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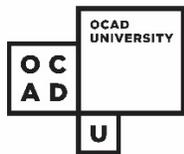
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2015

# Rebels Without Regret: Documentary

## Artivism in the Digital Age

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## Rebels without regret: documentary activism in the digital age

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This article takes up the implications of the blurring of art and politics in two documentary contexts: Ai Weiwei's art activism in China, as documented in Alison Klayman's award-winning film *Never Sorry*, and the Gezi protests in Turkey, documented and disseminated virally through the Internet. Drawing parallels between the self-proclaimed hooliganism of Ai Weiwei and the Turkish protesters, who co-opted the hooligan label that the government used to incriminate them and turned it into a tool for resistance, the article argues that hooliganism is just another incarnation of unruly documentary activism, which has become prevalent in an era of digitally mediated, global social justice movements. As an interpretive framework for understanding how documentary hooliganism operates, the article proposes Tony D. Sampson's theory of virality and its application of Dawkins's neo-Darwinian memetic thought contagion model to the way ideas and political gestures spread in the twenty-first century. Hooliganism, like viruses or memetic thoughts, has a self-spreading tendency; its anarchic affect is contagious and creates volatile yet powerful social encounters. Therefore, the article claims that the foregrounding of hooliganism, which is itself a phenomenon that describes 'affective contagious encounters' among anonymous crowds, in the activist practices of Ai Weiwei and Turkish protesters point to the potential of unruly forms of documentation to influence and inspire self-organized mobilization.

Alison Klayman's *Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* (2012) lies at the intersection of two major developments in contemporary documentary: the digital technologies' enabling of the emergence of new – fluid and performative – forms of filmmaking and the rising interest in art activism or radical art. Promoted as 'the inside story of a dissident for the digital age who inspires global audiences and blurs the boundaries of art and politics', the film follows the renowned Chinese artist Ai Weiwei as he carries out his studio as well as activist work. Yet, beyond the surface of an entertaining biographical account, Klayman's debut project offers insights about the shifting modes of audiovisual documentation (in terms of production, distribution, form and ideology) in the digital age and contagious forms of unruly political dissidence, which find a poignant representation in Ai Weiwei's self-proclaimed hooliganism. As Manohla Dargis (2012) states, the film is an exemplary product of 'the fluidity and convenience of digital moviemaking tools'; in other words, it is as much about Weiwei's irreverent stance against the repressive communist state through art and digital activism as about the mobility and intimacy digital technologies provide to a freshly out-of-school young director in portraying (if not

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mimicking) a high-profile public dissident under constant surveillance and threat. Yet, it is also about the rise of the hooligan as an interesting figure for art activism and documentary filmmaking. In what follows, I'll foray into the manifestations of hooliganism in two documentary contexts – Ai Weiwei's art activism in China and the activist documentation of Gezi protests in Turkey – in order to provide an interpretive framework for understanding the processes of appropriation and transgression that have become prevalent in unruly activist documentary practices around the world (in especially the global social justice movements).

In *Never Sorry*, a then 24-year-old Klayman manages to capture and compile videos of Ai Weiwei in highly confrontational situations, at times challenging and harassing Chinese officials and at others acting, in his own words and those of others, like a hooligan. Beijing artist Chen Danqing's commentary in the film speaks directly to this unruly aspect of Weiwei's activism: 'Weiwei has a hooligan side, so he knows how to deal with other hooligans. The Communist Party are just hooligans, really. So you have to turn yourself into a hooligan as well.' What is meant by hooliganism in this context is Weiwei's anarchic tactics (like filming and publicizing the Beijing authorities' activities without legal permission). However, instead of distancing herself from the Weiwei's radicalism that might put her at risk, Klayman seems to support and further highlight it. *Never Sorry*'s Facebook page occasionally refers to the Chinese artist as 'our favourite hooligan', taking the word from its isolated context in Danqing's interview and making it a symbol of Weiwei's defiant art activism. Here, I am using the phrase 'art activism' to refer to a broad range of practices that blur the boundaries between art and politics, echoing Julie Perini, who uses it to describe the work of hard-to-classify artist-activists like The Yes Men, Dara Greenwald, and Josh MacPhee (Perini 2010). 'Tactical media' is also often suggested as a phrase akin to activism, since it marks 'expressions of dissent that rely on artistic practices' (Renzi 2008, 71), yet its emphasis is usually on the availability of resources and the promise of DIY media, so my choice of wording comes from a desire to draw more attention to the increasing convergence between art and activist media networks in the world of documentary filmmaking.

Reportedly, Alison Klayman accepted the Sundance Film Festival's Special Jury Prize by asking the audience to raise their middle fingers in salute to the Chinese artist and photographed it on stage (Ng 2012), imitating and embracing one of Weiwei's most famous controversial gestures. It can be argued that by associating the image of the political hooligan with 'dissidence for the digital age', Klayman has inadvertently turned herself into a witty apologist, which gives the unremorseful and defiant title of the film, *Never Sorry*, a double meaning. While the title encapsulates the unapologetic stance of contemporary activism towards cultural transgression, it also makes the film function as an apology in the classical sense, making a case or defence for the unconventional tactics of China's public enemy number one Weiwei. This apology (or modern apologia) is significant for documentary studies in that it provides an entry point to understanding the broader context in which particular activist discourses like hooliganism and culture jamming gain prominence, calling for a reconsideration of the ethical boundaries of documentation in the twenty-first century.

