Nash, Matt Canavan, from the Nationals party and Malcolm Roberts, (One Nation) are before the high court as they all have dual citizenship. Scott Ludlam and Larissa Waters from the Greens Party resigned over their dual citizenship status.

Bloomberg journalist, David Fickling, in his August 17, 2017 article, called for Australia to rethink its "out-dated citizenship restrictions," following the latest "blow" of Joyce's NZ citizenship to the one seat majority government of Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull. The deputy prime minister's father was born in New Zealand in 1924, as a result, he is officially considered a Kiwi.

“In total, 13 senators and 11 House members were born overseas, equivalent to about 17% and 7.3% of the respective chambers. More may be caught, like Joyce, as a result of their parentage,” Flickling’s report said. This crisis could stymie the government’s ability to pass legislation as both the House of Representatives and Senate are finely balanced between parties.

Australia has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born residents among democratic countries. Nearly half of permanent residents are first or second-generation migrants, with 28% born overseas and 21% having at least one foreign born parent, according to the 2016 national census count. Kathie, a Labor councillor for Ward 3, moved to Blacktown in 1971.

A country of inclusion and exclusion

In 1800, when the first record was taken, Blacktown had a population of 16 people. This count would not have included the Aboriginal population. At the last Australian census in 2016, the city recorded 350,288 people and is expected to have 520,000 people by 2036. It is the second largest city in New South Wales by population and has a land area of 247 square kilometres. The area is steeped in indigenous history. Prior to 1788, it was largely an Aboriginal settlement until 13 people on the Prospect Hill were granted land by Governor Phillip in 1791. There was competition for land and resources as a result of white settlement. Although the Aboriginal Darug’ population declined, there has always been a presence of the community in the city which was originally named Blacks Town.

One of the country’s most culturally diverse areas, Blacktown, 34 kilometres west of the Sydney CBD, is one of the fastest growing cities in Australia. The city has 37.6% of its population born overseas. The city also has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Australia with 8,195 or 2.77%. With the real estate market soaring in Sydney, Blacktown’s physical landscape is also changing dramatically.

“When we first moved to Blacktown the population was mainly Anglo with quite a few Maltese who generally were farmers. The Ital-

ians seemed to have the fruit and vegetable shops. Catholics were the most prevalent faith group. There were also quite a few refugees or displaced people from devastation of the 2nd World War. All of these newcomers to Australia were simply intent on making a home for themselves and contributing to the country,” Kathie recalls.

Kathie was rostered on the night shift at the local Blacktown Library on the day Whitlam made his famous “It’s Time” speech”. She recalled, “It was 7.45 pm and I had just finished my shift at work. I walked across from the library to Bowman Hall where a crowd had gathered. I heard the speech and it had a life changing impact on me. I realized then the value of political philosophies and began my search for my place in politics. It’s time – I told myself.” Kathie continued working at the library, a job she says was easy to find, “given that there was almost full employment and I was the only applicant”.

Even if you are not a true believer, Whitlam’s speech stirs something radical in the political space: “Men and women of Australia! The decision we will make for our country on the second of December is a choice between the past and the future, between the habits of the past and the demands and opportunities of the future”. Whitlam took his party to its first victory in 23 years at the 1972 election and became Australia’s 21st Prime Minister. He was leader of the Labor Party from 1967 to 1977.

Spoken at a time when Australia was demanding social change including gender and racial equality, Whitlam’s speech laid out a choice between the habits and fears of the past, and the demands and opportunities of the future.

Kathie gave up thoughts of pursuing a career in federal politics when she was described as “too old” when she was around 50. It is an irony that during the week of this interview with Kathie, Australia’s former Liberal Prime Minister, John Howard and former Labor Prime Minister, Bob Hawke criticised career politicians “with no life experience”.

Reflecting on Australian democracy in conversation with political journalist and commentator, Annabel Crabb, on 17 August 2017, Howard,



National Aboriginal and Islanders Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) in Blacktown. Kathie Collins is second from the left. The event represents a celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander cultures and recognises the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as first Australians in various fields.

who was the 25th PM and led from 1996 to 2007, said, “We have too many people who enter Parliament now, particularly at state level, who have had no experience in life other than politics.” Hawke, who was Prime Minister from 1983 to 1991, said, “My advice consistently to every young person who comes and asks me about (entering politics) is to make a life first.”

