Art and Social Justice

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The Media Connection

Edited by

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This book is dedicated in memory of Michael Green … and CCCS

… we can learn to see each other and see ourselves in each other and recognize that human beings are more alike than we are unalike …
—Maya Angelou (1928–2014)

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INTRODUCTION

MIKE HAJIMICHAEL

Whilst the relationship between art and social justice may appear straight forward, when the issue of media comes into the frame things become more complicated in terms of advocacy, expression and change. This is primarily because anything relating to creators/producers/artists, texts/works and audiences, as the late Stuart Hall noted many decades ago, is never simple. There is very little evidence to suggest that we all agree on issues of media texts, so trying to untangle these dynamics is a challenging task due to the at times ambiguousness of media and messages.

The media is also a rapidly changing world. With the arrival and development of a more interactive internet and various forms of DIY online popular culture, everyone seems to be that much more engaged. As Gauntlett argues, "making is connecting."[1] All of this is great in terms of democracy and increased participation but somewhere along the line, as Carpentier argues, motivation keeps resurfacing, as do issues of how much participation and openness actually exist .[2]

Making, as a process of creation, for me as a poet, is not just about connecting, it's also about criticism, having a voice for expression and resisting. Largely because I come from an island—Cyprus—where great injustices have happened through conflict, militarism, invasion, occupation and economic mismanagement, not saying anything about this through my art would be tantamount to accepting the status quo. It is not enough to just create for the sake of creating. Artists throughout the world and in history have always been at the forefront of different forms of critiquing to a given status quo. From Charles Dickens, Picasso and Nazim Hikmet to Norman Carlberg, Maya Angelou, Mikis Theodorakis and Miriam Makeba, artists the world over, have always questioned, have always resisted. As the incarcerated human rights activist, literary critic and Nobel Prize winner Liu Xiaobo stated, "the history of thought is the history of questions."[3]

With many of these ideas in mind, over the last few years I have gone on a journey around different parts of the world under the auspices of a

conference called Art & Social Justice (ASJ). This concept was inspired by my friend and one of the contributors to this book, Jan Jordan, from Durban, South Africa, where the founding conference took place in 2010. Since then, conferences have happened in Nicosia, Cyprus (2011) and Gernika, Spain (2012). While most of the chapters in this volume come from the second conference, the general spirit of ASJ, and its uniqueness as a forum and amalgamation of academics, artists and activists, is also present in this volume. This collection of essays and reflections by invited academics and artists takes on and interrogates different art forms and how these relate/connect to different forms of media. This is particularly important to many people due to the fast developing and ever changing media environment. Generally, the book contains chapters in three key areas (with some overlaps). These are art, social justice and ethics, connections with media in different contexts, and art, social justice and practice-based research.

Beyond the journey that this book has taken, another key theme running through many of the chapters is the political nature and need for art. This by no means implies that all art should be Political (not my capital "P"), but that if art is to approach a variety of issues pertinent to inequalities and injustices then it has an ideological element to it. If I am alarmed as poet by the rise of far-right / neo Nazi groupings, for example in Europe, then as an artist my conscience says to do something about it, to create songs, poems which protest and resist this surge in ultra-nationalism. Art can be a mission; it is like a calling, but more than anything we should never lose sight of art as a process of expression and creativity, which can be nurtured, developed and taken beyond existing conventions. Additionally, and just for clarification, concepts such as art and media are being used in the widest and most diverse sense. Art can mean and be many things to many different artists. Media is also ever pervasive, evolving all the time, and is a means to convey a message or series of messages. In the process, media requires communication in a deliberate way. It is the connections between art and media that draw me to issues of social justice in writing, research, teaching practice and artistic creation.

I would also like to share some thoughts on the chapters that are more specific and people/author centred.

Manzu Islam, a long-time friend and acclaimed author, certainly unlocked a few thoughts in my mind with the opening chapter on Ethics and Justice in Arts Works. The central argument in Manzu's contribution relates to how the relationship between arts and historical context/reality is not a straightforward issue. He does this through an eloquent exploration

of Toni Morrison's historic novel *Beloved* in relation to ethics and arts. More than anything, the "as if" mode described in this chapter is central to understanding art as a powerful tool with a deeper sense of situation through empathy, living the other, which leads to action, challenging inequalities.

Tao Papaioannou's focus on youth as constituency interrogates and challenges certain notions regarding civic engagement. This leads to a balanced approach which recognizes that there are levels of apathy but also high levels of engagement by particular youths through the use of particular media. What remains to be explored, through a more sensitized approach, is why this occurs and how this can impact art and social justice. Tao's chapter is an important contribution on how this can be researched and explored.

Alice Araujo provides a substantive chapter on the ways in which new media are developing in Brazil with the active audience in mind. While this may hold the premise of greater social equality and more justice at the same time, through exploring realities in a detailed sense Alice concludes that the internet has to be linked to lived realities, real situations and struggles. If this is done, as a new form of media it can contribute in a small and significant way to possibly challenging the deep-set inequalities of Brazilian society.

