Segment Introduction

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Taking a side, understood as supporting a distinct position in an argument or defending someone against oppression, inherently carries a slight difference and distance between the initial conflicting parties and those who then – somewhat later – take a stand. Taking a site however, is more immediate, can be spontaneous or planned, and is certainly a practice in the context of resistance, political activism, and protest that has manifested in a multitude of ways. In either case, individuals share a concern, resources, spaces, and practices. This section brings together four contributions that look at these processes in the context of media activism.

Taking a side and taking a site, as they are understood in this edited collection, enter an interesting relationship when we turn our attention towards contemporary media. The discussion can escalate rapidly by including commentary on hardware and software, online and offline media, and digital and (simulated) analogue media as well as the press and so called social media. Depending on how wide we extend the frame, one could consider any activism in today's world as media activism. To establish a sense of coherency in the discourse, the contributors in this section focus on the contexts of journalism, law and public opinion, the dark web, and fandom in exploring taking sides or sites.

When we discuss different areas or genres of activism, the majority of which take place outside of academic or intellectual discourse, material infrastructures arise at every instance. Infrastructures of bodies, spaces, and technology, and infrastructures of a more volatile variety, of micro-practices and skills, comparable across situations, demand to be viewed as modes of immanent critique and in context of the media they employ and are shaped by.

Discussing media activism then also implies a debate of center and margin, power structures and resistance. What is the activism aimed at, against, or for whom are people active, and who is activated or affected by the media activism of others or simply by mediated activism? We must consider how we can think about these topics without using overly simplified linear poles or without understanding power and resistance as a simple binary, and possibly include discussions on a more ambient concept of dissent.

In the media activism workshop held at the "Taking Sid/tes" conference, an instant shift to multiplicity happened when we sat down to discuss the topic and so the event's name instantly changed to media activisms – emphasizing the plurality and heterogeneity. Working on uncovering the connecting thread of the papers and people at the table, the focus was drawn towards instances in which bifurcations happen and new and potentially opposing branches of a former (perceived) unity break off. These spin-offs or splits are especially interesting if an image of unity is upheld and used as a strength and strategy to convey power. These bifurcations also pose questions such as 'where to draw the infamous line' – in language, violent behavior, adherence to the law, common practices – what does such a 'line' mean, and what are the implications of it? When does slacktivism become activism, and when does activism become criminal or labeled terrorism? And in which way does collective dissent require a mode of self-care in order not to self-destruct?

Or, employing the intensely discussed image brought to the discussion by Julia Ihls: When does a ship's crew become pirates, who says so, and why? This thought or image of pirates carried the idea of a crew engaging in mutiny in order to fight their battle against all authorities and nations, the elements, and even each other, for example for resources or power. It also led the discussion to hone in on the fact that if infrastructures and care are directed at the inside of the boat, community, or bubble, they need to be maintained and defended by a spectrum of means, and so the pirates need to occupy or destroy elements outside their shared space in order to take a stand or become self-sustained, to make a statement, to take a side.

The authors in this section sat at said table, and offered their unique perspectives. Discussions with Gabriella Coleman, one of the keynote speakers at the "Taking Sid/tes" conference, revolved around activism, hacktivism, and how online activism is often labeled slacktivism. The simple and pre-structured action of overlaying one's profile picture with the colors of the French flag after Charlie Hébdo were stood in strong contrast to the DdoS attacks on Scientology carried out by Anonymous in 2008 or the ongoing whistleblowing cases in the US. Participants left the discussion table with the open question: How can media activism be pragmatic without being arbitrary? Can we or need we be involved in media activism and how can we study it?

Coleman argued that hackers distinguish themselves through their avid embrace of political intersectionality and exhibit a high degree of tolerance for working across ideological differences. In many projects, pragmatic judgments or other considerations often trump ideological ones – leading to situations where an anti-capitalist anarchist might work in partnership with a liberal social democrat without much friction or sectarian infighting. Writing this introduction some time after the conference, these words can be directly transported to the many political fights and conflicts worldwide that have arisen or been rekindled since. The "ideological elasticity" Coleman diagnosed for hacker groups such as Anonymous is

effective, but it does have its limits and can exclude certain people from becoming active within the larger effort. Nonetheless, these activity or activism based temporary conglomerates of people are highly interesting as they are organized without being an organization, meet on- and offline without being a group, and only rarely engage in activities common to social media networking platforms. In addition, Christoph Brunner identified "community" as the major buzzword within social media discourse, which confronts us with the problem of inclusion and exclusion. The co-presence of bodies, the being-together, has changed with mobile media and the Internet. But, similar to any other human habitat, specific spaces emerge where online community crystalizes and actualizes.

Many authors and articles have emphasized that access to these online spaces is not distributed equally around the globe, even though early utopian ideas sometimes still shine through today's conception of the Internet. Media activism thus can also be very excluding when meaningful voices don't have access to the media channels that could share them.

This may be a matter of geography, as with China's social media politics and economic wealth concerning the distribution of hardware, connectivity, ableism, or even language dominance. It can also be platform immanent when specific channels or hashtag are jammed with expressions of sympathy, prohibiting for example the #blacklivesmatter from informing people about protest, news, and developments because the sheer utterance of support by people using that hashtag clouded its purpose (2020).

But generally speaking, online communities, or rather 'the users that come together on a platform for reasons highly variable', have proven to be extremely successful in the sharing and developing common practices or micro-practices. Teaching, coaching, and sharing are built into these spaces, seemingly even more so than in offline contexts.[1] In fandom research the passing of knowledge and skills has been studied quite extensively, bringing insights about knowledge communities that can be transferred to many other settings and media activist efforts. Research on fan fiction has especially shown how media literacy and programming skills in connection to gendered discrepancies foster learning communities amongst people actively engaging in media production. This links directly to topics Louise Haitz brought to the discussion and to this collection regarding YouTube Investigations such as those carried out in the context of sexual violence cases. The ascribed or acquired credibility of people or accounts on social media platforms, the power and truth they yield, emphasized the double entendre of media activism, meaning both

1 This is by no means meant to disregard communities of learning, or urban gardening, or repair cafés etc. which are all aiming to bring people together and sharing knowledge in order to take a stand against or for their causes. But chat room users, fans, and social media vloggers and micro-bloggers primarily are involved in these processes of information exchange.

the activism of human actors as well as media processes. And it posed the question of morality, of right and wrong and of truth, which are so very close in the realm of activism when it is framed as productive or destructive, peaceful or violent, or simply as good or bad. Yet, when a marginalized (by the media and public statements) space like the TOR Browser, which is distinctly linked to the deep web, starts a fundraising campaign, how do we distinguish the community without knowing the individuals, the morals, and the fringe perspectives?

By closely reading the Leaving Neverland documentary (2019), the 2017 G20 summit in Hamburg, "The Harry Potter Alliance", and the Darknet's Silk Road, Louise Haitz, Christoph Brunner, Julia Ihls, and Anne Ganzert discuss media activisms in four distinct settings. Each enquire whether dissent, resistance, or 'being against' is always both inherently personal and collective by focusing on aspects like affect, connection, greed, lawfulness, and guilt. By describing the fluctuant communities, the emerging subjectification and collectives that come into being, and which change because their individual parts constantly change in relation to each other, this section discusses how activisms are produced, reproduced, mediated and re-mediated. And the contributions show how modes of becoming, of being produced, strategies of being, and strategies of being against constitute the multiplicity that can be discussed as media activism.