Paying tribute to the power of political speeches in 2012, then Senator, John Faulkner, speaking at the 40th anniversary of Whitlam’s “It’s Time” speech, at Bowman Hall in Blacktown, the site for the famous campaign launch, said, “We may be cynical about politics and politicians, we may be sceptical of the motives of those men and women who aspire to represent and to lead us – whether in Parliament, in community organisations and campaigns, or in social movements – but it is still their words which have the potential to express our aspirations, our beliefs, and our deepest sense of collective self.”

He reminded the audience that political speeches are more relevant than ever in a technological age that allows for their wide and immedi-

ate dissemination.

Empowerment through technology

The digital age is making a huge impact on the way communities today engage with political decisions and messages, Kathie says. She attributes much of this “empowerment” through technology to the mobile phone. “Young and old alike are adapting to using the phone for anything and everything”. The level of connectivity in cyberspace challenges the physical meeting spaces, she laments. Despite this, she says, “the world is much enriched because of this level of connectivity and information sharing”.

Kathie believes that having information at your fingertips and carrying technology in the palm of your hands is power to individuals. High speed interaction brings opportunities, cultural change and appreciation of others. People share simple information about the places for best Indian food via social media and soon a particular place tucked away in Quakers Hill in Blacktown is on everyone’s radar for curries.

Fashion, music and information have per-

meated cultural, ethnic, and physical boundaries in Blacktown. This is very different to when newcomers were so intent on making Australia home that they allowed their own culture to disappear, to some extent. There has been a remarkable change on this front with the city facilitating numerous cultural festivals and social events, allowing multiculturalism and diversity to reign as part of the city's cultural fabric.

In 1975, Kathie commenced a Degree in Australiana at New England University. She "absolutely embraced the history of Australia and much that was never taught in school about the Aboriginal people. I was outraged by the treatment of the Aboriginal people." This outrage has remained a constant for Kathie even while occupied with other activities such as sporting activities for her children.

In 1976 many refugees were seeking asylum in Australia following the end of the Vietnam War. St Patrick's Parish undertook to house two families. With many others, Kathie became involved with settling both families. The goodwill of the local community was inspiring. "Forty years later we still keep in touch with one of the families. Again, the Vietnamese sought to be part of the community and contribute to their adopted country," she says.

Then Deputy Mayor of Blacktown Cr Charlie Bali talked Kathie into joining the Labor Party in 1980. In 1983 John Aquilina, then Mayor of Blacktown and former speaker and member of NSW State Parliament, persuaded her to run for council. She was second on the Labor ticket for Ward 3 in the 1983 and 1987 elections but was unsuccessful. The council elections in 1991 saw Kathie elected.

Kathie reminisces on how much she has learned by being exposed to a variety of situations and diversity of people. The landscape of Blacktown has changed into a United Nations on her doorstep. The most common ancestries in Blacktown in 2016 were: Australian 17.8 %; English: 16.2%; Indian 8.9%; Filipino 7.0%; and Irish 4.4%. A total of 48,551 residents in Blacktown reported speaking a non-English language at home. This multicultural melting-pot makes the city richer

for its diversity. Blacktown comprises 177 different nationalities and a similar number of languages spoken. The library now has collections in at least 21 different languages.

Kathie remembers how she stood in amazement when she saw Aboriginal children for the first time. "I was five then. I was playing near the gate of our farm house which sat on 8,500 acres outside Lake Cargelligo. A truck backed up against the gate. On the back were children with much darker skin than mine. I was speechless." In hindsight, I guess I reacted very similarly to how the Aboriginal people would have reacted as they watched white people land on their shores. I used to constantly talk, especially to the farm hands my father employed but this situation was something so different."

Kathie says that this scene was etched in her memory. She kept it filed away until she became an adult and with education and an inquiring mind, was able to learn and understand about other people, their cultures and ways of life, including the Aborigines.

Kathie says technology has made learning about others easier and faster. "I worked in the library when cards were issued for keeping records on borrowings and return". She grew up in an era when religion and politics were never discussed. The current debate in Australia over same sex marriage is an example of how much change has taken place. Same sex marriage will only become law if passed through Australia's parliament. The government, however, is seeking public consent on The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey, says the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

A fact-check by the news provider says that the process is voluntary and non-binding. Unlike other media reports, the ABC says the process is not a plebiscite which is a compulsory vote by citizens on an issue of significance, but one that does not affect the Constitution of Australia, and has no legal force. Same sex marriage became legal in New Zealand and the UK in 2013 and the US in 2015.