Dimitris Papanikolaou explores a form of media that in my mind is often taken for granted, namely radio. His chapter is an interesting reflection on the radical approach of Greek music composer Manos Hadjidakis, who headed the Greek Third Program on the state Radio Channel post military junta (1974–1981). The relevance to art and social justice of this chapter relates to Hadjidakis' humanist and aesthetic perspective which always puts people and quality first. This contributed to the notion of a much more "open society" culturally, and serves as a reminder of just how more appealing radio could be even today, if some of these aesthetic and more human-centric qualities prevailed.

Jan Jordaan is an important contributor to this volume, as without him the book probably would not exist. As the founder of the Art and Social Justice conference, Jan laid the foundation stone in Durban in 2010 for a series of conferences that have questioned issues of art and social justice from a number of different global and local perspectives. In his reflection on art, social justice and human rights, Jan concludes that art is like a beacon for the future, and this book aims to keep that flame alive.

Nikolas Defteras approaches things from a different perspective, and I wanted to include his chapter for its polemical qualities to add some fire and resistance to the notion that people are becoming increasingly engaged

with media in ways that are viewed as non-ideological. This is largely due to the allure of the internet as one indignant global village best epitomized in my mind by the term “Arab Spring.” The world may be becoming that much smaller (or bigger in terms of variety of online content), but for Defteras ideology grounded in actual situations of struggle and conflict remains the key driving force in changing history.

Andreas Anastasiou returns to the issue of the “oppressed” and the mind-set of “what am I going to do about it,” namely the injustices in the world, by viewing art as a timeless quality of resistance and questioning the authoritarianism of nationalism as a dominant and dominating form of discourse. Art, he argues, provokes us into action against injustice, and this is clearly evident in recent examples of Arab hip hop which connects/relates to/with the “Arab Spring.”

Anton Maslić develops a qualitative assessment of how art is changing in the digital/internet based age. His chapter is an example of exploratory research in a subject matter that is cutting-edge and pioneering. Art, he argues, is becoming more technologically dependent, and as such there is a need for being sensitized to these changes. He is aware of the romanticism of viewing these media changes as “utopian” with the glass half-full, or painting a gloomy picture of art becoming a form of dystopia with the glass half empty. The balance struck in his chapter appealed to me, leading to its inclusion in this volume.

Evanthia Tselika explores the social turn of art through substantive case studies of activities and actions in the urban space of Nicosia, Cyprus. This chapter is based primarily on practice-based research which considers elements of conflict, collaboration and dialogue. Many of these issues are often taken for granted, without detailed exploration/reflection, particularly in the island context of Cyprus with its divisions and conflicts. This gives another spin on art and advocacy in urban spaces and makes it clear that things are not as simple as we often assume.

Finally, my chapter is an effort at contextualizing the use of a poem by Pavlos Liasides, a renowned Cypriot poet, through a connection with the past, present and possible futures of people in migration as “immigrants/emigrants.” I relate historical experience of the past through the poem “Xenitia” by Liasides through a practice-based project called “Roots and Branches” to present-day realities. In a time when far right and ultra-nationalist political agendas are on the rise in Europe, largely through articulating “antipathy” towards immigrants, I argue for a sense of historical empathy through the use of different art forms and different media in a way that is more challenging and sensitized to lived historical experiences.

I would like to thank all the contributors for their time, ideas and research. … A special thank you to Graham Clarke for proof reading this edited book…And a big thanks to Tao Papaioannou, whose support and input made this collection take shape and form….With art we all move forward … with questions to change the world … through media tools we control ….

Notes

[1] David Gauntlett "Making Is Connecting – the social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0" (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011)
[2] Nico Carpentier "Media and Participation – a site of ideological-democratic struggle" (UK: Intellect Ltd, 2011)
[3] *Human Without God – quotes by Liu Xiaobo*
http://humanwithoutgod.blogspot.com/2010/10/history-of-thought.html

CHAPTER ONE

ETHICS AND JUSTICE IN ART WORKS

MANZU ISLAM

While musing on the "Raj revival" across British media during the 1980s, with its plethora of well-worn stereotypes, clichés and platitudes, Salman Rushdie begs the question of whether it is worth getting all worked up about it.[1] Shouldn't it be seen as just a bit of fun on the side, a nostalgic dip into the reveries of lost times of imperial glory? Why be a spoilsport and spook the party of innocent revellers? Questions such as these prompt Rushdie to visit a bizarre little essay by George Orwell called "Inside the Whale" written in 1940. In this essay Orwell, already weary of his earlier political commitments, argues that writers shouldn't dirty their aesthetic sensibility by letting themselves be meshed in the messy goings-on of the everyday life world, and should stay sealed in the hermetic enclosure of their art. Rushdie strongly disagrees—he recommends an artist's role of involvement, commitment and taking sides in the social and political disputations of her/his times and milieu.

