

**Social movements and  
media representation:  
the case of Occupy  
Anastasia Kavada**

THE FOLLOWING PREVIEW HAS BEEN APPROVED FOR  
**APPROPRIATE AUDIENCES**  
BY THE MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA, INC.

THE FILM ADVERTISED HAS BEEN RATED



[www.filmratings.com](http://www.filmratings.com)

**MOVIECLIPS** 

[www.mpaa.org](http://www.mpaa.org)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzJ4lpqmXwg>

Trailer of documentary on the Occupy movement – explains what the movement was about (quite positive towards the movement)

# Main characteristics

- **Heterogeneity:** uniting diverse people and issues
- **Decentralization:** no single identifiable leader, 'leaderfulness', light structure, non-hierarchical
- **Occupation of public space**
- **Building experimental communities of equals**

# Main characteristics



## OCCUPY TOGETHER HAND SIGNALS

### SPEAKING



WANT  
TO TALK



DIRECT  
RESPONSE



CLARIFY



POINT OF  
ORDER

### FEELING



AGREE



DONT  
AGREE



OPPOSE



BLOCK

## Reinventing democracy:

- Emphasis on participation and inclusiveness
- Practicing participatory democracy - open assemblies, consensus decision-making

# Social movements & the media

## An Asymmetric Relationship:

social movements  
need the media  
more than  
the media need  
social movements

# Functions of the media for activists

- Mobilization
- Validation/ legitimization
- Scope enlargement

(Gamson & Wolfsfeld, 1993)

# Mobilization & Scope Enlargement



# Validation/Legitimization



- Movements are taken more seriously by power-holders if they are portrayed positively in the media
- Mass media coverage prevents repression of social movements

# Media bias

But social movements and protests are often marginalized, trivialized and misrepresented in the mainstream media

## Selection bias:

- Location, size and intensity/violence of the event
- Issue type
- News routines and news agency characteristics
- Timing

# Media bias



# Media bias

Reporting violence towards property during the student protests in London (2010)



# Media bias

## Description bias:

- Focus on violence
- Trivialization and personalization
- Focus on internal conflicts
- Neutralizing or undermining movement agendas

# Why?

- **State** regulation and censorship
- **Market** pressures, media ownership and commercialisation (Emphasis on what sells and on trivial news)
- **News** routines and news values (Objectivity/neutrality, Balance, Newsworthiness, Norms regarding sources - e.g. preference for elite sources)

# The current media system

“Political communication now occurs in complex hybrid assemblages of older and newer media, as a diverse array of actors, ranging from large professional news organizations to elite politicians to engaged citizens, participate in an incessant struggle to shape public discourse and define the political agenda”

(Chadwick 2013, p. 159)

# Activist Media Strategies

The quadruple 'A':

Abstention

Adaptation

Attack

Alternatives

(Rucht, 2004)

# Alternatives and Adaptation

**Alternatives:** Social movements and activists create their own independent media

**Adaptation:** 'Acceptance/exploitation of the mass media's rules and criteria to influence coverage positively' (Rucht, 2004, p. 37)

Where does the use of commercial social media platforms fit?

## #OCCUPYWALLSTREET

*A shift in revolutionary tactics.*



# #OCCUPYWALLSTREET

*Are you ready for a Tahrir moment?*

On Sept 17, flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street.

Alright you 90,000 redeemers, rebels and radicals out there,

# A revolution with a hashtag



Activists use increasingly sophisticated techniques to spread their message through social media

**Example:** the branding work of Adbusters around Occupy Wall Street - the name of the movement itself was a hashtag

# Rallying around a common cause



The internet allows the quick and effective creation of 'insurgent communities' around a common cause

- More than 1,500 Facebook pages created by the Occupy movement (Gaby and Caren 2012)
- creating a collective identity and building solidarity

## PEOPLE

691,434 likes

Kim Fraczek, Marisol Sandova and 55 others like this.



Invite your friends to like this Page

## ABOUT

Occupy Wall Street is a people's movement that began on September 17, 2011 in Liberty Square and has spread globally.