"People from all sections of the local, national and international communities have jumped on the social media band wagon to have their say

on this important matter”, Kathie says. Commenting on women not being able to break the glass ceiling in the corporate and political world Kathie says that the situation is created by men not willing to give up the positions they believe were created for men. “Women, for the most part, are not feisty and don’t push the issue. There is much to be done.”



In 1996 Kathie (photo above) walked the Milford Track in New Zealand. In 2001 she completed a Bachelor’s Degree at the University of Technology, Sydney, while working full-time at Western Sydney University’s Penrith campus library. In 2006 she fulfilled a childhood dream by walking the Kokoda Track in New Guinea. That tough walk was followed by walking the Sandakan track in Sabah, Borneo in 2009 and a section of the Camino de Santiago in Spain in 2012. These travels opened her mind to other possibilities such as being involved in charities and tackling social issues like homelessness.

Kathie’s philosophy is, “Nothing comes easy. If you want to achieve something, you have to work hard.” ■

All photos courtesy of Blacktown City Council & Library Services records. for a video interview with Kathie Collines visit: <https://youtu.be/W4mYdt-Owzw>

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Rights at Risk: Observatory on the Universality of Rights Trends Report 2017

Excerpt

The trend is unmistakable and deeply alarming: in international human rights spaces, religious fundamentalists are now operating with increased impact, frequency, coordination, resources, and support.

The worldwide rise in religious fundamentalist actors is not happening in a vacuum. This growing phenomenon is inextricably linked to geopolitics, systemic and growing inequalities and economic disparities, conflict, militarism, and other political, social, and economic factors. In turn, these factors drive religious fundamentalists to regional and international policy spaces in search of increased impact.

Civil society organizations

In an unexpected shift in traditional dynamics at the UN, there has been a substantial increase in conservative religiously-affiliated non-State actors involved in the international human rights arena.¹ This trend can be understood as a form of backlash against the gains of feminists and other progressive actors. In what appears to be a conscious attempt to replicate the organizing methods and level of engagement of feminist and progressive civil society in transnational policy spaces, anti-rights civil society organizations are moving into New York and Geneva to further a very different agenda.

In terms of economic and Social Council (eCOSOC) accreditation,² the majority of such regressive civil society organizations are Christian

Photo courtesy of International Planned Parenthood Federation.

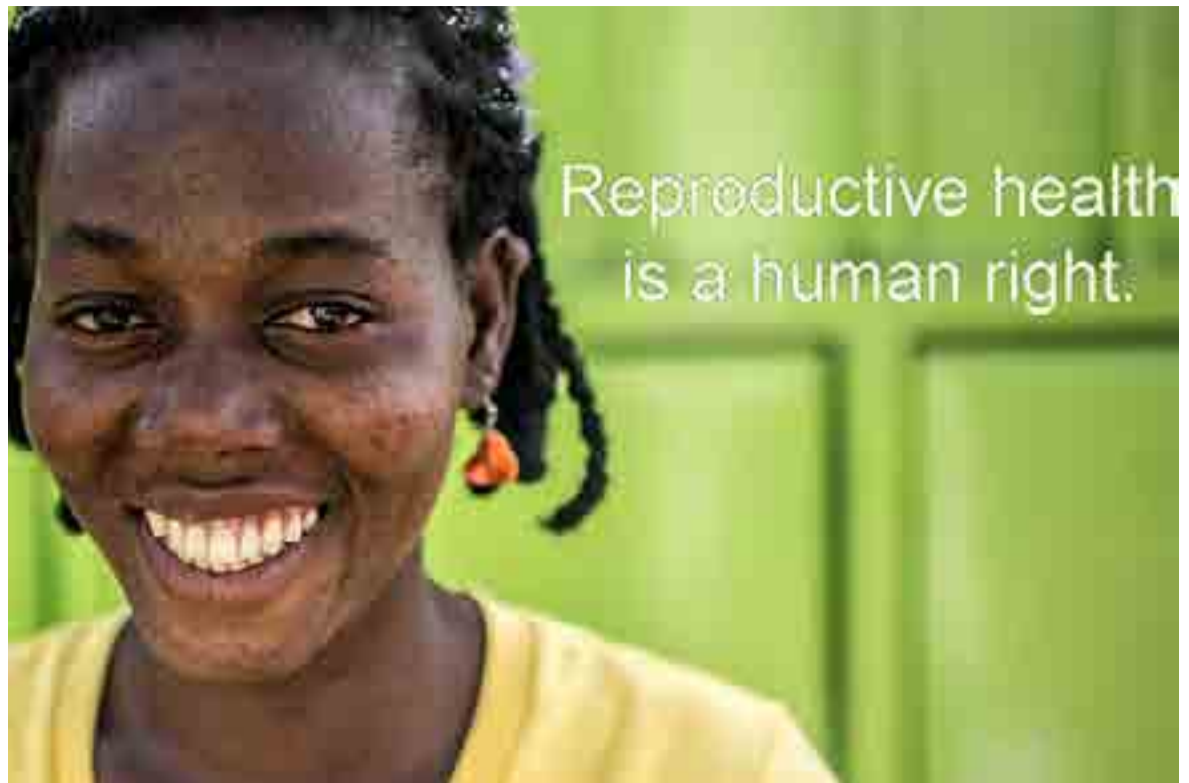
evangelical or Catholic in orientation.³ Most of the anti-rights CSOs active in international human rights spaces were founded in or are based in the United States, although their rhetoric often claims to speak with the “collective voice” of the global South. In fact, the bulk of United States based religiously-affiliated conservative CSOs now operating at the UN have long been active on the domestic front in U.S. “culture wars”,⁴ targeting women and individuals who are nonconforming in their gender identity, expression and/or sexual orientation.⁵