I also hold a similar view, and yet I must acknowledge that the relationship between arts—the representations of reality shaped by the medium of particular forms—to the wider social/historical concerns is not a straightforward one. More often than not it is complex, and comes into the orbits of each travelling a rather circuitous and indirect route. However, this is not to deny the need for an Agitprop type of art in a particular context and situation. I remember what a vital role the songs, plays and poems played during the war of Independence of Bangladesh 1970–71, in which I participated. Somehow, they lifted us from the ominous shadow of a giant military machine and gave us strength and courage to resist its genocidal drive. I suppose the songs of Mikis Theodorakis played a similar role during Greek dictatorship; one could name the music of Victor Jara in a similar vein in the context of Chilean popular unity or the poems of Mahmoud Darwish in the service of Palestinian struggle. These are the glorious examples of politically/socially-

engaged arts in moments that call for direct action, where the artist is a militant like any other frontline activist, because the basic survival or the fundamental rights of the artist's community is at stake. In general, though, the relationship between art and politics/social justice tends to be an indirect one, through the mediation of the aesthetic form particular to an art form.

It is well to remember the debate within the German left between Brecht, Luckacs and Adorno about aesthetics and politics, because they bring home their complex relation. For much of the left, Brecht's epic theatre is taken to be almost an analogue or at least an enduring model of politically committed arts, but, as is well known, even though it is given to the task of waking up the public from the make-believe world of bourgeois reality in which they are seduced into slumber, and jolt them into engaging with their everyday life with a critical consciousness, it works through the indirect mediation of aesthetic form, which is an artifice that deliberately distances the audience from the enacted drama before them, on the stage. Even for Luckacs, the staunch defender of nineteenth-century realism which he believed to be carrying (often despite the avowed intentions of their authors) the fabric of social/historical totality and the prototype for the socialist utopia, art works through indirection, more through mediation than as an immediate reflection of reality. This reality, if it were the case, would only end up reproducing the dominant bourgeois reality. From the positions of these engaged artists/critics, who wouldn't shy away from using arts as means of immediate calls to arms in popular struggle, it is clear that the relationship between aesthetic form, reality and the concerns about politics and social justice is a complex one. However, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that the aesthetic establishment has often dismissed genuine works of art as rubbish because they have taken a strong political position about the plights of the have-nots. For instance, the performance or the dub poetry of Jamaica—in the works of Bongo Jerry, Mikey Smith, Mutabaruka, Jean Binta Breeze among many others—that articulated the historical anguish of Afro-Caribbean people and enable them to shape a new identity, is often dismissed by so-called respectable Jamaican critics such as Mr. Roach as "Clap-trap."[2] This is primarily because the likes of Mr. Roach are using aesthetic criteria founded on European modernism and formalism, and have failed to take note of what is happening in those poems between the lines, in the silences, in the grunts and screams, in their insistent rhythms, in the bodily gestures of performance. It has been suggested by critics such as Gordon Rohlehr that in the heart of many of these poems lies a sense of "Dreadness" the present day tension between "have-gots" and "have-nots" under the apocalyptic memories of slave

time. It is easy to see that if you are using an aesthetic criteria that holds that a poem is simply a self-sustaining aesthetic form, where the "contentless" play of words and musicality, ambiguity, subtleties of metaphors are the only measures of a good work, then much of the works by the Jamaican dub poets would be found wanting. For a real assessment of these works one needs a historically/politically aware aesthetic concept like "dreadness."

Now I focus my attention on art and its relationship with ethics and justice. Let me begin with Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), which wonderfully mediates art form, ethics and the question of justice. On the last section of the novel we unexpectedly find this sentence "This is not a story to pass on." This strikes the reader as strangely paradoxical, for it claims the impossibility of representing or narrating it's chosen subject matter that it has just represented or narrated. What is the point of this wilful disavowal of narrative authority, its power of painting a picture of the historical past, its deliverance of truth for the reader? Despite meticulously recording the history of the African American people, even bringing to light the archaeological traces, the unspoken, unrecorded memories, the text seems to be undoing itself in an attempt to dislocate its apparent mode of address—the epistemological domain. Instead, it suddenly calls out to the reader in a vocative mode, soliciting another kind of reading and response. In a nutshell, the text seems to be saying to the reader "if you are looking for just knowledge and illumination, then look elsewhere. On the other hand, if you are willing to respond to an ethical summons, then please do enter. If you do so, then each of us can actively and experientially undertake an ethical journey and find a way of acting on the imperatives of the voices we have just heard, thereafter proceed to fashion a self and a community accordingly." Morrison mediates the strands of this complex, paradoxical project through the figure of love.

