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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Aesthetics of Posthuman Experience: The Presence of Journalistic, Citizen-generated and Drone Imagery

Bolette B. Blaagaard[1]

[1] Assistant Professor of Communications, Department of Communication and Psychology, Aalborg University, Copenhagen Campus, Denmark
blaagaard@hum.aau.dk

In this article I argue that the meaning of presence in journalism is taking on new forms as the photographer, bystander or citizen journalist may be absent in body but remains present in digital form and interconnected with that digital technology. Using the reference point of new materialist concepts this entanglement is shown through what I will call the aesthetics of posthuman experience. The article proceeds to undertake a posthuman reading of three videos posted online between 2009 and 2012 of demonstrations in Greece, Iran and Poland arguing these make manifest two key lines of thinking in new materialist theories: the nature-culture continuum and the material-semiotic. Technology, hereby, is endowed with subjectivity in continuous relation with the viewer. Employed by citizens, such drone or digital aesthetics of posthuman experience use a more nuanced mediascape beyond 'objectivity' and 'journalistic truth' for their frame of reference and for defining knowledge and reality.

Keywords: citizen journalism; new materialism; posthuman; drone technology; technogenesis; aesthetics

> The trauma is the suspension of language, a blocking of meaning. Certainly situations which are normally traumatic can be seized in a process of photographic signification but then precisely they are indicated via a rhetorical code which distances, sublimates and pacifies them. Truly traumatic photographs are rare, for in photography the trauma is wholly dependent on the certainty that the scene 'really' happened: *the photographer had to be there* (the mythical definition of denotation).
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> (Barthes, 1977, 30).

In this oft-cited paragraph from Roland Barthes' text on the message of photographs, Barthes connects the authenticity and therefore the shocking or traumatising effect of the photograph to the presence of the photographer, a subject, who testifies to the reality of the photographed event.[1] The materiality of the witness, the photographer, is necessary in order for

the photograph to have an impact beyond the semiotic. For a long time, presence has been crucial to (journalistic) photography and filming, and due largely to technological advancements in recent decades, the understanding of temporal and spatial presence as well as the understanding of whom and what is a photographer or a journalist has been discussed extensively (Allan, 2013; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013; Wahl-Jørgensen, 2012; Zelizer, 2010). But it is in particular the disequilibrium and disorientation of viewing online mobile phone footage and other citizen media, the changed aesthetics of online visuals, that has put the issue of the presence of technology in concert with the photographer, the witness, into focus. Today, Barthes' necessary material witness is not just human but increasingly becoming cyborg. Mobile phone footage of everything ranging from everyday events to political demonstrations, natural disasters and terrorist attacks, are channelled through technology that has evolved with us throughout the past decades – indeed the past century. This imagery has shifted and developed into new forms and possibilities, from being a product of heavy technology and consequently frames with limited mobility to pocket or pin-sized cameras and shaky and omnipresent citizen journalism. Our interactions with technology in visual, tactile and audible ways allow us to perceive the world differently (Hayles, 2012) from Barthes' analytic studies (*studium*) or traumatic experiences (*punctum*) of images. These changes in aesthetics and concepts of time/space and presence simultaneously change our perceptions of the world and our relations to the world, thus encompassing an ethical-political charge. Studies in journalism have argued that the ethical relationship between the object in the image and the audience call on the viewer to act and empathise because of the perceived decreased distance between the sufferer and the onlooker (Chouliaraki, 2006; Silverstone, 2003). This is then partly because of the way in which such imagery allows the audience to experience the presence of the witness – the journalist or bystander – allowing the viewer to imagine him- or herself in the place of the witness (see also Blaagaard, 2013a; 2013b).

In this article I argue that beyond imagery or semiotics, there is raised moreover a question of technology's ability to express imagery and experience that changes and challenges our experience of and in the world. This understanding of witnessing as a relational movement between technology and subject calls into question the idea of the unitary 'Self' also questioned by new materialists. What happens if the body or the journalist-subject is no longer *self*-evident (Haraway, 1997), i.e. rooted in a modern, unitary and determining self as claimed by new materialism and science and technology theorists such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, Iris van der Tuin and Rosi Braidotti among many others? The relationship between the object, the audience, and the knowledge production – or meaning – may still be intact but mediated and technologically enhanced and entangled. The photographer, bystander, or citizen journalist still have to be there, albeit perhaps in digital form and interconnected with the technology expressing and bringing about the imagery, as the following reading will discuss. Crucially, the continuous development or growing capacity of technogenesis (Hayles, 2013) makes available an analysis of the meaning of presence in visual journalism and the power relations implicit in this technologically entangled 'being there' shown through what I will call an aesthetics of posthuman experience.[2]