Ironically, given their tactical appropriation of anti-imperialist discourses at the United Nations, a number of the CSOs highlighted below—including the Family Research Council, World Congress of Families, and United Families International—have been and continue to be involved in attempts to export the United States “culture wars” abroad, particularly in an attempt to shape national policies regarding sexuality and gender identity in several African, eastern European, and Latin American countries.⁶

In the Latin American context, these activities coexist with a longer history of struggle between ultra-conservative and emancipatory discourses around sexuality and gender with the Vatican/Catholic Church significantly influencing outcomes.

Cross-denominational conservative coalition

[As the section below highlights,] religious right civil society organizations working at the United Nations increasingly join forces in a cross-denominational conservative coalition that hopes to achieve common goals related to “life, family, and nation”. For U.S.-based organizations, their capacity to organize, influence, and build cross-



regional coalitions received a boost during the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009) that has yielded an ongoing effect.

Many in the network of U.S. anti-rights civil society organizations made the transition from outsiders to insiders through President Bush’s courting of the religious right at the international level. Under Bush, Christian Right activists were included as official representatives on U.S. delegations to UN conferences, such as the World Summit on Children.⁷ United States religious right civil society benefited from increased access, institutionalization, and lobbying power in negotiations on rights for women, children, and individuals with non-conforming gender identity, expression and/or sexual orientation.

In the same period ultra-conservative actors in the U.S. built relationships with counterparts abroad. For instance, at the 2002 UN Special Session on Children, the U.S. led a coalition of majority Catholic and Muslim countries, including Sudan, Iran and Pakistan, to oppose draft language recognizing “various forms of the family” and reproductive health services for adolescents.⁸

The relationships initiated then form the basis of today’s ongoing strategic alliances with conservative allies on the State level and across religious lines.⁹ With the new U.S. administration under Donald Trump and Vice-President Michael Pence – who describes himself as a “devout evangelical” – it is highly probable that U.S. anti-rights

CSOs will be again endowed with greater access, power, and inclusion in the determination of United States foreign policy.

At the time of writing, the new administration had already reinstated and expanded the “Global Gag Rule”, a policy that prohibits U.S. funding from going to any international organization that administers, counsels on, advocates for, or mentions abortion; and it has defunded the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).¹⁰

Traditionalist civil society actors working to influence international human rights today are also more unified at the international level than the domestic. While the relationship between the Protestant and Catholic Right is uneasy within the United States,¹¹ in UN venues Catholic, Mormon, and evangelical organizations and individuals now largely act as a unified bloc. An ongoing project, antirights CSOs increasingly focus on coalition building and training as part of their operations. In turn, networks are developed to further collaboration at the international, regional, and national levels.

