Analyzing Disruptive Tactics and Strategies in Media Activism

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Abstract

Our 21st century media environment has grown more immersive and predominant with the invention of communication technologies such as telephones, satellites, video cameras, and computers. We are all now electronically connected, able to communicate, observe, and react to what is happening anywhere in the world in an instant. How do we make sense of these myriad electronic messages and messengers? Can we trust or understand the monetization processes behind the code that creates and designs our mediated contemporary reality? More importantly, how can we disrupt and transform the mainstream media’s dominant control over most of these messages? During this panel, we shared our knowledge of disruptive media activism, presented in three parts:

a) Examining its historical origins; b) Merging cultural and technological processes to undermine a code-controlled Internet; and c) Populating our shared public social networks with culturally competent media artifacts, transcoding experiential knowledge into short digital stories.

Keywords

Media Activism, Guerrilla Television, IndyMedia Center, Culture Jamming, Digital Storytelling, Cancer Treatment, LGBT Health, Experiential Knowledge, Coded Infrastructures, Aesthetics.

Introduction

Our panel discussion began with Robin Oppenheimer’s historical analysis of media activist strategies in the United States. Victoria Moulder and Michael Heidt discussed their collaboration – demonstrating how, by disrupting the algorithmic structures of commercial search engines, we can serve activists. Lorna Boschman discussed a cross-Canadian research study of LGBT cancer patients who used digital stories to disrupt mainstream cancer narratives. Our panel joined with audience members to address the following questions:

- Media Activism Tactics: What can we learn from early media artist/activists? What are the disruptive tactics and strategies they pioneered that can help current and future generations make social change happen?
- Coded Infrastructures: Is code a purely technical, politically neutral medium? What is the relationship between digital spaces and social activism?
- Sharing Experiential Knowledge in Cancer Narratives: How can researchers work with artists and mentors to support digital storytelling among LGBT cancer patients so that socially relevant health knowledge is shared online and in workshops?

Be the Media: Media Activism Tactics

Presented by Robin Oppenheimer

Like today’s Millennials who grew up on the Internet, early media activists were the first generation to grow up watching the “new” technology of Television. They were mostly college students radicalized by the counterculture politics of the late 60s who also read McLuhan and understood the power of mass media to inform and shape their lives.

Guerrilla Television

I have identified 3 eras or historical periods of collective media activism in the U.S. The first is the Guerrilla Television era of the mid-1960s through mid-1970s. The Guerrilla Television era started with the invention and U.S. marketing of Sony’s portable Portapak video recorder. It was the first time ordinary citizens could record video onto tape and edit it, however crudely. As described by media arts historian Deirdre Boyle, “Video pioneers didn’t use covered wagons; they built media vans for their cross-country journeys colonizing the vast wasteland of American television. It was the late sixties, and Sony’s introduction of the half-inch video Portapak in the United States was like a media version of the Land Grant Act, inspiring a heterogeneous mass of American hippies, avant-garde artists, student-intellectuals, lost souls, budding feminists, militant blacks, flower children, and jaded journalists to take to the streets, if not the road, Portapak in hand, to stake out the new territory of alternative television.” [2]

The phrase “Guerrilla Television” comes from journalist Michael Shamberg’s 1971 book of the same name. Guerrilla TV was a Whole Earth Catalog-like publication documenting an international network of video collectives and artist/activists who communicated via print, mail, and by travelling and showing work. This and other publications such as Radical Software represent a larger alternative media movement in the late 1960s that took a critical stance toward mainstream media and stressed an alternative approach to media coverage of issues and events.

Mindy Faber, a video artist who worked for an early video art distributor Video Data Bank, describes the aesthetics of Guerrilla TV. “The raw energy and immediacy of the guerrilla cinema-verite style was an aesthetic principally dictated by equipment limitations. Since videotape editing was difficult on the first reel-to-reel systems, most vid-
eos occurred in real time, without much editing. Use of the wide-angle lens which for TVTV [an early Guerrilla TV collective] became a stylistic trademark, was a technique employed that would compensate for low lighting conditions. These along with other characteristics such as the lack of voice-over and the use of the cameraperson/interviewer style of journalism purposely countered the slick, polished, rapid-editing look of commercial television.” [7] Guerrilla TV groups were also part of the art world and they embraced the documentary form as art. They used video as a testing ground for the re-invention of journalism, media language and collective action.