In *Beloved*, love is portrayed as strangely "too thick," and the lovers come burning as "a hot thing." It is a form of love that is born of catastrophe and is driven by a destructive force—characteristics of the death drive. Nothing can survive this. Sethe, the runaway slave mother, cuts the throat of her baby daughter because she is possessed by "too thick" love. She would rather have her hotly loved daughter dead than taken in by the slaving machine. It is a pathological form of love that goes against the all-too-human instinct for survival. Moreover, it is a form of euthanasia or mercy killing that relieves the lover of her painful existence and registers a desperate protest against the prevailing social/historical conditions. It is also a suicide pact in which Sethe, by killing her daughter, lets her ghost devour her. Possessed by the ghost of her daughter, Sethe—

confined in her den at 124 Bluestone Road and cut off from the world—lives the life of a living dead. Her life now—like that of a saint or a Sufi mystic—is given to the annihilation of the self in her solitary pursuit of merging with her beloved daughter. So Beloved, like the god of the mystic, becomes a sacred devourer. "Too thick" love, then, is not for the living—its exorbitant demands are unbearable for any socially constituted subject. Yet, for Morrison, the visitation of this sublime form of love becomes a necessary condition for the African American people to constitute a self and a community. It is as if when starting from the year zero on a path of genesis—that is, what emerging from slavery amounts to—one has to begin with the most primal form of love. Strange though it might sound, Sethe's murder of her daughter out of love, and then being devoured by her loving memory, allows the emergent slave mother to discover the force of love, without which both the constitution of the self and the community would be impossible.

Behind Beloved's ghost lies, of course, the haunting presence of those "sixty million and more" drowned and degraded slaves to whom Morrison dedicates her novel. Invariably, then, due to various forms of forgetfulness and repression, they come to form the unconscious of the African American self. For Sethe, though—and, for that matter, for any descendant of those "sixty million and more"—any attempt at re-visioning their dim traces becomes a necessary step for the constitution of a self that can feel equipped to join the community at large. Yet, as it is well known, dabbling in the unconscious or in sublime memory is a dangerous thing to do. From the dark depths of the psyche surfaces those unstable and violent forces that can rend the memorizing subject into pieces and kill those around them. If you are already broken into pieces, as Sethe has been by the slaving machine, you have nothing to lose. So Sethe lets herself be caught in the spiralling movement of "fold … refold … and doublefold,"[3] which embarks her on a journey of memories that takes her back to her slave home, then through the dark waters of the middle passage all the way back to Africa. From these precarious journeys she gathers the unspeakable memories and lets them loose among the living so that they can form a community of love together. Even though this is a ghostly community of memories, it makes room for all those drowned, lynched, degraded and forgotten ancestors to be found in recognition as if they had always been proper subjects of history. Upon their retrospective arrival, they provide the genealogical continuity with those of the living present and their endeavour to form a community of the future. Like all immemorial or sublime memories, this recollection of the ancestors is full of paradoxes. Among so many flows of these involuntary memories, Sethe remembers

the lynched boys—the iconic signature of white supremacist violence against African-American people—but instead of being drowned in sorrow she gathers the sensation of "shameless beauty" from the "the most beautiful sycamores"[4] from which they were hung. Even from the floating death camps of slave ships, the memory clutches onto the "pretty little teeth"[5] of the dead slaves as though they were precious stones. It would be easy to regard these representations of affective sensations as obscene aestheticization, but somehow they become Sethe's elementary pathway of emerging from the nothingness of a slaved body to the affirmation of self. Falling into a "too thick" love with memories of an unspeakable past, and between experiencing the violent emotions of catastrophe and perverse joy, Sethe drags herself to the surface. And loving her body becomes the first stage of this process; or, as Baby Suggs puts it: "love your flesh … Flesh that needs to be loved."[6]

Surely this is not narcissistic love but an affirmation of a minimal embodied self. Even though the possession of one's body seems like the most singular act of private passion, Sethe cannot do it alone. She needs another to conjugate with her in the reciprocal giving of love to confirm the non-nothingness of her body. Here Paul D—a carrier of old slave home memories—comes to Sethe's aid by forming a micro-community of love with her. Her shattered body pieced together with the glue of love, Sethe can finally dream of "some kind of tomorrow."[7] Yet she can only realize this "tomorrow" by forming a wider community with many others like herself. Led by Ella—who suffered "the lowest yet"—thirty women come to fold her in their music. Only by being claimed by others in a collective effusion of love, which merges Sethe's self into theirs, can Sethe become herself. Significantly, the music of love that the thirty women bring to Sethe's door has nothing to do with signifying logos. It is made of pure sensation, the sublime music of primary affectivity. Narrating this event, the narrator tells us that "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound."[8] Although the collective self-constituted through the affective conjugation of sound belongs to the African American survivors of slavery, it does not produce the locked-bodied self of racial types. We hear the narrator telling us that "the sound … broke the back of words."[9] In the process of granting a new subjectivity, the collective sound of the thirty women needs to break the words—of the habitual, dominant reality, of racialist stereotyping—that formed Sethe as an abject racial other. Significantly, the women, after clearing away the debris of racial time, do not add signifying words to their sounds. Perhaps they did not want to risk the reactive gesture of mimic words that would have constituted Sethe into her new locked-bodied racial self. What the

sound wants to break is the very circuit of mimicry in which the locked-bodied self of racial attribution is constituted. Instead, what Sethe gets is a body that can bear herself and can love and be loved and dream of a future.