[In the following section,] we examine several of the most active ultra-conservative religiously-affiliated civil society actors engaged in international human rights advocacy over 2015 and 2016. Given the results of the recent U.S. election, it is likely that their influence and impact will rise sharply in the near future; indeed, as of early 2017, we have already seen their impact.¹² ■

The complete report is [available here](#). The Observatory on the Universality of Rights (OURs) is a new collaborative initiative that aims to monitor, analyze, and share information on initiatives that misuse religion, culture, and tradition to undermine the universality of human rights. Grounded in a feminist framework, the OURs initiative works across regions, issues, and human rights spaces towards the advancement of social justice. The OURs Working Group is made up of organizations and activists who work to protect and promote the universality of rights.

Notes

1. While there is a documented increase in numbers of ultra-conservative CSOs active at the United Nations, it is also important to note that many of their claims in terms of

attendance and dissemination are not externally corroborated and may be inflated.

2. At present, 4,507 NGOs worldwide enjoy consultative status with eCOSOC, which coordinates the work of the United Nations. NGOs which receive eCOSOC accreditation may engage in formal UN proceedings. For more information, see <http://csonet.org/index.php?menu=134>
3. Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Lobbying for Faith and Family: A Study of Religious NGOs at the United Nations, 2013, <https://www.norad.no/globalassets/import-2162015-80434-am/www.norad.no-ny/filarkiv/vedlegg-til-publikasjoner/lobbying-for-faith-and-family.pdf>
4. The term was introduced in the U.S. domestic context in “Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America”, by the sociologist James Davidson Hunder. It refers to the ongoing pronounced polarization between ideologies, often played out in the political sphere, and frequently focused on such issues as abortion, immigration, LGBT rights, and the separation of church and state.
5. See for example, Jennifer S. Butler, *Born Again: The Christian Right Globalized*, 2006.
6. See for example, Public Research Associates, *Colonizing African Values: How the U.S. Christian Right is Transforming Sexual Politics in Africa*, 2012, <http://www.politicalresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/Colonizing-African-Values.pdf>
7. Doris Buss and Didi Herman, *Globalizing Family Values: The Christian Right in International Politics*, 2003.
8. George Archibald, U.S. to help UN redefine “families”, *Washington Post*, April 2002.
9. Strong interlinkages amongst anti-rights CSOs continue. The Board of the U.S.-based World Congress of Families, for example includes the founder of the Spanish conservative online petition platform HazteOir, the founder of the Russian CSO FamilyPolicy, the director of La Fundacion in Mexico, and the founder of the Italian Novae Terra Foundation.
10. For more on these and likely future developments, please see Françoise Girard, Implications of the Trump Administration for sexual and reproductive rights globally, *Reproductive Health Matters*, 25:49, 2017.
11. Bendyna, M., Green, J. C., Rozell, M. J. and Wilcox, C., Catholics and the Christian Right: A View from Four States. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39: 321-332, 2000.
12. We have already seen their effect on the current U.S. administration in early 2017, with respect to the regressive positions on SRHR taken by U.S. representatives at the CSW and CPD, the inclusion of the anti-rights CSO C-Fam (and the Heritage Foundation) on the U.S. delegation to the CSW, and the administration’s defunding of the UNFPA.

The Meaning of Life: Locarno Film Festival 2017

Robert K. Johnston

*The 70th Locarno film festival – held during the first days of August on the shores of Lake Maggiore on the border of Italy and Switzerland – again proved magical. But as Golshifteh Farahani, an actress starring in *The Song of Scorpions* (d. Anup Singh, Switzerland/France/Singapore, 2017), one of the films that was screened to more than 6,000 outdoor spectators on the Piazza Grande, said: “The power of the mountains, lake and rivers combined with movies and the best risotto in the world. What could be better than that?”*

As it has done each year since 1973, SIGNIS (World Catholic Association for Communication) and INTERFILM, the international, inter-church film organization of mainly Protestants, joined together to appoint an ecumenical jury to choose a film in the festival’s international competition that best portrayed “human experience that is in harmony with the gospel” or best sensitized “viewers to spiritual, human or social questions and values.” What this award seeks to honour are cinematic works of the highest quality that bear witness to the power of film to explore the spiritual dimensions of our existence.