<http://interoccupy.net/>

# Diffusion: spreading tactics

CONTACT PARTICIPATE ABOUT DONATE

Search



GRASSROOTS PRACTICES FOR GLOBAL CHANGE

## TRANSLATORS NEEDED

We desperately need translations into these languages: MANDARIN, ARABIC, FARSI, JAVANESE, PANJABI, URDU, FRANCAIS, TELUGU, VIETNAMESE, ESPANOL, RUSSIAN, PORTUGUES, ENGLISH (if not existing), JAPANESE, SWAHILI, HAUSA, AMHARIC, YORUBA, KURDISH, LINGALA, AFRIKAANS, and many others!! If you can help us, please contact us!!

## Open source protest:

Making the tactics, knowledge and 'code' of the movement available to everyone

- Fosters learning
- Makes mobilizations easier to spread as activists in different locations can easily adopt and adapt the movement's tactics

*Ecology (12)*

*Economy (5)*

*Free Media (5)*

# Bearing witness and reporting from the streets

**Makeshift media centres**  
ensure that what happens in  
the streets quickly finds  
its way online  
- Set up by experienced  
media activists and also  
offering training





<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=moD2JnGTTtoA>

Video of police violence during the first weeks of Occupy Wall Street – this particular video mobilized many people to join the protest (together with the arrests on Brooklyn bridge around that time)

# Bearing witness and reporting from the streets

Ability to quickly post raw footage and reports from the ground helps to:

- bear witness and challenge the official narrative of events
- protect protesters from the authorities during demonstrations
- de-legitimize the tactics used by the police

# Live-streaming the revolution

The screenshot shows the Livestream interface for the 'Global Revolution' channel. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'livestream' logo, a search bar, and buttons for 'Discover Live Events', 'Livestream your Events', 'Login', and 'Broadcast Now'. The channel name 'Global Revolution' is prominently displayed in red. Below it, a video player shows a man speaking. To the right, a chat window is open, displaying a list of user comments. The chat messages include:

- blitzdude: hover 24 hours a day."Before this we were all very happy,"
- trollbrigade: well next time abby comes in ill let her know she ws taking that out of context
- RisePDX: blitz: obama is a good man he would never do that?
- trollbrigade: but anyways
- ArielFormari: The decline of imperialism cannot be seen inside the metropolitan empire, due to MSM brainwashing and fluff, heh, heh.
- RisePDX: yes ariel
- RisePDX: people live in MSM constructed reality
- ArielFormari: Rise-Obama spit on the sacred altar of the historic memory of Latin America...stand by.
- robtomorrow: "abby and co" lol
- RisePDX: CO and is C.O.
- blitzdude: "TBJ reports that from June 2004 through mid-September 2012, available data indicate that drone strikes killed 2,562, 3,325 people in Pakistan, of whom 474, 881 were civilians including 176 children
- RisePDX: as in
- RisePDX: co as in C.O.

At the bottom of the screenshot, there are several small video thumbnails with titles like 'Live St Sun Nc' and a timestamp '16:34'.

- DIY streams had up to 80,000 unique viewers per day at the peak of the mobilizations
- Activists live-streamed general assemblies and meetings increasing the transparency of the movement and virtual participation (see Constanza-Chock 2012)

# Livestreaming the revolution



**OCCUPY STREAMS**  
the revolution will not be televised\*

Live Streams

Recently Live

Most Views

Contact

Blog

Like Share 24k Tweet 2,587 +1 294

## Live Streams



dissenters

LIVE!

21 viewers



VicheKyiv

LIVE!



okolokremlya

LIVE!



Occupy-Israel

LIVE!



OccupySFTV

LIVE!

1 viewer

### Live-streaming videos:

- Raw and unedited video
- Immediacy
- Often boring...
- DIY and amateur nature
- Openness and visibility

### The difficult role of the live-streamer:

Targeted by the police

Demanding task physically

Sometimes accused of being

# Livestreaming the revolution

## Streamer Journalist Code of Ethics

### Preamble

The act of streaming may be used for journalism, documentation of controversial events or for entertainment purposes. Streaming can provide personal protection when involved in situations that may have legal implications. Those engaged in one or more of these activities may be considered a Streamer or a Citizen Journalist. Due to the many categories of streaming, as well as differing journalistic styles, which may include advocacy journalism and gonzo journalism, the technique is sometimes treated with contempt by law enforcement as well as the traditional journalistic community.