From an ethical point of view the question is—how does one negotiate difference? Perhaps the best way I can explore this question is by engaging with Emmanuel Levinas' work. In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas, in passing, mentions Martin Buber's *I and Thou* relationship, which his own ethical ideas seem to resemble. Yet, Levinas suggests that Buber's *I-Thou* relationship falls short of the requirement of the ethical genre. Apart from drawing attention to the "formalism" of Buber's *I-Thou* dyad, Levinas also points out that this mode of relationship, "does not enable us to account for … life other than friendship: economy, the search of happiness, the representational relation with things."[10]

Levinas modestly claims not to have the "pretension of 'correcting' Buber," but shifting the orientation on relationship in view of "the idea of the Infinite."[11] Cursory though they might be, these comments have crucial bearings on our discussion here as they suggest the very condition of possibility for the ethical genre. What is wrong with the model of friendship presumed in the *I-Thou* dyad? For Levinas, this circuit cannot allow the intrusion of the foreign and the stranger. Behind the *I-Thou* dyad of friendship lies the dialectics of reciprocity and the recognition of mutual egos. Such processes can only take place within the boundary of an intimate community where each subject knows each other, feels bound by the same set of cultural rules and values, and knows each other's worth. In other words, friendship of this type is possible among subjects who share the same immanent condition. But ethics demands, Levinas contends, that the other come before me with the attributes of the *Infinite*. *Infinite* always brings to me a stranger who not only fails to recognize me but also fails my attempt to know her/him. It is by stubbornly remaining outside the parameter of my knowledge and recognition that *Infinite* allows a response to the other without any precondition. Only from this arises the feeling of obligation—the crux of the ethical genre. So, if we are searching for friendship in ethical terms, then we must allow the would-be-friend to call on us in her/his absolute strangeness; not as the other self of whom I might have fore-knowledge and recognize, but simply the vacant eyes and blank skin that solicit my response. Levinas writes: "It is my responsibility before a face looking at me as absolutely foreign (and the epiphany of the face coincides with these two moments) that constitute the original fact of fraternity."[12]

Yet, how is it possible to have a friendship with a stranger if the stranger remains a stranger? Doesn't the very recognition of the strangeness of the stranger shed light on the being of the stranger? Let me deal with this issue by looking closely a passage from Edith Wyschogrod's *An Ethics of Remembering.*[13]

In the course of presenting her meditation on the ethics of historical memory, Edith Wyschogrod cites a personal anecdote that took place in a New York street. While guarding a van for someone who was in the process of moving, Edith Wyschogrod meets "an old, homeless African-American man" with a swollen left foot.[14] Moved by his plight and caught in a sense of obligation that she ought to do something for this seemingly destitute and afflicted man who is in desperate need of attention, she offers to accompany him to a nearby hospital, but he refuses. To her surprise, the only thing he asks of her is that she remember his name, which is Billie Joe. Feeling that Billie Joe's solicitation to be remembered places her in a new kind of ethical terrain, Edith Wyschogrod asks a series of questions. "Was the injunction to remember his name a means of informing me that," writes Edith Wyschogrod:

> … he was one of the forgotten, that a transpersonal history was locked into the name Billie Joe, that he was a particular, as it were, that exhibited a universal meaning, that of destitution? Or was he pointing to himself proudly as the unique individual, a singularity, designated by this name? Was his history the inalienable property of a people and a culture upon which an outsider had no purchase? Yet, if I, such an outsider, am prohibited from inquiring into the history of the other, is this constraint not tantamount to an endorsement of historical solipsism? If, per contra, I enter into the other's history, recount it, have I not created in his name a particular constellation of verbal or gestural instances having practical import, one that imposes a language of dominance and alien historical identity? Would I come to remember this incident through the screen of later literary encounter, perhaps through the celebrated words of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, who pleads in a moment of sexual desire … Or, more insidious, was my offer and is the present telling of it not a gesture of narcissism, the self-congratulatory display of good intentions on the part of the relatively privileged?[15]

Edith Wyschogrod does not provide an immediate and direct answer to these questions, but their reverberations are felt throughout her text as she tries to negotiate the ethical dilemma of a historian caught between the obligation to lend her/himself to bear unconditional testimony of a memory that is not his/hers and the validation of the veracity of historical events. Apart from the dilemma regarding the manner or the terms in

which the knowledge of the other is to be borne in writing, the very event of such knowledge-gathering risks the core element of an ethical response. Even before Wyschogrod faces the dilemma as to the terms in which she should remember the name of Billie Joe or the ethical implications of such remembering, her gesture of lending a hand to the stranger compromises his strangeness. She already knows that he is "an old, homeless African-American man." Is not her gesture then grounded in the knowledge of the historical location of such a man? Yes, it is, and moreover, such pre-knowledge is unavoidable. Billie Joe is a stranger to Edith Wyschogrod only insofar as not being an acquaintance or a friend before the present chance meeting on the street. Perhaps their racial and class differences, and their relative fortunes of privileges and health, can also make them strangers to each other on the historical stage on which they appear. But the sentiment that moves Edith Wyschogrod to offer her care to Billie Joe is not done in view of an unknown other. For the very invocation of "an old, homeless African-American man" already brings to mind a long and terrible story of destitution, which then acts to move a cognizant and benevolent soul such as Edith Wyschogrod's into her role as a carer. Yet Levinas disallows such pre-knowledge from any act of ethical friendship, because if it weren't the case, then the gesture to the other wouldn't be unconditional. We can shift our orientation here and ask "is it possible to feel obligated and offer care to someone or something of which one doesn't possess any fore-knowledge?" If it is difficult to imagine such an event ever taking place, then it is impossible—in the unlikely case of such an event taking place—to narrate or write about or make sense of it. We have no language for such a task.