Activist Video Movement

The second era is the Activist Video Movement of the 1980-90s, when video camcorders became more ubiquitous and affordable. With the election of Ronald Reagan and the rise of the conservative Moral Majority, the ever-increasing corporate stranglehold over commercial television became more apparent. Younger video artists embraced the playful intervention into mainstream television through Do-It-Yourself collective groups that also included hip-hop and punk musicians.

The convergence of these new political, cultural, and economic forces led to the establishment of Paper Tiger Television (PTTV), a New York-based collective of media activist/artists founded by Dee Dee Halleck and others. Feminists, gays, blacks, AIDS activists, and other social change progressives worked with Paper Tiger TV producers at a local cable access station to produce weekly shows.

Jesse Drew, a media arts historian and professor, describes Paper Tiger’s tactics: “Paper Tiger TV emerged in the early 1980s from the beginnings of a different form of new technological infrastructure... cable television. Building from the success of media activists’ demand for public-access TV channels from the cable conglomerates, a group of activists, academics, and artists chose to use these newly won television channels to focus on the media themselves. PTTV released a prolific barrage of half-hour critiques of mainstream media programming on Manhattan cable in 1981, opening with a hand-made, funky, decidedly low-tech look. This low-tech aesthetic was not only the result of a miniscule budget, but a conscious effort to show the public that anyone can make media. This demystification of television technology became a prime aspect of the Paper Tiger style.” [5]

A short video clip of Dee Dee Halleck’s PTTV compilation was exhibited at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York. In the video Halleck talks about the low-tech, creative aesthetics using chromakey and other video editing tricks invented by artists such as Joan Braiderman to critique mainstream media TV shows such as Dynasty.

Video artist Sherry Millner described the “bargain media” aesthetics of PTTV. She stated, “Since it is not have to be nice, pleasant, or well-behaved. It doesn’t have to sugarcoat its intentions. Throwing aside expectations about what media should look like or what it should say, bargain media can afford to be offensive and to encourage people to take sides. Like it or not you are always fighting two battles at once; for an alternative content embodied in an alternative form.” [18]

Out of PTTV and other collectives came the idea for a national network of channels and producers linked by satellites. The Deep Dish TV network was established in the late 1980s. It distributed PTTV and other progressive public access TV shows to community TV centers in the U.S. and internationally before the Internet was available. Deep Dish provided collectively-produced media programs critical of the Bush administration’s Gulf War, editing short pieces created by local media activists into a crazy-quilt collage that showed what mainstream media wasn’t showing — opposition to the war in communities across the U.S. and internationally.

Jesse Drew describes the tactics and look of Deep Dish: “The Gulf Crisis TV Project was formed in the fall of 1990 and put out a call for video documentation of local antiwar events, as well as to disseminate interviews with dissident experts and intellectuals ignored by mainstream media. Also welcomed were artistic and cultural works that critiqued and illuminated what was happening in the Gulf. ‘It contained the work of over a hundred producers, from dozens of locations. The work ranged from rallies, to comedians, to guerrilla theater, to intimate interviews, to didactic charts and history texts...The programs bristle with anger and outrage, but also have humor, music and dramatic moments.’” [5]

Independent Media Center

The third collective media activism era began with the creation and launch of the Independent Media Center (IMC) in Seattle during the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in late 1999. Some of the people who created the IMC were also PTTV producers who brought their experience, aesthetics, attitude, and vision of an international collective of media producers already making and distributing their own TV shows over a network. They helped establish the IndyMedia Center (IMC) and website during the 1999 WTO meeting. Working outside mainstream media systems, they webcast to the world for the first time first-person videos from the streets of Seattle in almost real time, 24 hours a day. [4]

Using the slogan “Be the Media!” they demonstrated the visual power of making grassroots media collaboratively. They worked with environmental activists, union leaders, community organizers, Internet engineers, and media professionals to create an alternative media production and broadcast center operating out of a shabby downtown storefront in the midst of teargas and confrontations with police. Their powerful images inspired media and political activists worldwide, and IMCs sprang up in countries as diverse as Mexico and Italy.