It is also an affective relation, which is at stake in this posthuman argument: the posthuman, as I will discuss momentarily, is not a techno-determinist entity, but a technogenetic relation that therefore alters and elaborates embodied affect and politics. Moreover, affects are not seen as uniquely human. In an interview with Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn (2012), Karen Barad explains how the entanglement of object, technology and subject opens up to thinking about matter as affective: '[m]atter feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers' as she puts it (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, 59). In this article the question of presence and authenticity of which Barthes so eloquently spoke and the material-semiotic

theory of technogenesis and the new materialist understanding of the non-unitary subjectivity come together in an argument for thinking differently about visual, online citizen media witnessing as posthuman. My use of the material-semiotic concept, then, is not restricted to describing relations between material and semiotic or discursive formation, but also argues for a genealogical and productive entanglement of these formations. I will begin by discussing the new materialist conception and use of the posthuman and in which way this article makes use of the concept. I will then proceed to conduct a posthuman reading of three videos posted online between 2009 and 2012 of demonstrations in Greece, Iran and Poland. I will use the videos as exemplifications of relations to aesthetics of posthuman experiences and argue that they make manifest two key lines of thinking in new materialist theories: i.e. about the nature-culture continuum and about the material-semiotic. If taken up by media scholars, these new materialist interventions will bring new insights into online journalism practice and its impact.

The power of the posthuman

What does it mean to *be there* when we are perpetually *there* online, technologically mediated, and in digital form - when we are posthuman? New materialism proposes a way of thinking about 'matter as possessing its own modes of self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness' (Coole and Frost, 2010, 10) and thereby rejects the long-standing philosophical belief inherited from Descartes and Newton that matter is simply passive objects incapable of generating action, possessing agency and bringing forth signification (i.e. matter participates in its own representation). Agency is no longer perceived as a purely human ability and indeed to some theorists this posthuman, informational agency and networking subjectivity is to be preferred. A posthuman perspective Hayles (1999) argues 'privileges informational patterns over material instantiations. […] it considers consciousness … an evolutionary upstart […] thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate […] [and] configures human beings so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines.' (Ibid, 2–3). Hayles' posthuman is informational pattern wrapped in biological forms. This means that the posthuman lacks a self that possesses a will and agency divorced from other (equally agential) informational schemes, networks and structures. Hayles emphasises that the posthuman is not necessarily cyborg (cybernetic organism) but may be simply a new conception of subjectivity in which the unitary 'I' can no longer meaningfully be separated from the 'Other'. This means that the posthuman has at least two different trajectories from which it emerges: firstly, the posthuman arises from the anti-humanist discourses of theorists such as Marx, Foucault, Lyotard and Fanon (Badmington, 2000; Braidotti, 2013). The new subjectivity is then not new in any teleological sense, but rather in its application and implication. As Rosi Braidotti (2013) argues, the posthuman is figuring in the tradition of anti-humanists' quarrel with the unitary, white, male subject of modernity, knowledge and of power. This is underscored in the critique of medical and biosciences that neatly dissect the human into microscopic genomes and strings of codes, although often only to reassert the genealogy of the 'natural' and biological Human – with a capital H. Braidotti and others point towards the human sciences and their tendency to categorise and label the human against the non-human producing an inhumane division between 'us' and 'them' and consequently a distinct definition of what counts as a grievable life (Butler, 2009). However, in order to bring about an *affirmative* posthuman condition Braidotti argues for replacing the nature-culture divide with a 'non-dualistic understanding of nature-culture interaction. [Which is] supported by a monistic philosophy, which rejects dualism, especially the opposition nature-culture and stresses instead the self-organizing (or auto-poietic) force of living matter.' (Braidotti, 2013, 3). It is also in this tradition of the posthuman that the objection to objectivity and

scientific claims to truth lie. Secondly, the posthuman finds its roots in cybernetics (in spite of the term 'cyborg' having fallen in disuse, as mentioned above). The cybernetic posthuman is a material-semiotic symbiosis that argues for technology as the extension of the human (McLuhan, [1964] 2001). This line of enquiry has been popular with scholars of German theorist Kittler and flourishes in parts of the new media theories such as media archaeology (see Parikka, 2012). Moreover, feminist science and technology theorists as Haraway, Barad and Hayles among others have been influential in developing thoughts on the implications of technologically entangled subjectivities.