I was privileged to be part of the Ecumenical Jury this year. Co-members of the jury included a long-time organizer for a sister jury at Cannes, a programmer for a non-commercial Christian television station in Prague, a staff member for a Protestant church-in-mission organization in Montpellier (France), the director of a Roman Catholic cultural centre in Frankfurt a/M (Germany), and

a lecturer in practical theology in the Netherlands. Four of us have finished doctoral work in theology and film, and two have had long standing involvement with film and the church. As one might expect from such a group, discussion of each film in the competition was both spirited and insightful. We learned from each other.

In a ceremony on the closing day of the festival, we awarded a prize of 20,000 Swiss Francs (to be used to help with the film’s distribution throughout Switzerland) to the best film of the competition, as well as commendations to two other movies of merit that invited spiritual reflection on the nature of the human. The three films chosen could not have been more different, whether in genre, tone, nation of origin, or focus. But what all three shared in their stories was their filmic excellence, their universal impact, their inventive expression, and their spiritual depth in portraying what it is to be human.

Ecumenical Award for *Lucky*

The prize for best film went to *Lucky* (d. John Carroll Lynch, U.S.A., 2017). An homage to Harry Dean Stanton, one of America’s greatest character actors who is now ninety-one, *Lucky* (see still on following page) winsomely explores the meaning of life given the immanence of death. Directed by an accomplished actor himself, John Carroll Lynch and including David Lynch in a memorable supportive role, the movie is set in a small, bleak desert town in the Southwest. Starring the 91 year old Stanton himself as Lucky, the film follows this elderly curmudgeon as he goes about his modest life. Though angry, fearful and living on the edge of his community, Lucky also proves “lucky” enough to have others who help him move beyond himself. He is not alone.

Although Lucky refuses for much of the film to engage with others, a highlight of the film is Lucky coming to a birthday party thrown by the waitress in the diner for her daughter. There he is cajoled into singing a song, something melancholy and probably inappropriate for a young girl’s party to be sure, but something loved by all in attendance, nonetheless. It is his gift to the others. As the Preacher says, “Two are better than one[]



but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help” (Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10).

The film notes make clear, as did the director during his Q&A, that Stanton is an atheist, himself. And the film is meant to be about Stanton. But the film, despite itself, explores a spirituality of life that extends beyond surface reality. As John Lynch, the director, said in his response to the award, “While ‘Lucky’ wears his atheism on his sleeve, there is no doubt that the themes of mortality and life’s meaning fall in a spiritual realm. Even though Lucky (and Harry Dean for that matter) would disagree that there is a spiritual realm, or a soul for that matter. But regardless of one’s faith, we all have to face the truth of our mortality and ‘Truth is a thing,’ [as the movie says].

Though the bleakness of the desert where Harry lives is unrelenting, a slow walking tortoise by the name of Roosevelt symbolizes in the movie’s narrative life’s ongoing mystery and meaning. There is more to life than surface existence. Life is precious, even given the spectre of death. As the director said when commenting on the film, “Roosevelt steps slowly but surely into the future with his ‘coffin’ on his back, defying the bleakness around him. As the movie closes, Harry faces the audience directly and smiles. Perhaps for the first time in more than 60 years of acting, Stanton “talks” directly to us, his audience. The fourth wall is broken. The story is not one about death at all, certainly not about Lucky’s death. It is about liv-

ing. There is a larger spirituality to life, despite all that might seem to militate against it.

I write this review while back at home in Pasadena, California. I have just gone to the gym to work out. There, I meet once again, Tony, an elderly Japanese man who has had a stroke and who barely can shuffle along with the help of a three-pronged cane. A former body builder, Tony has been coming to this same gym for over twenty-five years (I know for he was there the first day I came.) Tony’s life is precarious, but not without joy. For his community greets him daily, stops to chat briefly, even offers a helping hand before moving on. And Tony too, still shuffles into the cycling class, or moves slowly back and forth in an exercise class. Life is not much; but it isn’t ‘nothing’. Again, to quote the preacher, “But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion” (Ecclesiastes 9:4).

Commendations for two different films

A commendation for merit was also given by the jury to two other films, *Qing Ting zhi yan/ Dragonfly Eyes* (d. XU Bing, China/USA, 2017), and *Vinterbrodre/Winter Brothers*, (d. Hlynur Pálsson, Denmark/Iceland, 2017).