Levinas is not unaware of such difficulties, of the impossible demands that he makes of ethical conduct. In a late work, he writes,

> The correlation of the saying and the said that is, the subordination of the saying to the said, to the linguistic system and to ontology, is the price that manifestation demands. In language qua said everything is conveyed before us, be it at the price of a betrayal, language is ancillary and thus indispensable.[16]

The mode of ethical response to the strange other, which he terms as *saying,* cannot really be expressed without the signifying language—the *said*—which by introducing historical recognition forecloses the possibility of encountering the strange other. Yet, since the signifying language is the only way that the strange other can be borne in testimony, then the ethical gesture will always be compromised. In other words, it would be impossible to maintain the stance of unconditionality. Hence,

ethics must proceed with a paradox. In other words, the task is to bring the ethical perspective to bear on knowledge production—to find in the narrative and the description of the others some room to bear witness to their predicament and express care.

So, in the context of meeting others and passing through elsewhere, what is needed is not less inter-cultural knowledge but more of it, in the manner of what Clifford Geertz has called "thick description." However, more precise and "thicker" knowledge does not secure the feeling of unconditional obligation that the ethical relation demands. One way of proceeding in this situation is through the "as if" mode. In fact, ethics, being a vocative genre, can only work through the "as if" mode that secures a feeling of otherwiseness in the addressee. So, in order to guarantee that one feels unconditionally obligated towards the other, one has to relate to the other—about whom one may possess a profusion of reliable knowledge—as if one does not know anything about them. So, knowing about Billie Joe is not only unavoidable, but one must know his history, his location as accurately as possible, while at the same time taking care that he does not simply become an example of a type. It is true that he cannot hide the historical memories that his ancestors have endured, and whose legacy still determines his place in the world, and yet he has a particular way of being. A gatherer of knowledge of others—if that knowledge has an ethical pretension—has to pay attention to this. Moreover, the knowledge about Billy Jo and his world must take into account the way he and his lot express meaning about the world in which they dwell. Yet, the abundance of knowledge about Billy Jo and his world, and seeing things from his interpretative viewpoint, do not secure the feeling of obligation that moves one to take care of him. For that it is necessary to respond to his elemental presence—or, the face as Levinas calls it—as if he is a stranger. Otherwise, a sense of unconditionality, even though it is virtual, cannot be secured. Ethics loses its core condition of existence if any gesture of care depends on preconditions, for example; I need to be charitable to Billy Jo because his ancestors have suffered so much. In this case, it is easy to argue that the impulse that prompts this gesture of care lies in a sense of guilt, which remains far removed from ethics. Besides, without the feelings of unconditional care the gathering of knowledge about others cannot be conducted with ethical sensibility. It is through the dilemma between ethics and justice that art works—on the one hand to record historical memories and to articulate a sense of social justice in its signifying language; on the other hand its aesthetic aspect, which also works in the "as if" mode, is capable of intuiting an ethical sensibility.

Notes

[1] Salman Rushdie, "Outside the Whale," in *Imaginary Homeland—Essays in Criticism 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 87–101.
[2] Gordon Rohlehr, "West Indian Poetry: Some Problem of Assessment 2," in *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, edited by Alison Donnell & Sarah Lawson Welsh (London: Routledge, 1996), 321–326.
[3] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (London: Picador, 1988), 61.
[4] Ibid., 6.
[5] Ibid., 212.
[6] Ibid., 88.
[7] Ibid., 273.
[8] Ibid., 259.
[9] Ibid., 261.
[10] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 68–69.
[11] Ibid., 69.
[12] Ibid., 214.
[13] Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[14] Ibid., 4–5.
[15] Ibid., 5.
[16] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (the Hague, Boston, London: Martinus Publishers, 1981).

CHAPTER TWO

DIGITAL MEDIA AND YOUTH CIVIC PRACTICES: STRATEGIES TO FOSTER ONLINE PARTICIPATION

TAO PAPAIOANNOU

The decline of civic and political participation among young people is one of the great challenges facing many Western democracies. Several factors may have contributed to this difficult reality, in particular some fundamental socio-cultural transformations which have led to a change from the group-based society to a networked society, emphasizing personalized conceptions of membership and identification in social and political identity processes.[1] These shifts, on the one hand, have alienated young people from mainstream forms of political discourse and produced much of the cynicism about media and politicians, particularly in the context of failing institutions and systems in several Western societies. On the other hand, they have possibly encouraged self-actualization in young people's political and civic expression, leading youths to organize their citizen identity around their personal lifestyles rather than government and through alternative political activities, taking place progressively online. The advent of web 2.0 technologies, such as social networking media, YouTube, blogs and Wikis, offers people new opportunities for processing information, interacting among one another and participating in communities and society. Civic groups and political leaders are increasingly promoting themselves online, hoping to attract the interest and support of young people inclined to use these technologies. Evidenced by the role of social media in articulating citizen actions in the Arab Spring movement, digital technology has challenged more traditional participation and public deliberation practices in recent years. Regarding the arts and social justice, the political potency of art has been witnessed throughout history whether