The interrelation and dependency between technology and subjectivity – understood as a multifaceted process of becoming in contrast to a fixed positioning and view-point – means that epistemologically, digital citizen media as well as the burgeoning type of imagery produced by camera drones allow us to know the world through technological others to an unrivalled extent. This is what Hayles in a later text (2012) calls technogenesis and which I referred to above as the genealogical entanglement of technologies and subjectivities. Our consciousness, affects, and understanding of the world are enmeshed with the development of technology as technology is borne out of human interactions and desires. In as much as technology is of human born – albeit itself functioning agentially in relational networks with humans and other non-humans – it is far from politically neutral. New materialism, in the arguments put forward by Iris van der Tuin and Rick Dolphijn (2012), originates from feminist theory owing to its challenge to dualistic thinking (given that every dualism is gendered, feminist theory is the longest tradition of critically dealing with dualism). New materialism is as such inherently political (see also Hinton and Van der Tuin, 2014). Citing the seminal text by Donna Haraway (1991) on situated knowledges, Dolphijn and van der Tuin argue that 'feminist epistemology in general has always been structured by the desire to make clear that humanism is in fact an androcentrism in need of alternatives' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin, 2012, 159). The alternative however has been difficult to enforce despite theoretical assertions and development such as the posthuman and new materialism more generally. Rather than doing away with gender or claiming a post-gender or post-racial stance, new materialism and the concept of the posthuman allow for a rethinking of the situated, political, embodied (gendered and racial) positions enabled and reinforced through technological and informational structures. Biotechnology, reproductive technology, and information technology all rely on racial and gendered politics as well as politics of economic and class-related privileges. Additionally, the melting away of boundaries between nature and culture means that the claim of objective truth held by the viewpoint of a unitary subject is rejected and called into question by the embodied, political and situated posthuman. Unavoidably, this is a provocative argument against the modern standards of journalistic practice and the claim of importance of the presence and objectivity of the journalist-subject. Despite journalism's origin in technological advances from the printing press to the telegraphic wires, the telephone, the cinematograph of the Lumière brothers, television and the Internet, journalism as a practice is the twin of the nation-state, dualist thinking, and the idea of enlightened Man. Journalism as it is recognised today is a product of modernity, and the principles of objectivity and truth-seeking are highly praised and sought after. It is thus also a practice, which relies on the unified 'Self' and an understanding of knowledge as analytically conclusive. The thought that technology on which journalistic practice rests and journalistic practice itself could be agential and politically infused therefore goes against the practice taught in most schools of journalism. New materialism suggests that technology may operate as more than a journalistic source of information or qualify as more than a tool for journalistic expression. Technology affects the message of the photography or film and therefore has an impact on

the viewer's understanding of authenticity and realism. A posthuman reading of journalistic products – professionally or user generated – then, presents a rupture in media and journalistic theory.

The term 'posthuman' has been used in connection to many different kinds of analyses, such as performative gender stereotypes (see Rabinowitz, [1995] 2000) or as queering sexual expressions (see Halberstam, [1991] 2000) or as a necessary enrichment of intersectional analysis of everyday life or court cases (see Deckha 2008) or science practices (see Barad, 2003). However as it is hopefully clear by now the present article focuses on the posthuman as a new materialist concept and as such it sees the posthuman as a figuration to think through particular instances of presence and aesthetics of experiences online. This article therefore suggests that our developing relationship to materiality of technology is discernable and entangled in the semiotic structures of citizen media representations and vice versa: the semiotics of citizen media (shaken disequilibrium etc.) is discernable and entangled in the materiality of mobile technology and its connection to embodiedness. The analysis will concomitantly shift between the semiotic and material nature of three different genres of online expressions and will produce a *cartography* of aesthetics of posthuman experiences by reading the three genres through one another.

The quadrocopters are coming

The following discussion is grounded in and presented through three exemplifications of visual journalistic expressions of journalistically edited footage from a Greek demonstration[3] uploaded by Times of Earth, citizen journalistic mobile phone imagery from a demonstration in Iran,[4] and raw drone footage of a Polish demonstration.[5] Drone imagery is a new, potential citizen device for producing imagery. Also known by the name of 'quadrocopters' or 'quadcopters' the drones are remote controlled devices, endowed with cameras, which are able to fly over areas that are impenetrable or undesirable to travel. So far, the ethical discussions of drone imagery have centred on privacy issues and safety. The drones may gain access to private territories, they may overfly areas that are deemed confidential and thereby threaten national priorities, or they may quite simply drop on someone's head causing bodily injury.[6] In contrast, in this article I explore the *being there* in posthuman, technologically mediated form and analyse the positions the three very different journalistic formats online produce – including edited footage, citizen mobile phone footage, and drone imagery. All three films are available on YouTube and part of a digitally mediated mediascape (Appadurai, 1996).

The three pieces of footage – uploaded between 2009 and 2012 – all show anti-governmental demonstrations from around the world. In this capacity they are part of strategies of resistance. However, they relay three very different messages and understandings of the world. That is, the ways in which we experience and know the world through these images differ. If they do this, it is because the visuals as well as the sound used – i.e. the aesthetics of experience – create an understanding of the relationship between technology, viewer and the object or event covered, and concomitantly what makes the viewer perceive the footage as 'real' or 'as it is' – the experience of presence and authenticity is key. Moreover, this article argues that the presence of technology expressing aesthetics of resistance breaks with some preconceived ideas of the semiotics of resistance, thus making this a posthuman reading. Whereas the issue of editorial power and power of representation is – or remains – at stake, because the image suggests 'a symbolic frame consonant with broader understandings of the world' (Zelizer, 2010, 3), the relationship between technology, subjects and objects moreover draws attention to the political of citizen media and mobile photographic imagery as aesthetics of counter-hegemonic practices.