Dragonfly Eyes/Qing Ting zhi yan tells the story of Qing Ting, a simple young woman training to become a Buddhist nun. But sensing in her spirit the need for something more, she leaves the monastery to work on a highly mechanized dairy farm where the cows are perhaps treated better

than the workers. There she meets Ke Fan, who is smitten by her. Their relationship becomes complicated however, Ke Fan ending up in jail for a time after doing something he thought Qing Ting would like, and Qing Ting then having plastic surgery and reinventing herself as an online celebrity. When Qing Ting dies, Ke Fan expresses his grief by also having plastic surgery so that his face becomes hers, and he then joins the same monastery as we have seen at the film's beginning. The movie ends where it began, with Ke Fan/Qing Ting beginning his/her quest to find meaning in life.

This story of a search for meaning in life by two Chinese young adults might seem straightforward, almost classic even if a bit quirky, except for one major factor. Rather than starting with a screenplay, the director, XU Bing, started with an image – actually lots of images. Fascinated by China's ubiquitous use of surveillance cameras (the average person in China is captured by surveillance cameras 300 times a day!), and aware that this footage was available for any to see from the internet cloud, Bing first culled images from 10,000 hours of footage. Here was the genesis of the movie. Bing then created a story line as he edited a bricolage of images. (To make his story work with the images at hand, Bing said in a Q&A that he chose to use plastic surgery as a plot device, thus allowing different people to be used as the same person!)

In the movie there are, as might be expected from surveillance cameras, few close ups. Instead, we as the audience are voyeurs of two lives, concurrently both proximate and yet also distant. The movie's editing is often frantic, even nonsensical. We see buildings collapse and a woman senselessly fall into a harbour and drown (perhaps while not paying attention while being on her i-phone), and a cow fall out of the back of a truck. But we as viewers remain fascinated, despite the confusion, for the footage is also real (think *The Truman Show* which was one inspiration for the filmmaker). What we might reject as poor editing if the images were simply constructed somehow seems genuine here. Life is chaotic. Stuff happens, and truth is often stranger than fiction.

The film asks, given life's mystery, what in

life really is real, and what is fake? As the movie states, "When you fake reality, reality is fake." How does outer appearance relate to inner reality? Both the film's formal characteristics and its storyline raise such questions. Our panel of judges was fascinated by this portrayal of spiritual longing in the midst of life's ongoing absurdity. Though the movie comes out of Communist China, the film ends in a monastery where it also began, with a character seeking to mine the depth of China's rich spiritual past, even while cognizant of the vagaries and secularity of present life, chief of which is death itself.

Focussing viewers' attention on mining

At the Festival there were randomly several movies that focused viewers' attention on mining and its consequences. *Good Luck* (d. Ben Russell, 2017, France/Germany) was a documentary in the competition about the lives of miners first in Slovenia and then in Surinam. Slow paced and largely without a narrative arc, the rhythm of the film nonetheless ushered viewers into the extremity of life for these workers.

Viewers also had the opportunity to watch *Das Kongo Tribunal/The Congo Tribunal* (d. Milo Rau, Switzerland/Germany 2017), a movie shown outside the main competition as one of seven documentaries selected by the Swiss Association of Film Journalists to help festival goers engage new perspectives that might provoke debate. Documenting a unique civil tribunal concerning the war in Congo that has claimed six million lives, the film gives us a tragic portrait of the bloodiest economic conflict in history, centring on the rich mining deposits being exploited at present in Congo.

But best, without question, was not a documentary but a drama – *Vinterbrødre/WinterBrothers*, (d. Hlynur Pálmason, Denmark/Iceland, 2017). Stunning visuals that showed only faint light from the miners' helmets amidst overwhelming darkness provided powerful "commentary" on the film's intended meaning, and a riveting sound design demanded the viewer's attention. The movie tells the story of two young brothers (Emil and Johan) who have no parents and who live and work



at an almost animal level in one of Denmark's underground mines. Elliott Crosset Hove, who plays the younger brother Emil (still above), was awarded the festival's golden leopard for best male actor, an award richly deserved.

Emil and Johan seem reduced to life at its most primitive – work, food, drink, sex. A scene where they wrestle each other, animal-like in the nude, shows rather than tells all we need to know about their condition. Emil also is involved with making and selling moonshine to his fellow workers. Though some of the liquor is tainted causing another's death, he is unconcerned. The story's byline seems appropriate for much of the movie – “a lack of love story”. But Emil unexpectedly finds a neighbour girl who loves him, even if Johan then has sex with her. Despite life's amorality and its overwhelming sense of enclosure, these young people, like the ninety-one year old Lucky, discover that “two is better than one”.