through music, painting, poetry or graffiti. Recently, through online venues such as exhibitions, with their capabilities of vividly demonstrating clashes of political and artistic ideals to millions of potential viewers, a growing number of artists are engaged in politics, issues of inequality and the many conflicts that besiege the world today via the internet. Amongst the current research trying to understand the capacity of the networked sphere to mobilize citizens and foment social and political change, studies specifically focusing on youth civic cultures are debating the potential of digital media in contributing to new forms of civic involvement, facilitating civic participation and empowering youth.

This chapter aims to explore the role of digital media in fostering online civic participation among youth. After an examination of whether and how children and teenagers make selective use of digital technologies for civic purposes in view of the participation opportunities that new media offer, and the ways in which they utilize online tools available to them, it is suggested that the internet presents significant opportunities for exploring civic interests (not necessarily generating these interests in the first place). However, online communication does not straightforwardly translate into online or offline practices, indicating a more complex participation process than previously thought. Building upon the analytical frame of civic practices—which argues that the extent and manner to which participation is realized in the online environment underscore the notion of contingency—this article identifies and analyzes strategies which may mobilize youth and promote online participation through appropriately directing online activities to the varied interests and motivations among heterogeneous youth, appealing to young people's own agendas and expressions and providing civic media literacy education among other institutional support for opportunities and conditions of democratic agency in society.[2]

Young people are typically portrayed in both popular media and academic discourse as uninterested in the news media, unaware of national and international current events and apathetic about participating in the formal political process.[3] Interestingly, the traditional mass media, particularly television, have been described as simultaneously playing the role of deflecting and enhancing political and civic participation among youths.[4] As young people are found to be increasingly adopting internet-based information sources instead of the traditional media, there has been growing research interest in whether this new communication environment may play a crucial role in fostering youth civic interest and participation. Communication is a significant aspect of civic and political participation; however, civic engagement should not be treated as merely an issue of

communication technology as civic agency cannot be examined in isolation from one's immediate social environment as well as the wider political and hegemonic power structure. (Democratic) Political systems provide structures of opportunities for participation and a range of factors can affect how participation within a system actually functions.[5] Hence, civic agency is always conditioned by social and political circumstances. Any perception of civic (dis)engagement among young people must be analyzed in the context of late modern democracy, whose political functions and expressions evolve with time and the broader social environment as the character of participation.

Currently, in several western societies, increased social fragmentation and atomization have led to growing distrust of media and politicians among young people.[6] They do not necessarily follow politics in the news and do not necessarily view voting as the core democratic act. Instead of emphasizing the "adult" realms of socio-political engagement, as in contribution to state institutions and knowledge about politics and government, young people tend to consider self-actualizing politics more relevant to their individual needs and organize their citizen identity around their personal lifestyles. Resistant to older expectations about citizen duty, they are drawn to alternative political activities. Instead of joining social organizations and parties they may join informal or online networks for direct social action on consumer and lifestyle issues. Among others, Bennett,[7] Earl & Schussman,[8] Levine,[9] Montgomery[10] and Jenkins et al.[11] have critically argued for a perspective of citizenship and participation that acknowledges the ways in which young people incorporate civic interests and media content into their everyday lives. This view has expanded the traditional understanding of participation to include—beyond direct involvement in government and national issues—volunteer activities, local and online community engagement, youth philanthropy, social activism, political consumerism and lifestyle politics. Striving to offer new insights on youth civic apathy, this conception of civic participation seeks to capture creative developments in youth participation which comprise a wide range of practices and civic learning styles, often in forms of shared activity online.

Considerable empirical evidence has supported this broader perspective.[12] [13] Some research has noted many online forms of civic expression, ranging from participating in interest- or issue-based online communities, protesting in gaming and fan sites, blogging about political and social issues, to volunteering in local and online communities. For example, a number of youth initiatives have succeeded online, providing participatory opportunities in civic and political issues including

voluntarism, youth philanthropy, voting, racism and tolerance, social activism, patriotism, terrorism and military conflict.[14] Media literacy training projects from several Nordic countries have produced encouraging results from classroom initiates helping students to use digital media to express their artistic as well as civic interests.[15] [16] [17] More widely, a transnational analysis on youth media production and distribution projects argues positively that youth media initiatives contribute to advocacy and empower youth to become expressive participants in their local and global multi-mediated realities.[18]

At present, civic initiatives using the internet to stimulate young people's participation can be found in many different parts of the world. However, they are mostly organized by individual organizations and rather small scale, which make it difficult to evaluate them systematically or to more widely implement them. The internet is transforming certain aspects of civic participation as it provides possibilities to disseminate and access far more information, offers the capability to reach out to others with a greater level of direct and personal involvement, and affords additional spaces for democratic deliberation and participation. The internet is becoming an increasingly useful and empowering platform for those who are in the position and willing to take advantage of the networked public sphere. Some young people may well be affirming their sense of civic identity through new skills and opportunities that digital media may open up for them. However, there is no concluding evidence (provided that data is still scarce in this area) for the claim that internet-based technologies have brought the majority of young or old people into active civic life. Rather, limited empirical research seems to suggest that the internet presents significant opportunities for participation among those who have already developed civic interests in their lives, but online communication does not straightforwardly translate into online or offline practices, indicating a more complex participation process than previously thought.