Affect and journalistic imagery: edited journalism and mobile citizen media

The first footage explored is that of a Greek demonstration against planned austerity measures and it is uploaded by *Times of Earth* on the image- and film sharing site *YouTube* in 2012. It shows a demonstration that turned violent focusing on the police, while also covering the protesters throwing rocks and material set on fire. So, there is fire in the streets. The footage cuts from behind the masked and fully equipped riot police to standing by the side of the street looking in on the battle between protesters and police. Time is shown as passing at an exaggerated rate as the footage cuts from daylight to showing the streets darkened and the protesters and the police only visible because of the extensive fires in the street. At the end of the 1.31 minutes footage the perspective has moved from street level to a view from the top of a tall building. The footage has real sound of shouting and rocks hitting shields etc. No individuals are marked or identifiable in the footage. There is no voice-over in the footage. The footage contains 13 edit cuts that shift in scenes, perspectives, and locations. Thus, the witness – the photographer – is situated in various and shifting places or there may be more than one photographer present at the scene. The footage is recognisable as possible cover images to accompany a voice-over during a televised news show: the edited footage represents journalistic proper distance, or objectivity, edited and professional.

Professional journalism prides itself on bringing facts and impartial news to the audience. Historically, objective, fact driven, and truth seeking journalism emerged as a response of professionalization to political changes and technological advances in the United States of America (US) at the turn of the previous century (Schudson, 2003). Journalism as a practice and an ideology is rooted in the modern understanding of truth and of the position of the human. Despite the fact that objectivity is seen as a set of principles that include factuality, fairness, non-bias, independence, non-interpretation, and neutrality and detachment (Ward, 2008, 19), objectivity continues to be seen as a "performance", which can be "evaluated by the degree of truth that characterizes [the journalist's] report" (Boudana, 2011, 396) rather than an ethical practice that calls on a moral critique (Chouliaraki, 2010). Indeed, save factuality, these journalistic principles seem to make journalistic objectivity into an ethical concept that relies on the individual professional journalist to maintain the moral standard (Blaagaard, 2013a). Although, this is in keeping with common understandings of the relationship between knower and knowledge (see Daston & Galison, 2007, 40), Sandrine Boudana argues that "the problem raised by this reliance on personal evaluation is precisely that it prevents an evaluation of professionalism" (2011, 395). Thus, Boudana effectively splits the journalist from subjectivity and the knower from the self, i.e. the ethical subject: if a journalist is personal s/he is not professional and journalistic ethics cannot be thought of in terms of personal qualities, but are constituted in professional practices alone, goes the argument. It therefore follows that ethical subjectivity in journalistic practice is often seen as a way of sneaking in relativism through the back door (Kieran, 1998). Indeed, should journalism be seen as a subjective, ethical practice, then 'to condemn a particular news report as shoddy, irrelevant or inappropriate would only serve to point out that we do not share the news values being addressed rather than to claim there is a fundamental mis-match between the report and the actual nature of the event being covered' (Kieran, 1998, 28). The fact that journalists are human – 'selves' – too and are impacting on the world of which they are part (Bell, 1998) seems largely ignored or makes up a fringe-argument, and the discussion seems stranded on the same dichotomy through which journalistic objectivity is argued: between the modern tenets of rationality and affect.

This is not to say that scholars of journalism have not explored this dichotomy. Karin Wahl-Jørgensen (2012) argues for instance that it is a simplification to position objectivity and

subjectivity as opposing each other. The relationship between the two concepts is more complex. Emotions and subjectivity are used strategically in objective or fact-driven journalism in ways that do not challenge a belief in the truth claims made by objective facts. Although the role of emotions as well as of objectivity in journalistic work is well documented (Muhlmann, 2008; Pantti, 2010; Richards and Rees, 2011; Tuchman, 1972), the tension between the desired objectivity and the practical affectivity within journalistic subjectivity and its practices of memory, cultural significance, and political undercurrent is still under-theorised (see Blaagaard, 2013a; Hartley, 2008; Wahl-Jørgensen, 2012; Zelizer, 2010). Moreover and importantly, the perceived binary is not neutral and should we choose to analyse the relationship from a political point of departure, subjective and affective reporting may be seen as a struggle against objectivity that keeps the power relations in check between the ruling, capitalist power and the people (Benjamin, 1970; Hartsock, 2009). As Walter Benjamin put it: 'the press is the most authoritative instance of this process [of separating the reader from the writer]' (Benjamin, 1970, 87) or the consumer from the producer of news and knowledge. In this light, literary journalism, new journalism, participatory journalism and now citizen journalism – or citizen media more generally – are struggles against the definition of knowledge through a merging of the producer and the consumer in a variety of ways. They are always unfinished struggles to 'make us, the public, see something that is 'other' to us, and to do it in such a way as to cause this otherness to have an effect on us, question us, and change us …' (Muhlmann, 2008, 226).