This new form of collective electronic media activism

1 Dee Dee Halleck’s PTTV compilation can be viewed at (www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7QOllR1YBQ).
is still in its formative stages, but its collaborative activist tactics continue to evolve with every new movement, from Occupy Wall Street to the streets of Egypt and Ukraine. Its aesthetics and ideas emerged from the murky, hand-held subversive videos of the Guerrilla TV era, through the Activist Video Movement era that birthed the alternative ‘bargain media’ aesthetics of PTTV and the pre-Internet DTV network that then led to the first IndyMedia Center in Seattle during the WTO.

Collective media activism embraces a low-tech collage look that emerged from the technological limitations of the Portapak. It references popular media culture and symbolizes an alternative approach to making TV by people with something to say, not corporations trying to sell something. It deals with serious subjects like global warming and government overthrow using an often playful, irreverent attitude that shows its ‘60s counterculture and avant-garde art world roots where musicians, dancers, performance and video artists often worked collaboratively to create biting critiques of mainstream media. This movement also networked people, ideas, images and spaces to circulate their videos that predated the Internet. It birthed the first IMC as a model that current and future social movements now emulate to promote media activism around the world.

Coded Infrastructures

Presented by Victoria Moulder and Michael Heidt

In this section Moulder and Heidt discuss their aesthetic strategies for relating the formal traits of code with the situational requirements of concrete activist practice.

Introduction

Effective activism, both online and offline, is premised on a reflection of the spaces within which and against which it operates. Analysis, reflection and renegotiation of digital spaces however, are counteracted by the hidden nature of their coded substrates.

The reflections we put forward here, aim to explore the conditions and possibilities of a[rt]ivist practice within the context of contemporary digital infrastructures. The argumentation draws on contemporary digital infrastructures. The argumentation draws on contemporary digital philosophy and social theory as well as on discourse surrounding the phenomenon of code literacy. [6,16] During the discussion, one of our own projects, a series of art installations called the Aesthetics of Activism (2014) [12,21] serves as a concrete point of reference and contestation.

Within our collaboration we have been experimenting with various compositional frameworks and thematic structures creating digital assemblage from footage of activist action in the form of uploaded images, video and text. We use material retrieved from the social web and arrange these digital found objects using handcrafted algorithmic devices. In this presentation, we briefly sketched the tendencies within contemporary digital culture that we responded to with the art practice we created.

Hidden Deep Structures, Overpresent Surfaces

Primarily, our practice is motivated by a concern with the way aesthetic experience and user-screen dynamics are negotiated within contemporary device ecologies. Digital interfaces more often than not present themselves as an unordered assemblage of visual stimuli, fervidly competing for the viewer’s attention. Every button on every screen wants to be clicked, tapped or slid - messages and videos keep injecting themselves into our field of vision – erratic beeps and flashes quickly do away with whatever cognitive reserves remain. In this respect, the Internet presents itself as something of a cheerily anarchic mess, seemingly devoid of structure, as is reflected in the anarchic overtones of phenomena such as early net.art [8] or the exuberant promises of past and contemporary cyber-utopianism [19].

As we all know, at the same time, very clear and distinctly strategic, often economically motivated, intentions are inscribed within the formal systems determining interface behaviour. Almost every one of our actions within the digital sphere is recorded, coded as data, stored and monetised. Generated data, analysed into patterns, in turn influences and optimises the way content will be displayed in the future, in order to generate yet more revenue by shaping future interactions. This tendency of commercialised sanction goes so far that certain forms and patterns of interaction themselves tacitly become the subject of patent ownership. This typically happens when companies acquire patents of technology that implicitly specify forms of interaction.

The gravity of this state of affairs of course depends on your valuation of interaction as a social phenomenon. We conducted analysis through the lens of cultural theory as explored by Heidt [9,10]. In this context, we draw on a form of cultural theory known as practice-theory [22] stating that social structure is reproduced through routinised forms of behaviour and interaction, rather than through collectively held ideas or norms. Material frames such as kiosks, vending machines, and digital algorithms gain special attention within this theoretical tradition [15]. They structure and reinforce these routines, thus containing tacit knowledge. Within this theoretical framework, having patents on interactions and routines thus gains a special degree of severity. Since society consists of patterns of behaviour, owning and shaping these patterns is tantamount to owning social structure within this interpretorial framework.