The girl's love is life-giving to Emil, as is his for her. When Emil shows her his card tricks, a new spark of humanity is evident. And as Emil mixes two chemicals together, this time not to

make liquor but to cause a delayed reaction for her to see, a reaction in which the liquid changes from clear to dark, viewers celebrate with this young couple their innocent joy. Though life might be vain, it is also precious; though too often inhuman, it is also wondrous. The person who is arguably the least likely in the mine to discover his true humanity, Emil, does so. The bleakness of the first ninety minutes becomes joyous. Life has real hope, however modest.

Additional movies to keep in mind

During our eleven days in Locarno, my wife, Catherine Barsotti, and I saw over thirty movies. These also included from the international competition: *Wajib* (d. Annemarie Jacir, Palestine/France/Germany/Columbia/Norway/Qatar/United Arab Emirates, 2017) was a Palestinian, father-son, road movie telling the story of a son who is living in Rome who returns home to Nazareth to join his divorced father in personally handing out invitations to his sister's wedding as is the local custom. This social custom brings the two estranged people together, as the conversa-

tion tests their fragile relationship.

As Boas Maneiras (Good Manners, d. Juliana and Marco Dutra, Brazil/France, 2017) was not only an excellently crafted Brazilian werewolf movie, but a story of the sacrificial love of a black nanny who comes to live with the wealthy Ana and her soon to be child and ultimately becomes a Madonna-like figure. The film was awarded the Special Jury Prize by the International Jury.

Goliath (d. Dominik Locher, Switzerland 2017) shows us a young man, David, small of frame, who chooses to take steroids in order to bulk up so he can protect his girlfriend from the bullies they encounter. In telling its story, the movie uses the biblical story of David and Goliath, only in this retelling David chooses not five small stones but attempts to become another Goliath with tragic results.

Las cinephilas (The Cinephiles, d. María Alvarez, Argentina, 2017) in the section “Semaine de a critique” is a documentary which interviews older women in Argentina and Uruguay who find their joy in life watching a movie at the cinema each day.

Finally *Demain et tous les autres jours* (Tomorrow and Thereafter, d. Noémi Lvovsky, France, 2017), the opening film on the Piazza Grande, tells a gentle, non-judgmental story of a single mother’s mental illness and her young daughter’s need to take on the role of the adult, helped through magical realism by the spiritual presence of a wise owl.

The Festival also showed in a retrospective a large number of films by the French director Jacques Torneur who made most of his movies in the USA. We saw his classic *Cat People* (USA, 1942) a superb, black and white film filled with suspense that uses suggestion and one’s imagination (not high priced special effects) to create fear in the viewer.

The Golden Leopard

Perhaps the biggest enigma of the festival for me was the choice of its International Jury (president Olivier Assayas, France) of outstanding film. It went to the Chinese documentary *Mrs. Fang* (d. WANG Bing, France/China/Germany, 2017),

which showed the last days of a dying woman with Alzheimer’s disease. The men in the family go fishing most evenings and stay largely unconnected. The women stay in the room but talk about, not to, the dying woman. There is almost no interpretation of the event offered by the filmmaker other than the editing. Rather, viewers are asked to create their own narrative about its meaning.

If *Dragonfly Eyes* created the feeling of being a voyeur at times, *Mrs. Fang* does this throughout its screening. Are we as viewers intruding? Would Mrs. Fang have wanted her last moments to be made public in this way? Is it enough in a documentary to leave interpretation almost entirely in the minds of the viewer? Or is a dialogue between filmmaker and viewer a rightful expectation?

Questions, both ethical and formal, caused this movie to remain stillborn for me. But, of course, that is the promise and problematic of a movie’s story. What is profound for one might do nothing for another. Perhaps. But a great film might be expected to capture more of our interest. I, together with my colleagues on the Ecumenical Jury, remained mystified. ■

interfilm

is the international network for dialogue between church and film. It participates in festivals through ecumenical, interreligious or solely Protestant juries which award prizes to outstanding films.

Besides Berlin, Cannes, Locarno and Venice, **interfilm** is represented at numerous other festivals where church film juries award prizes to films which:

- are of high artistic quality
- lend expression to a human viewpoint corresponding with the message of the Gospels, or stimulate debate with the Biblical tradition
- make audiences sensitive to spiritual, social and ethical values.