One who is claiming to be a Streamer Journalist needs to operate under the established journalistic framework despite possibly using streaming for other purposes. It would



Officer John Pike Pepper spraying Occupy activists at the UC Davis campus









# 'Memewars': Casually Pepper-Spray Everything Cop



**Meme:** a small unit of culture (or message) that can travel quickly and be appropriated and adapted easily

For an analysis of this meme see:

<http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/casually-pepper-spray-everything-cop>

# 'We are the 99%' Tumblr



- Personalizing the message of the movement makes it easier to spread and inspire solidarity (Gaby and Caren 2012)
- Tumblr allowed different people to upload their message, facilitating an open collaborative process of creating the story of the movement and helping multiple voices to be heard

# Alternative News

#OWS

## OCCUPY WALL STREET

LIVE FROM THE OCCUPATIONS OF NEW YORK CITY

HOME

STORIES

ABOUT

CONTRIBUTE

CONTACT

OccupyWallStreet.net is brought to you by the NYC General Assembly to provide news, information and inspiration from the occupations of Wall Street and around the world.

STAY INFORMED

Enter Email Address

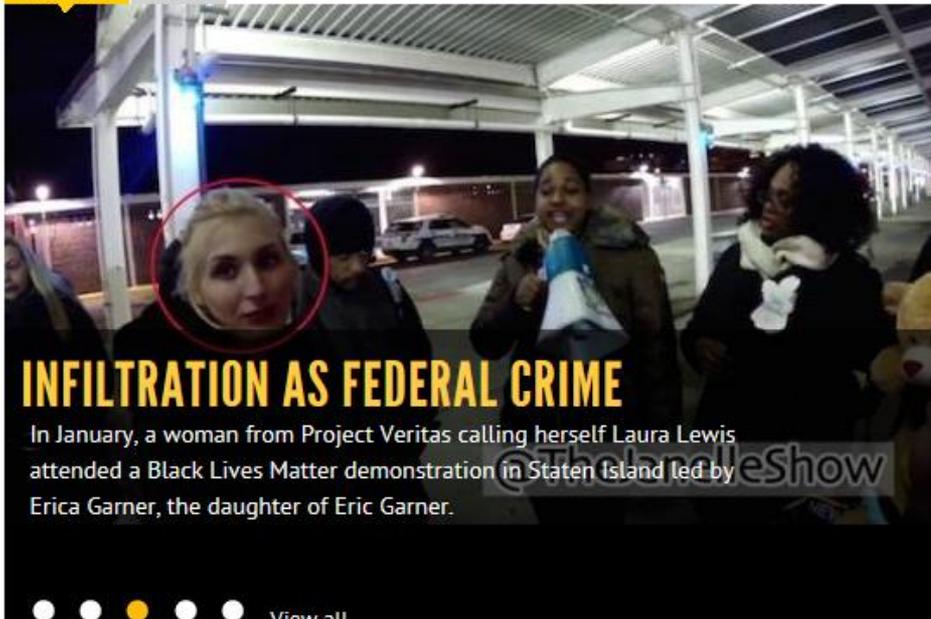


GET SMS UPDATES: TEXT "@NYCACTION" FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS & "@NYC2FERGUSON" FOR UPDATES TO 23559

[IT'S TIME TO #FLOODTHESYSTEM, SEPTEMBER 2015](#)

Featured

Video



### INFILTRATION AS FEDERAL CRIME

In January, a woman from Project Veritas calling herself Laura Lewis attended a Black Lives Matter demonstration in Staten Island led by Erica Garner, the daughter of Eric Garner.

@TheIndieShow

In the News

Ferguson police antagonized Michael Brown protesters, DoJ report finds

1 day 3 hours ago

US Department of Justice report about August protests over teenager's death finds officers inappropriately used teargas and violated free speech rights.

[Read More](#)

Israel Blocks Flotilla Of Foreign Activists From Reaching Gaza

2 days 23 hours ago

Activists said the boat had a few dozen Europeans, including politicians, on board and had been headed for Gaza, the blockaded Palestinian territory.