When acting in and through the Internet, we often find ourselves in a profoundly alienated and commercialised space in which ownership of technology bleeds into ownership of patterns of interaction. This development is masked by the hidden nature of the digital spaces framing and sustaining said interactions. We do not know nor can we directly influence the algorithms forming the material base of platforms such as Google, Facebook, or Twitter. In effect, what can be observed is an interweaving of cultural and technological phenomena. This poses both a conceptu-
al as well as a pragmatic artistic challenge to which we have been trying to formulate a response.

**Transcoding**

In order to face this challenge and create material for our art practice we offer a conceptual framework influenced by the notion of ‘transcoding.’ It is based on a critical reading of *The Language of New Media* [17], which Moulder developed into a theoretical framework aimed at informing artistic practice as well as art-science cooperation. [20, 21]

Theorists who evaluate Human Computer Interaction (HCI) design from a cultural perspective began to expand the concepts surrounding ‘transcoding’. In 2001, Lev Manovich introduced the concept of ‘transcoding’ as one of the five principles or layers for understanding new media artworks. He suggested that the culture layer and the computer layer influence one another. The cultural layer includes categories such as the stories we create. The computer layer includes the interfaces use, their functions and data structures. [17]

Other scholars like Jeff and Shaowen Bardzell agreed with Manovich’s overall interpretation of transcoding and have expanded the concept to include an interaction layer that is further divided into four categories: designer, interface, user, and social ecology, so that more critical concerns can be addressed. [1] What we’ve seen here is a certain interweaving of cultural and technological phenomena, a tool to critique technology from a cultural perspective.

Within our own art practice transcoding functions as an interpretive device, that allows for the intertwining of cultural and technological phenomena, to be described through one shared lens. In other words, we use transcoding to define a type of artistic practice that blends multiple perspectives into one visual and audio output. We do not try to counter one perspective with another; instead we propose to use code as a unifying element and reconfigure the modes of presentation highlighting activist phenomena. We redesign presentation so that the power that is afforded by contemporary coded infrastructures might be transcoded into forms that are remotely less oppressive.

In relationship to the *Aesthetics of Activism*, the concept of transcoding provided a metaphor to describe the ways both we as human actors as well as the algorithms we produce, concretely gather and assemble content from the social web documenting activist practices. We looked at ways to collect online data and build large-scale physical compositions with this data in physical places.

Based on this research, we are creating operational boundaries designed to inform the compositional layout and the themed structure (how the information is ranked, sorted and filtered) for presentation on Internet. In the current iteration of *the Aesthetics of Activism*, the virtual composition is shaped by these compositional layers: a) the event context, b) the opposing elements, c) real-life documentation related of the protest. [Figure 2] These layers are combined through the system interface to create one. [Figure 1]

Figure 1. This image demonstrates how the Aesthetics of Activism appears as people interact with the artwork. Sensors track people’s movement and reveals different compositional layers.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

Figure 2. Compositional layers are combined to create one image.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

The physical prototype is still in process, but generally, it is designed so that it can spontaneously report on emerging issues. In a presentation of our artwork, we projected images, video and text related from the Kinder Morgan protest on Burnaby Mountain in British Columbia, Canada. [Figure 1] We incorporated an image of Jakub Markiewicz, who pinned himself under a Kinder Morgan jeep in order to stop construction of an oil pipeline. As activists uploaded video and images from the protest site, the system created multiple views of the generative compositions in a different public location.

In effect, the work is trying to call attention to the way digital spaces operate and reproduce. As was mentioned in the beginning, for activism to be effective, it has to understand the space in which it operates. When organising a rally or leading a demonstration in meatspace, you need to have a certain understanding of how the specific site affords the action you are trying to mount, be it a town square, a financial district, or the streets. This entails understanding who runs security, how participants can enter and leave the space, and how attention is allocated between statements within it. The way sound travels and the way posters and other visual stimuli become visible and occlude...