### From Tiananmen to Taksim

Interestingly, another reference to documentary hooliganism was made a year after *Never Sorry*'s release, during the Gezi Park uprising in Turkey. In May 2013, the Turkish government brutally dispersed a relatively small peaceful sit-in, which was organized to contest a controversial urban development plan at Istanbul's Taksim Gezi Park. The protests soon evolved into a broader occupy movement, eventually prompting nation-wide resistance against the government. As Aslı Iğsız wrote for *Jadaliyya*, 'In terms of the neoliberal urban development of Istanbul, the encroachment of the Gezi Park development plan on Istanbul's vanishing public space was by no means an isolated move' and discontent about 'the institutionalization of neoliberalism, centralization of powers, allegations of cronyism, authoritarianism, and encroachment on professional independence and labor rights' (2013) had been brewing among the population for quite some time. In such a tension-ridden political climate, the park issue became a tipping point.

What gave the national protest international significance is that it appeared, right at the outset, as a brand new incarnation of the social media-driven mass social justice movements that seem to have become the dominant form of political dissent in the twenty-first century. Under the heavy state censorship of mainstream media, the crowds filling Taksim and other public squares in major cities came up with their own means of documentation and 'mediatized mobilization' (Lievrouw 2009), quickly tapping into the radical tactics garnered from the Occupy and the Arab Spring experiences. Within the course of a few days, 'Occupy Gezi' had generated its own internationally recognizable 'network culture' players including: participatory media, civil journalists, alternative computing specialists, algorithmic curators, hacktivists, culture jammers, provocateurs, solidarity platforms, crowd-funding campaigners, trending topic/meme/hoax starters, flash mobs and digital documentarians. These diverse actors found a uniting ground in increasingly anarchic forms of civil disobedience, which the government quickly labelled as 'çapulculuk': acts of looting or vandalism. Following this epithet, protesters came to be known as *çapulcu*, which was commonly translated by international media outlets at the time as looter or thug, but 'hooligan' might be a more poignant translation when put in context with the actual charges of hooliganism thrown at art activists like Ai Weiwei, the Russian band Pussy Riot, or Femen by repressive governments for similar forms of public protest in recent years. In the case of the Turkish crowds filling the Taksim Square, the accusatory label became a tool for resistance and immediately got co-opted as a positive term, frequently appearing in the titles or credits of documentary videos disseminated virally on the Internet. One of the most iconic and widely shared videos from Gezi – serving as a manifesto in a sense – was titled *Everyday I'm çapulling*, presenting compiled documentary imagery of street graffiti, urban protests and occupation of public space (all considered impermissible by the Turkish government, while being otherwise common forms of urban art and strategies of global social justice activism), as well as the rowdy participation of Besiktas soccer team fan club members – literally the hooligans – who were celebrated as among the leading heroes of the movement.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the seemingly isolated emergences of hooligan activism, born out of a marriage between anarchic/self-organized forms of dissidence and new media-driven audiovisual documentation in these two contexts (Tiananmen and Taksim),

however, mediated forms of unruly activism is not a new or unique phenomenon, especially in the history of documentary media.

In the past two decades, we have observed an increase in the number of documentaries and filmmakers that are unhinged by ethical, legal, narrative or digital codes in their representations of reality. People like Sasha Baron Cohen, Mads Brügger, Ai Weiwei or Banksy, and collectives like The Yes Men have been receiving more attention lately than some of the more canonical, or 'sober' (Nichols 1994, 67), figures in the documentary field.<sup>2</sup> These filmmakers' seemingly unprecedented approaches to the genre are often viewed as unconventional, questionable and at times even unclassifiable within the documentary tradition. Cohen's films, which are often followed by lawsuits from non-consenting subjects, are considered mockumentaries or satirical spoofs; Danish filmmaker Brügger defines his socially exploitative strategies in films like *The Ambassador* (2011) as performative journalism (Reestorff 2013); Ai Weiwei takes pride in hooliganism; the reality behind graffiti artist-turned filmmaker Banksy's *Exit Through the Gift Shop* (2010) seems highly manipulated and masked, not unlike his identity; and last but not the least, the culture jamming duo The Yes Men exploit 'the power of the mimic' or what they call 'identity correction' (Perini 2010, 185) by mastering imposture and political stunts. One can easily add Jafar Panahi (especially with regard to his legal-ban-defying house arrest documentary *This is Not a Film*) and the crowd-funding director of *The Age of Stupid* (2009), Franny Armstrong, to the list of activist documentary rebels. What is common among these figures is that they are all artist, actor or activist-turned documentarians, who are often associated with network culture-related agonistic strategies like satirical, ironic or cynical media activism and culture jamming. Here, tactical media theorist Geert Lovink's formulation of *Networks without a Cause* (2011) is relevant in relation to understanding how unruly dissent or cultural transgression emerges not as an anomaly but as the overarching theme for our times. As Lievrouw argues, Lovink's work suggests that amid the cultural fragmentation and radical subjectivity of network modernity, episodic, nomadic and disruptive forms of resistance are the only tenable ways forward for political activism (17). Therefore, what appears on the surface as individualistic and unique forms of documentation in the works of filmmakers like the Yes Men, Brügger and Banksy are interconnected displays of growing discontent with the injustices in the global socio-economic system and a common diversion from the BBC or Griersonian style attitude of balance in challenging them. Here, the diversion from the attitude of balance has more to do with the 'compassion fatigue' that Lillie Chouliaraki attributes to the new structures of feeling that have become dominant since the 1970s, leading to a move from the ethics of compassion and pity to an ethics of irony (2013, 3), than the inadequacy of the self-abnegating discourses of documentary. In other words, unruly/performative and self-abnegating/balance-oriented attitudes or commentary-voice practices in documentary are historical rather than antithetical.