[Read More](#)

<http://occupywallstreet.net/>

# Alternative News

## The Occupied Times - OF LONDON -

#01

26OCT2011



### HERE TO STAY

Shirley Keefe



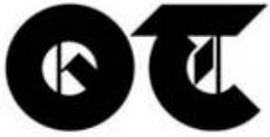
Anti-cuts activists in the heart of London remained defiant this week as Occupy London Stock Exchange marks its first fortnight in action - infrastructure and all. An estimated 2000 people have passed through the sprawling camp on the steps of St Paul's Cathedral, with a resident population around 200. The camp is part of a global movement against corporate greed and unregulated banking systems, rejecting hierarchies and creating a space where people are encouraged to join - with a second, growing occupation established at Finsbury Square on Saturday.

It has been nearly two weeks since the initial chaotic scenes on October 15 when police kettled protesters, arresting eight on suspicion of police assault and public order offences. Since then the camp has turned into a wild, peaceful working community - complete with kitchen, university, prayer room, waste management and power generation - and speakers at the camp's daily general assemblies have frequently voiced plans to stay "until Christmas". German student Niklas Haug told the Occupied Times he planned to stay as long as the camp remained. "I'm going to stay here as long as it exists, the thing is going to exist until we reach some change," he said.

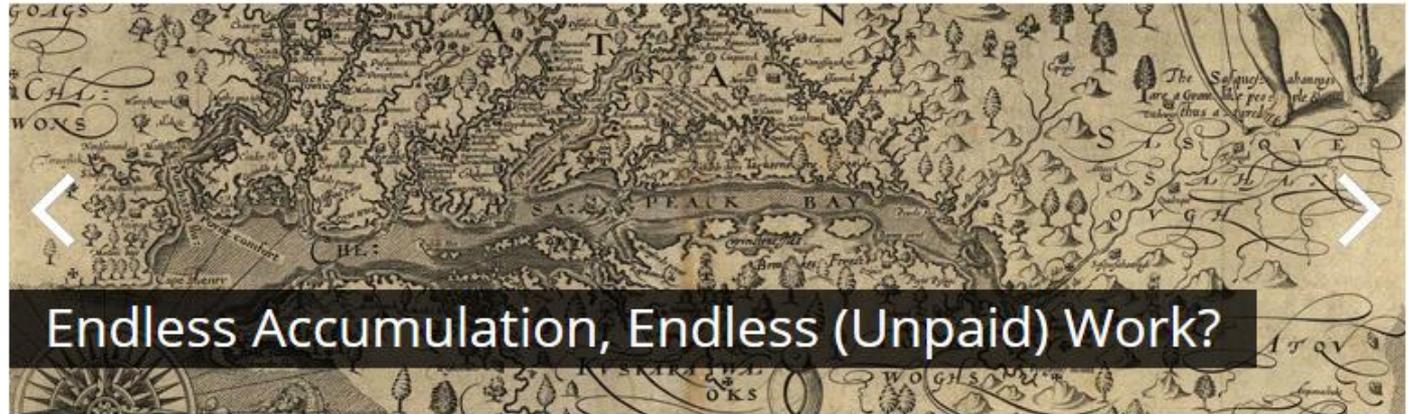
All work done at the camp is voluntary, with occupiers lending their support when needed. Meanwhile food, clothing, equipment and monetary donations have flooded in; mostly gifted to the occupiers from people passing by. One camper, Sean, told the Occupied Times he had put his experience as a civil servant to use in the information tent, a first point of call for many visitors - along with stints in the kitchen, tech tent and setting up Finsbury Square. Since his arrival on the 15th he had seen the camp become more and more organised, he said. "We spent the first week getting the structure together - the working groups - and getting people used to our direct democracy." The camp is founded on direct de-

<http://theoccupiedtimes.org/>

# Alternative News



LATEST ISSUE BACK ISSUES ARTICLES INFO DONATE



## Endless Accumulation, Endless (Unpaid) Work?

Search

### ARTICLES

#### SOCIETY



### The Supermax in Wrexham

Eighty-five thousand and counting. This is the number of bodies incarcerated at any one time in Britain's crumbling and overcrowded prisons. It's a figure that has almost doubled over the past 20 years, a