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2 Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline project is discussed in more detail by the David Suzuki Foundation: [http://davidsuzuki.org/blogs/panther-lounge/2012/07/we-are-the-kalamazoo/](http://davidsuzuki.org/blogs/panther-lounge/2012/07/we-are-the-kalamazoo/)

each other heavily influences this allocation of attention (and the thematic connections we are able to make). Within the web, or the so called social web for that matter, attention allocation is heavily determined by coded infrastructures, determining what shows up on your Google results page, what is hidden and displayed in sidebars, and what shows up in your Facebook and Twitter feeds.

In order to do justice to the diagnosed intertwinements of cultural and technological phenomena, we have outlined a strategy informed by media and cultural theories. Our strategy has been to embrace the described intertwinements of cultural and technological phenomena, potentially reconfiguring them through creative and artistic practices. To this end, we have proposed an appropriation of the concept of transcoding in order to render these processes accessible to a discourse operating within the interspace of art and science.

We have outlined a response that seeks to confront power effects manifesting within coded infrastructures on their own grounds. Hence, we have been trying to cultivate a practice rendering the interweaving of cultural and technological phenomena productively. We are not trying to disentangle theses layers to restore a state of purity; instead, we are entangling them differently. In the context of the Aesthetics of Activism, we created coded infrastructures ourselves that serve to expose the mechanics reproducing attention economies. Constructed installations try to reintroduce and re-situate abstract/formal machines for content aggregation into concretely situated activist practices.

Within this context, transcoding points to the importance of looking at on- and offline activism in tandem [13]. Phenomena such as 'Clicktivism' attest to the impotence of symbolic action constrained to the realm of the digital. Thought and action informed by transcoding have to avoid this pitfall through a creative intermeshing of on- and offline practices. The Latourian frame adopted allows for design styles that consciously orchestrate patterns of use and non-use into meaningful wholes [11].

It is a constructive and creative practice we have been espousing here. A stance further supported by a panel attendee who stated, “a position that might free activism from being perceived as necessarily having to oppose something, as being ‘negative’ or unproductive.” It thus might be aligned with projects situating practices such as liquid-democracy within local communities [23].

**A[rc]tivistic Future**

Hopefully, the discussion has elucidated some of the conceptual and artivistic possibilities inherent within contemporary net phenomena while pointing towards inner limitations and lurking practical pitfalls. The discussion departed from a diagnosis of the contrast between a sometimes chaotic aesthetic shell of web-structures and its highly formal material base. The hidden nature of the latter allows actors to inscribe economic and political interests without these becoming subject to public scrutiny and activist tactics. The aforementioned analysis was followed by a critique of the specifics of digital materials and the spaces constructed from them. These conditions of online practice can remain orthogonal to a concrete activist cause or directly or indirectly modulate, sustain, or undermine it.

Practices of aestheticisation of otherwise blackboxed formal procedures thus relate to the level of the political. In effect, both the hidden character, as well as the inherent formality of these codes, present art and artivism with a unique set of challenges. Latourian practice-theory together with a critical reading of the concept of transcoding were offered as conceptual devices seeking to provide novel impulses for art-science projects exploring this problematic. Working with interactive assemblage made from digital found objects was presented as a concrete artistic strategy of foregrounding the tacit level of coded infrastructures.

**Experiential Knowledge in Cancer Narratives**

Presented by Lorna Boschman

For the past three years, I have been the Project Coordinator and a Post-Doctoral Researcher with Cancer’s Margins, a cross-Canadian research study. We use a community- and arts-based approach to exploring sexual and gender diversity, and experiences of cancer health, support and care. We look at how LGBT people locate and share knowledge after they’ve been diagnosed and treated for breast or gynecologic cancer. Our research-based approach to digital storytelling combines professional mentorship with peer knowledge exchange to create powerful and personal digital stories.

As a researcher, I explore how we as media artists and activists can work with community members, not only to help them ‘find their voice’ but also to share their experiential health knowledge using digital storytelling techniques. The contemporary Digital Divide is not limited to addressing the affordability of technology. Instead, the divide has become a chasm between those who have learned to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as communications devices and those who have not. In our digital storytelling workshops, participants used digital stories to share experiential knowledge about cancer treatment and care, refining those stories by concentrated knowledge exchange with peers.