In contrast to a subjective and affective reporting, the carefully positioned and edited footage from the Greek demonstration described above testifies to a professionally planned message that adheres to the journalistic principles of modern objectivity and news values by showing several sides and perspectives with no visual or spoken comments. The (seemingly) lacking narrative may be ascribed to the need for a report to accompany the footage, as traditional journalism is accustomed. The linguistic anchoring of the image that embeds the meaning (Zelizer, 2010; Barthes, 1977a). The images by themselves make no argument but that of journalistic objectivity and balanced reporting. The footage connotes very little out of the ordinary journalistic televised report, i.e. this is the way we are used to viewing the world through technology – it is a mediatized view. The journalistic self is lacking and therefore the ethics is transposed to the professional practice, and the politics of defining knowledge and truth is disposed of. There is no cry for change or political struggle in the footage, but a fact-driven, totalizing gaze at what went on in the streets of Athens. The technology underlines this analysis: the steady view, which shifts positions but keeps a clear frame is meant to obliterate the journalist-subject in the name of objectivity and the view from nowhere (Haraway, 1991). In fact, it makes the technology and the journalist-subject(s) become one singular entity expressing objective search for the truth of the public protest in Athens. We may argue that objectivity becomes a standard, a language, within which we are presented with the world and through which we tend to understand it. From a posthuman perspective, then, through the shifts in time and the links created through editing, we may force a peek at the wired interconnections that question the structure and the language and its normative narrative of events. However, it remains an analysis of what-is-not-there, what is left out or disguised.

Mobile footage and the new real

The digital disruption of the normative language and aesthetic becomes clearer in the second example of online aesthetics of posthuman experience. The second footage is recorded by a mobile phone at an Iranian demonstration in 2009 and it is (in)famous for showing the death

of philosophy student Neda Afgha-Soltan (Zelizer, 2010). The footage is 54 seconds long and is disturbing not only because of the death of a young woman, but also because of the visual framing of the footage. The footage is shot by a bystander and shows a young woman lying on the ground. The person, who is filming, is running towards her and people gather to help. The grainy and shaky imagery positions the viewer in the situation with the person who is filming. At no point is the film still; it shakes, wobbles, skips and jolts. Afgha-Soltan's face is rarely at the centre of the frame, however she is strikingly recognisable and present. Most of the visuals are murky and unclear. The perspective is that of a standing person, reflecting the height of the anonymous man or woman who is filming. The footage breaks, leaves the screen black, and resumes once during the 54 seconds. Far from only recording the facts of the events, the people who are present, the blood, and the attempts to help, the footage records – even *embodies* – the chaos, desperation, and fear of the event. It shocks us and calls on the viewer to help, because we seem to be right there next to her (Blaagaard, 2013b; Zelizer, 2010). The sound is real and underscores the panic and frustration of the people gathered around the dying person.

New media technologies' ability to generate and spread imagery, opinions, and news stories, is the last in a long line of citizen-generated and technological challenges to journalistic professional ethics and politics of objectivity. This citizen journalistic footage challenges the established division between rational and objective journalism and subjective reporting on two scores: firstly, mobile phone imagery shows the a-rational (Flyvbjerg, 2001) motivation behind political news stories through political and embodied arguments that challenge mainstream media. The political is – as feminist theory and politics would have it – indeed personal and situated, which is made quite clear aesthetically as well as technologically in mobile phone footage through the experience of the photographer-technology amalgamation that creates the disequilibrium when viewing the footage. Secondly, it shows the implications of the technological state of society to our understanding of 'reality', i.e. the photographer, who has to have been there, in Barthes' terminology, is visible through a cultural and social imaginary rife with already technologically enhanced imagery and virtual realities. The mediatized condition (Hjarvard, 2013) of living in media (Deuze, 2012) much theorized in media studies and sociology, but which is added a new layer in a posthuman perspective: the shaken and grainy quality of mobile phone imagery enhances our understanding of 'being there' and helps authenticate the experience. This quality is the 0s and 1s (Plant, 1997), the visible technology, of the mobile phone footage aesthetics in relation to the journalist-subject and the viewer of the footage's disorientation. Taking the two points together, rather than professionalism, mobile phone imagery draws on affective and political relations and experiences of the viewer to underscore the actual nature of the event covered (see also Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013). More to the point, the posthuman, the photographer-technology-viewer, is vouching for the truth of the image through the technology-expressed aesthetics of what is happening.[7] It is now not the photographer and his or her technology alone, but in collaboration with the viewer that vouches for the presence and the authenticity of the event. The footage, then, operates as a form of political resistance in showing the other side or the side not regulated by governmental and media institutions. The footage from the Iranian demonstration not only questions the rationality of domestic conflicts, but also raises the issue of state control of media. Thus, making the struggle to define truth visible and political through the wired nervous system running through and inter-connecting the technology, the photographer and the viewer. The access and framing of journalistic footage becomes apparent through the interception of technologically generated footage in media imagery. The frame is an active and political mechanism by which power is asserted silently and invisibly through selecting