#### POLITICAL THEORY



### Endless Accumulation, Endless (Unpaid) Work?

Every civilisation must decide what is, and what is not, valuable. Marxists occasionally speak of a "law of value." It is not a concept easily translated into everyday politics, or

#### LAW & POLICING



### Putting Feet On The Ground

I was heartened by the United Families and Friends Campaign against deaths in custody (UFFC) annual march in October 2014, even though it was still small. In 2013, around 100 people marched on

# Alternatives

Allow social movements to:

- Express and disseminate their own values and ideas in their own language
- Develop networks of contributors, people who produce, share and disseminate alternative messages
- Organize media production according to different values (e.g. more horizontal, de-professionalization)
- Build a repository of knowledge, a cultural memory of the movement and the campaign



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAd0Hi3sIAg>

Video from the Guardian showing a meeting of the press working group of Occupy Wall Street [notice the ways in which activists discuss and take decisions – i.e. working in alternative ways that express specific ideals – and their analysis of the movement’s depiction on the mainstream media]

# Adaptation

- Media training
- Cultivating relationships with journalists
- Following the news cycle of the mainstream media
- Lists of contacts
- Tours of the camps
- Regular press releases

# Adaptation

## The role of the spokesperson

Attempts to depersonalize/democratize the role of the spokesperson:

- List of different interviewees and media training
- Spokespeople were anonymous or pseudonymous
- Presented themselves as individuals (but as someone-as-anyone) not as representatives



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB\\_xXUIWne8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB_xXUIWne8)

Al Jazeera short report on the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations [notice how activists speaking to the media avoid appearing as representatives, for instance by speaking in the first person singular- the strategy of course has limitations as one of the activists is presented as an 'Organiser' and the other one as a 'Protester']

# Social media power dynamics

Social media design rules call for a collective voice: e.g. @occupylsx

‘Organizational twitter handle is for organization (movement). Not personal causes/shout-outs. Keep it relevant to our tweeps (followers). Avoid “I” statements (\*\*except\*\* when being arrested, when you can tweet in 1st person all you want!)’  
(Tweeting for @OccupyWallStNYC)

Occupy Seattle: adding initials of the administrator after each Facebook post

# The problems of adaptation

“Movement- media communication is like a conversation between a monolingual and a bilingual speaker. The media speak mainstreamese, and movements are pushed to adopt this language to be heard since journalists are prone to misunderstand or never hear the alternate language and its underlying ideas.”

(Gamson & Wollesfeld 1993: 119)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4lqyfLyqUs>

Scene from the television series 'The Newsroom' slightly satirizing Occupy Wall Street (not very accurately...) but demonstrating the attitude of the mainstream media towards the movement and some of the difficulties that Occupy activists had with regards to engaging with journalists)



- Need for narrow and 'clear' demands
- Need for clear leaders

# Social Media Participation

The screenshot shows the Facebook page for 'Occupy London'. At the top, there is a large red banner that reads 'BRING DOWN THE BIG SIX' in bold, capital letters. To the right of the banner, the event details are listed: '26TH NOVEMBER 2013 11.30AM CENTRAL LONDON (SECRET LOCATION TBA)'. Below the banner, there are logos for 'SSE', 'EDF ENERGY', 'SCOTTISHPOWER', 'EPOWER', and 'British Gas'. The 'Occupy London' profile picture is a red circle with a white 'O' and the text 'OCCUPY LONDON' below it. The page shows 41,137 likes and a post from 5 hours ago about the 'Liberate Tate' performance art action. The right side of the page shows a list of friends to invite to like the page, including Orjan de Roo, Athena Kalkopoulou, and Heather Moreno.

Social media users participated:

- as spectators of the assemblies through livestreaming
- in sharing and circulating information to their own networks
- in liking and commenting - affecting the information architecture on platforms like Facebook
- as metrics of

# Conclusions

- Distrust of the mainstream media but attempts to build relationships in ways that respected the movement's values
- Emphasis on alternative media production
- Use of social media for mobilization and diffusion of information
- Participatory and decentralized process of content creation leads to a dispersed narrative