**Introducing Cancer Margins**

Cancer’s Margins lead researcher, Dr. Mary Bryson, began with a pilot study in the San Francisco Bay area five years ago. Since funding was secured from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) for a larger Canadian study, our team conducted interviews in six provinces. We

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4 There were many people who attended the panel. This statement came from a woman who had questions about how designers support empathy. Regrettably, we did not record her name.

5 Cancer’s Margins site http://lgbtcancer.ca/
have interviewed 112 LGBT cancer patients and designated members of their support network.

To gather experiential knowledge from study participants, Dr. Bryson and I designed a weekend-long digital storytelling workshop, combining strong group feedback with professional video authorship mentoring. We build on my own professional experience in media arts, benefitting also from the approach of Joe Lambert and his colleagues at the Centre for Digital Storytelling in California [14]. Two 2014 English-language workshops were held in Vancouver and a 2015 French-language workshop was held in Montreal. All participants had been diagnosed and treated for breast or gynecological cancer.

Prior to participating in the workshop, the participant/storyteller was interviewed for 90-120 minutes by one of our researchers. With the participant’s written permission, the interview was audio recorded, and in most cases, video recorded. In some cases, up to a year passed between the research interview and attendance at the Digital Storytelling workshop.

Just before the workshop began, the storyteller was assigned a mentor, typically a director/writer/editor or academic. The storyteller and the mentor were both provided with a copy of the storyteller’s original interview transcript. The storyteller was able to recount the ways in which they conceptualized their cancer treatment at the time of that interview; the mentor was able to gain insight into the type of digital story that could be co-created during the workshop. Mentors who were documentary director/editors were especially adept in creating a story from materials similar to the photos and home movies that storytellers brought to the workshop.

Understanding Knowledge Projects

Cancer’s Margins is a knowledge project, informed in part by the work of exemplary queer artists who have documented and analyzed their own cancer treatment using film and performance [3]. In the research study, we document how queer people gather and utilize knowledge as part of their decision-making process about cancer treatment and care. We consider access to culturally competent healthcare knowledge and the ability to mobilize that knowledge to be basic human rights.

Health knowledge projects differ from media activism in their focus. Rather than documenting demonstrations or teaching digital literacy skills, knowledge projects employ ICT to focus community-specific understandings of self-care and health management.

We have identified two concrete differences between our digital storytelling workshop and many media arts workshops. First, we begin by collecting data – the classic qualitative research interview and second, our focus during the workshop is not in teaching technical skills.

Storytellers were asked to tell a story about their experiences of cancer treatment and care as LGBT people. The interview transcript was introduced as a memory prompt for the storytellers. Workshop participants could choose whether to utilize the interview in their digital story or not.

Some participants did not want to look at their own interview transcript, or listen to the audio file, as it made them feel uncomfortable. Each participant completed their story before deciding whether to show it in public or not, a process approved by our Research Ethics Board. Participants were motivated to help others who were about to undergo cancer diagnosis, treatment and care.

Following our protocols, a queer woman who had been treated for breast cancer was interviewed; she designated her wife to be interviewed subsequently as her primary caregiver. In preparation for the digital storytelling workshop, they decided to share their transcripts with each other, a step that we would not have suggested because each interviewee had been assured of confidentiality. During the Digital Storytelling workshop, the partner who was treated for cancer used their recordings to simulate a dialogue, an account of the struggles and resolution they experienced as a couple and as the parents of a young child. [Figure 3]

Teaching Digital Literacy by Sharing Knowledge

Another difference between media arts workshops and our digital storytelling approach is that we were not teaching digital literacy – the how-to side of media production. We were instead, creating an environment where people worked out how to construct a story about their experience with cancer treatment, support and care. While learning to use digital media technologies is important, the process of clarifying their stories about cancer was the priority during one short weekend. By providing an experienced mentor, we freed participants from the additional cognitive burden of having to learn to shoot or edit a video.

Our digital storytelling workshop consisted of cycles for participants – coming together to tell a first iteration of the story, going off to work with their mentor, bringing the storytellers back together to talk about their stories, going back out with the mentor, and coming back with a revised story. After the workshop, the storyteller continued to work with an editor until the digital story was complete. When the editing was concluded, the storyteller was in a position

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6 Centipede on the Cancer’s Margin site: https://queercancer.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/centipede.mp4
to choose whether or not to share their story with the public or to limit viewing to a research context.