which images and perspectives are available to the media. In doing so the frame restricts our political consciousness and our understanding of the human and the grievable life (Butler, 2009). Mobile phone footage such as the footage of Afgha-Soltan from 2009 makes apparent that the objective frame is far from politically neutral.

Although, mobile phone footage breaks with journalistic objectivity and becomes an interrupting part of the mediascape and ideoscape (Appadurai, 1996), simultaneously, they draw on existing mediated interpretations and are expressed in journalistic and filmic framing. They are reincorporated into a format usable to mainstream journalistic narrative and produce news reports that emphasise the personal danger of the journalists and the instability of the reported situation through footage produced by running cameramen and – women creating shaken imagery. The realism, in which mobile phone footage and other journalistic manifestations exist, is a photorealism (Manovich, [1995] 2003), which is 'the ability to fake not our perceptual and bodily experience of reality but only its photographic image'. Indeed, Susan Sontag (2003) asserts that what used to be experienced in dream-like sequences are now experienced as filmic narrative. (Although she hardly expected the filmic representation to shape itself around the documentary style of citizen journalism.) This is because we have come to accept photorealism as reality, writes Lev Manovich. The shaken images of natural disasters and conflict catastrophes would not appear shaken to us if we were present at those events – our sense of balance would compensate for the disequilibrium as Thomas Susanka (2012) astutely observes. Mobile phone footage made by citizens therefore runs the risk of becoming 'fashionable clichés' (Benjamin, 1970, 91) and reappropriated in mainstream journalistic practice rather than proving subversive and disrupting power struggles. However, I suggest above that our trust in photorealism is an expression of the material-semiotic posthuman connections and a posthuman reading of these images, bringing the wired nervous system of technology to the fore, stops these images from becoming clichés. The footage is then not seen as imagery alone but as technological selves creating an aesthetic of posthuman experience, i.e. incorporating the material in the semiotics of mobile phone footage.

Edited news and proper distance: drone footage

A drone at a demonstration in Warsaw 2011 is the last example of aesthetic posthuman experience to serve as foundation for this posthuman cartographic reading. The drone starts on the ground and then quickly levitates with a loud, humming sound drowning out any real sound from the streets below. The drone follows a battalion of riot police down narrow Warsaw streets. Then flies back down another street where rows upon rows of police vehicles are parked. The drone makes two flights: the first flight footage is two minutes long. The second is 2.41 minutes and again the drone is humming on the ground before taking off from behind the riot police and making its way across the police line to the protesters. Hovering above the protesters, riot police are seen to the left-hand-side running like ants behind the group of protesters, who are held in a closed off part of the street. The drone advances down the street; there is smoke, people indistinguishable from each other, and white police helmets bobbing about, but the details of what is happening on the ground are impossible to discern. As the drone works its way back down the street – all in one long take – it finally lands on the asphalt from where it started. The perspective is that of an eagle or a glider hovering over the streets at a safe distance from the protesting. Immediately, the imagery connotes surveillance and control in light of its aesthetics. However, in a post-Snowden age, surveillance has taken on another reality, which allows us to pursue a more affirmative line of enquiry and analysis (Tufecki, 2014; Lovink, 2014). I will return to this argument and the issue of surveillance after an introduction to traditional journalistic studies on the topic.

In contrast to mobile phone footage and professional journalism, drone journalism is a way of surveying areas where it is humanly impossible or undesirable to go. For instance, drone journalism has been used to make journalistic footage of an immigration detention camp in Australia (Bartlett, 2011; Corcoran, 2012), to expose meatpacking violations in the US (Mortimer 2012), to cover Polish demonstrations (Corcoran, 2012), and more. The technique includes a small quadrocopter with an attached camera, which is remote controlled and records digitally images as it flies over the selected area. There continue to be obvious privacy and safety issues involved in using this sort of camera,[8] as mentioned briefly above, but they are not our concern here. Rather the question arises: if mobile phone footage enables political action and solidarity through aesthetic experiences that position the viewer among the events covered and draws on a posthuman experience of interconnected material-semiotic understanding, how may we theorise potential citizen action based on drone-generated aesthetics?