For example, a large-scale study of children aged 9–19 years old in the UK found that nearly half of the participants had visited at least one civic website and has online discussions about civic or political issues with peers.[19] Exploration of the reasons why some children and teenagers do not participate in civic activities online leads to the conclusion of lack of interest. Young people indeed use digital media to pursue their civic interests, but it tends to be those who have already cultivated these interests offline, very likely through political socialization in their early lives. The results of a survey on how public high school students aged 14–19 use Facebook reveal that online group membership among teenagers reflects a moderate degree of civic/social interest, but there is a gap

between communication and response, and online participation does not necessarily lead to further offline participation.[20] For example, about 44% of the survey participants take part in youth groups, 28% are members of political parties/groups, and 23% and 12% respectively are involved in local and international civic groups on the platform of causes on Facebook. While the majority of the students (70%) read and forward e-mails about the groups they belong to, less students participate fully and consistently or try to tackle, as campaigners, either local or global problems: 30% participate in most of the online activities organized by the groups they belong to, 20% have campaigned for the groups they belong to via their profiles/blogs, 10% have organized e-mail pressure campaigns and 5% have made online donations. Overall, only 15% of the students share via Facebook their views on social, cultural and political events, either national or international, with their friends. In parallel, offline, only a small number of students fully participate in the activities organized by the groups they belong to or actively campaign for these groups or causes. If society wishes the internet to truly represent a participatory, self-expressive platform for most young people rather than the self-motivated few, it is important that educators along with policy makers meet the challenge of incorporating civic activities into young people's lives through actively promoting them in educational, civic and a variety of media contexts. More critically, researchers need to look further into ways in which young people make selective use of digital technologies for civic purposes to identify activities and participation models that youths find appealing, and identify strategies to further mobilize them both online and offline.

In his discussion of the potential significance of the internet for civic engagement, Peter Dahlgren proposed an analytical frame of civic practices with five participation parameters,[21] each with further subcategories. These five parameters intend to specify attributes about online civic and political participation. He argues that the extent and manner of participation realized in the online environment underline the notion of contingency, indicating a complex interplay of conditions across those five identified factors that could both facilitate and hinder participation. This conceptual framework thus serves as a good starting point for discussing strategies to further encourage online participation among youths. If the affordances of digital media are harnessed with strategies meaningful to the everyday practices and the frames of reference of young people, even if civic involvement has not become a dominating online phenomenon compared to other consumption and entertainment

oriented activities, the online environment can play a significant role in fostering participation.

The five parameters are: trajectories, modalities, motivations, sociality and visibility. The trajectories of participation indicate the direction of the primary intention and experience in roughly three major areas: consumption, civil society and politics. The trajectory of consumption points to participation through market relations which is always embedded in macro- and micro-power relations and can be manifested in political consumerism such as politically motivated boycotting. Participation in civil society emphasizes interaction among people outside both the market and the states and for shared interests and common purposes, often seen as a foundation for the public sphere and a passage leading to political participation. Political engagement signifies involvement in state institutions, voting or other contributions in the formal political process. Political and civic participation entail communication which supports the exchange of information, thereby increasing knowledge, a key dimension of civic cultures. Communication can take on an array of forms or modalities, such as textual, linear vs. multi-media. In today's growingly convergent and hybridized media environment, digital communication in multi-media form offers civic and political groups new opportunities for disseminating information, especially when targeting teenagers and young adults who are increasingly turning away from traditional mass media in favour of internet-based information sources. Yet it remains a challenge for these groups to effectively attract and maintain young people's attention and motivate them to translate communication into action. Motivation behind participation is the third significant parameter of the model of civic practices where sources of predispositions for participation are identified, including interest, efficacy, meaningfulness and duty. Depending on the presence and dominance of each or many of these subjective grounds, constraints and opportunities impact participation behaviour differently. Some younger citizens are found to be supportive of social causes in the belief of "connecting with one another to collectively make a difference in their own world,"[22] but young people should not be treated as a homogeneous group nor should civic groups assume that what constitutes meaningfulness motivate or apply to all young people. As young people tend to personalize their understanding of membership and identification in social and political identity processes, it can be difficult to identify what is perceived as meaningful by different individuals; at the same time, alleviating the importance of personal meaningfulness weakens the bases for collective action, which is important to public deliberation and a healthy democracy. Much research is still needed to explore