In the Montreal workshop, several participants created stories about living with metastatic cancer. In just being, [Figure 4], the author shares her approach to death and dying, and learning how to ‘just be,’ 7 She created two characters, Antouka and Okazou who represent her and her partner. When they want to talk about something really difficult, they ask themselves how these animated characters would respond.

Art Practice as Research Foundation
Our digital storytelling practices are built upon photovoice, an earlier 21st century public health methodology that trained community members to engage policy makers through photography. [24] Photovoice places an emphasis on what matters most to the community members and how their knowledge can be used to affect social change.

The Cancer’s Margins digital storytelling workshops created an incubator for knowledge about how cancer treatment, support and care are experienced by queer people – each participant worked with a mentor who was experienced in constructing a public story; the mentors had strong insight into the participant’s cancer experiences as a result of reading the transcript before the workshop; peers who had also experienced cancer were able to offer critical feedback that strengthened the stories; and most of our participants agreed to share their story so that healthcare providers and LGBT people who have recently been diagnosed are able to access shared knowledge in a way that is culturally appropriate for these communities.

Summary
In summary this paper has captured the thoughts of four speakers involved in the Analyzing Disruptive Tactics and Strategies in Media Activism panel at the 21st International Symposium of Electronic Arts in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Robin Oppenheimer set the groundwork for understanding the history of media activism in the United States. She explained that ‘being the media’ was an activist’s strategy rooted in the Guerrilla Television era. Oppenheimer discussed how the Ronald Reagan administration in the 1980s sparked a change in the way artists and activists worked together. Thus the launch of the Independent Media Center (IMC) in Seattle in late 1990’s emerged as a training space for people working outside of mainstream media systems.

Michael Heidt and Victoria Moulder introduced transcoding as both a philosophical position and aesthetic strategy. The artists introduced their work Aesthetics of Activism, as an example of the ways we as human actors, and the algorithms we produce can be used to assemble content from social web resources.

7 View just being on Lorna Boschman’s Vimeo site: https://vimeo.com/142706695

Figure 4. Still from Cancer’s Margins story just being.

Lorna Boschman introduced her involvement with the Cancer Margins Project as a digital storytelling approach. She discussed the importance of creating an environment where people can strategise collectively and learn how to construct a story through their experience with cancer treatment, support and care. Boschman explained that in today’s digital world culture, barriers have less to do with access to technology [25] and more to do with how we can use digital stories to share experiential knowledge.

In closing, this panel was motivated by the possibility of creating systems for creative processing of content outside of the commercial monetizing platforms that pervade contemporary Internet infrastructure and attached interfaces. We leave you with this – now that the Internet of ‘Things’ has become completely monetized, how can we use technology to support digital social action?

References

Authors’ Biographies

Lorna Boschman is a Faculty Associate at the University of British Columbia and Project Coordinator for the Cancer’s Margins study, led by Dr. Mary Bryson. This arts- and community-based LGBQ and T research project explores sexual and gender diversity, experiences of breast and gynecologic cancer health, support/care, and the ways we locate and share cancer health knowledge.

Michael Heidt is a computer scientist, emerging artist and PhD student studying at the Cherng University of Technology, in Germany. In his most recent media art installation, PRMD (2014) he explored practices of identity construction with respect to historical narrative and code; and the juxtaposition of digital form and interactional situations. Read more: http://crossworlds.info/people/phd-students/michael-heidt/

Vicki Moulder is the author of interactionart.org, an artist and PhD candidate studying at the School of Interactive Arts and Technology (SIAT) at Simon Fraser University in Canada. She holds a Master of Arts from SIAT and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Emily Carr University in visual communications. Molder is a pioneer in the field of social art practice co-producing artworks with not-for-profit organizations since 1988.

Robin Oppenheimer is a media arts historian, curator and scholar who has worked in the field since 1980. She was Executive Director of two media arts centers in Atlanta and Seattle and, until June 2015, was a Lecturer at the University of Washington Bothell, with a PhD in Interactive Arts and Technology. Her areas of research include media arts histories, participatory media, and media activism.