Traditionally, scholars of mediated relations and mediatisation have approached the subject from a purely semiotic angle and argued for a direct relationship between distance and *lack* of empathetic and political engagement as well as a relationship between proximity and the *production* of empathetic and political engagement. Lilie Chouliaraki (2006) distinguishes between three categories of news journalistic visuals and subsequently divides news reports into: adventure news, emergency news, and ecstatic news. The categories explain the importance of proper distance (Silverstone, 2003) to generating empathetic pity and solidarity. This proximity/distance axiom is visualized in news footage in which adventure news, among other characteristics, pans and scans the surroundings leaving the viewer with no hooks for identification, no personal stakes, and no pity. Emergency news brings about the negative identification, the 'glad it's not me'-reaction, whereas ecstatic news coverage is precisely *about* the viewers and visually allows them to identify and understand the implications of the news story with close-ups and personal perspectives and narratives. Whereas professional modern journalism and the Greek demonstration footage could be placed in the emergency news category, the category of ecstatic news according to this theory could be seen as befitting to citizen journalism's strong visuals and points of identification and pity. However, as argued above, the fact that mobile phone footage and in the example used in this article the footage of the Iranian demonstration and of Afgha-Soltan, bypass or come to mainstream news by technological detour, opens a space for a non-journalistic expression in which viewers are potentially positioned differently. While the viewer is still called to empathize with Afgha-Soltan, the relation is established through a posthuman, technologically mediated and non-professional interface, which bypasses the journalistic interpretation and gatekeeper role. Whereas, traditional news broadcasts have previously held the job of creating a kind of proper distance between audience and the object, person or event depicted, new media, Silverstone argues, challenges this position of one-to-many communication, which results in a 'personalisation of the other' (Ibid., 477). What defines this new relation is the ambiguity of cognitive, aesthetic, and moral boundaries, which is significant to mobile phone imagery. Proper distance reserves the separateness between the self and the other in order to recognise the irreducible difference of the other while still sharing identity with him or her (Silverstone, 2003). Indeed, these ambiguities are identifiable in new media: while mobile phone footage may incorporate the other as the case with the Iranian demonstration footage, in drone footage closeness – and therefore the ethical response or responsibility for the other – is resisted and suspended. Thus, drone journalism easily fits in Chouliaraki's category of adventure news. The visuals underline a bird's perspective and the scanning view over populations or landscapes without fixing its digital gaze on anything in particular. The drone

camera surveys the surroundings. Visually and physically, there is no closeness in the footage only an online connection – between the audience and the images as well as between the drone (technology) and the operator. When Silverstone's influential theory is used to think about drone imagery, the (human) witness, so important to Barthes among others, seems to vanish and with him or her, the guaranteed reality, ethical or objective truth. However, although the semiotic code of journalistic language remains in the networked distribution and reproduction of the images and footage worldwide, the material circumstances through which these images are generated allow a posthuman entanglement that brings about a more materially aware analysis.

Digital drone imagery, the Panopticon, and the posthuman.

Another oft-cited media theoretical reading of the drone image is that because of the remoteness of the photographer, the aesthetics of drone footage call on an ethics based on the insider/outsider: the one who is seen and watched and the one who is watching, unseen. Drone journalistic visuals from the demonstration in Warsaw, Poland, are produced without the objects' knowledge of whether they are being watched or not or why they are being watched. This speaks to Michel Foucault's thoughts on the Benthanian Panopticon, which he states should not be seen as an correctional architecture alone, but moreover as a disciplinary mechanism in more general terms based on the 'eyes that must see without being seen' (Foucault, 1977, 171). Surveillance is a disciplinary power that normalizes judgement and functions as a 'value-giving' measure. In this way it 'supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*.' (Foucault, 1977, 183 italics in original). As such, aesthetics of experience of surveillance speaks further to the power of definition and of objective knowledge. Despite the bodily disciplinary implications, the power of Panopticon-surveillance draws its strength from its depersonalisation and anonymous gaze. Although drone footage is generated by journalists and citizen journalists alike, and so has no particular relationship to state institutions[9] or media empires, the visual character of the footage and the experience of being over-flown by an unknown object at a demonstration, for instance, potentially inspire a politically chilling effect (Parenti, 2003). The imagery from drones such as the Polish demonstration footage exposes itself as disembodied – no movement, no grainy quality, no commentary, no editing: personal or professional selections – and as such it comes across as non-interpretational, not framed. This is a different aesthetics of digital communications altogether from the heralded new digital democracy of social media and citizen journalism, however, it nevertheless falls well in line with the idea of our perception of reality as photorealism: the out-of-body experience of watching the drone imagery is easily recognisable to the regular movie-goer or television audience.

However convincing the traditional arguments may seem in the present context, here I want to reclaim photorealism in the hands of citizens, emphasising the potential of political resistance and allowing for technological subjectivities. Barthes' witness will be replaced by a posthuman presence. Rather than presenting a knee-jerk response to the drone imagery, a posthuman reading may turn all of these influential arguments on their heads by updating our understanding of the mediatized condition. As Tufecki (2014) notes, today surveillance has to be thought of alongside resistance: surveillance and resistance are inseparable. The digital tools and our usages of these tools are connected both to the exercise of freedom of expression and to the data collection of national security associations simultaneously. The Panopticon has little to do with surveillance in liberal democracies today, Tufecki asserts. On the other hand surveillance is rife within the very structures of the technology, which has become our technology-subjectivity, our posthuman selves.

If we refuse to split nature and culture into human (ethics) and technology (doom), we are reengaging with the concept of the posthuman understood as a shift in the construction of subjectivity from a unified self endowed with a determining will, to a multi-layered, multi-modal, subjectivity constructed through mediated and digital relations to organic and inorganic (technological) others (Hayles, 1999; Braidotti, 2011; 2013). Subjectivities exist potentially among computers, cameras and people: i.e. the presence of the reporter or cameraperson may be digital and not only connected through wires and silicon but determined by this technology. This allows us to think of the drone as expressing an aesthetic of posthuman experience. Moreover, the posthuman is an epistemology, which questions our need for a 'realistic' or 'authentic' mediation of the world. It also questions our sense of ethics and to what extent technology is 'good or bad?' (Tufecki, 2014, 1). It is not the simulacra perpetually generating signs without a referent but rather a *mutation* that builds on the dialectical relationship between presence and randomness and 'testifies to the mark that randomness leaves on presence.' (Hayles, 1999, 249). Hayles' study in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) develops this material-semiotic move by arguing that random events may intervene on presence and change its modes of relation and understanding. The body and the embodied posthuman self is thus continuously expanded and changed, albeit still connected through political, social, cultural, gendered and economical structures and identities. In light of this, reality is not a thing detached from posthuman relations but a material – 'matter-realist' (Braidotti, 2013) – construct continuously changing and shifting in intensities.

We may talk of a new photo-reality presented by the drone footage. The drone footage from the Polish demonstration is not calling on a reality or knowledge drawn from daily life (and aesthetic) experiences, but on an aesthetic of digital, filmic experiences, a posthuman photorealism, that allow for the posthuman to glide over buildings and oversee groups of people as tiny figures below. It is a filmic reality, but no less real in that it is supported by an organic-inorganic subjectivity that connects us to a technologically mediated self – a posthuman perspective. The posthuman rejects the argument put forth by McLuhan ([1964] 2001) that ethics and human agency have nothing to do with the technological advancements, rather technology on and of its own vouches for the message. Rather the posthuman and the new materialist perspective assert that technology is entangled with the human and vice versa in a continuum. Our human perspective and experience is interdependent on technological devices and aesthetics, and technology is imbued with human desires and politics. Technology, then, is endowed with subjectivity in continuous relation with the viewer. Employed by citizens as resistance and struggles against objectivity and definitions of journalistic truth, drone journalistic aesthetics of posthuman experience use a larger mediascape as its frame of reference and for defining knowledge and reality. If this is the case as argued in this article, analyses of citizen media and other online journalism are not only called upon to explore the semiotic implications of mobile phone imageries and aesthetics; of the breaking down of language and formats in journalistic practices, but also need to take into account the materiality of journalism in terms of technological affects and impacts and in terms of what counts as journalistic authenticity and presence.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Notes

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[2] I am here applying Hartsock's aesthetics of experience (Hartsock 2009) beyond the literary journalistic discussion on which it is based.

[3] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVfyAPlJXUI&feature=related, *Tens of thousands of Greeks protest in violent clash over debt plans* 2012, accessed 26 February 2013.
[4] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp8I6q-x3QY&skipcontrinter=1, *Neda–unedited original footage*, accessed 28 May 2012.
[5] http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=o3OB_4BT1LA, *Watch!! ½ drone launched by protesters in Warsaw, Poland* 2011, accessed 26 Feb. 2013 & http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmhV-ymivJk&feature=endscreen&NR=1, *Watch!! 2/2 drone launched by protesters in Warsaw, Poland* 2011, accessed 26 February 2013.
[6] See for instance Drone Journalism Lab: http://www.dronejournalismlab.org/, accessed 26 February 2013.
[7] The discussions about the lack of verification of these images and the conspiracy theories that grew from this discussion is of a different nature and goes beyond the scope of this article.
[8] Drones have also been used to produce artistic visuals. See for instance http://www.youtube.com/user/ARdrone, accessed 26 February 2013.
[9] Recently, the state of Nebraska has raised concern about the use of drones in police work (Kremer, 2013).

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