It is needless to point out that the history of irreverent activist documentary and the coming-to-popularity of rebel filmmakers date further back than these figures. The 'unruly' approach to public discourse, which documentary filmmakers draw inspiration from, has a strong history that predates social media and cinema itself. In the English-speaking world, the most obvious example would be Thoreau's 'Civil Disobedience' essay, which propagates transgressing laws that are unjust and accepting imprisonment ([1849] 2008), and its pragmatic proponents, such as Ghandi

and Martin Luther King. As for examples within the documentary tradition, Michael Moore is one of the first names that come to mind when thinking of earlier documentary agent provocateurs. Writing for the British Film Institute's *Sight and Sound* in 2002, Jon Ronson has referred to Moore as one of 'Les Nouvelles Egotistes', the group of directors that included Ross McElwee, Nick Broomfield, Louis Theroux and himself – the quintessential documentary rebels of the late 80s and 90s. According to Ronson's account, McElwee's *Sherman's March* (1986) marked the birth of the movement, which was characterized by a tone of faux naivety, a distrust in the fly-on-the-wall style direct cinema's pretention that real reality was unfolding before cameras, and adoption of unconventional strategies, often associated with self-reflexivity. Some of these unconventional strategies were also highly unruly and anarchic; they involved provocation, invocation of polemics, shouting at people (like CEOs or gun lobbyists) and 'arching eyebrows' (while what is meant by this phrase is not clearly explained, it might refer to the moments in which the filmmakers criticize, challenge or mock subjects during filming). Interestingly, Ronson's labelling of the filmmakers adopting these tactics as egotists or egotistical implies that they might have viewed such acts of (what in the post-80s are identified as) culture-jamming as essentially self-serving: foregrounding the ego-centricism or the individual vision of each director. However, it is more likely that they saw themselves as disrupting the type of ineffective political correctness often associated with socially conscious filmmaking instead of trying to situate their work outside the stylistic interventions made by other filmmakers before their time. In fact, the novelty of the 'new' egotists came from their indebtedness to an earlier and even more defining wave of radical documentary activism, that of video, which put an equal emphasis on individual and collective forms of mediated resistance against hegemonic forces.

One could argue that the cultural and political climate surrounding the post-80s 'egotistical' documentary wave was highly infused with period-specific activist movements, especially against nuclear weapons proliferation and post-perestroika rise of neoliberalism. Some of the most non-conformist films from the period make references to these issues: the longer title of *Sherman's March* is *A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South during an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation*, and *The Atomic Café* (1982), which is famous for its unconventional use of black humor and satirically repurposed videos, is one of the several highly influential anti-nuclear films that came out around the same time as the nouvelles egotistes' films. That said, the performance and media art-based tactical strategies that filmmakers like Moore, McElwee and Broomfield employ were co-opted from 60s to 70s feminist and community/grass-roots video activism. Through the emergence of street tapes, underground video, self-proclaimed 'guerilla' filmmaking, alternative TV and video essays (Boyle 1990, 51), political activism went through radical transformations in the 1960s, changing the course of documentary altogether. Spectacle-like staging of activist videos, most famously exemplified by Ant Farm's iconic *Media Burn*, had a dramatic impact on the cultural or social concept of reality in this era (that is to say, reality took the form of media events, with no reference point prior to its mediatization), paving the way for performance art, activist and documentary media practices to become irrevocably intertwined. Remembering this lineage is important in pointing out that contemporary documentary activism has not emerged out a vacuum.<sup>3</sup> There is also a kind of violence in the frequent omission of post-80s documentary activism's indebtedness to the rebellious spirit, innovation

and medium-consciousness of video activism in historical analyses (I thank Deirdre Boyle for reminding me of this tendency). That violence stems from the fact that such an omission generally leads to the gendered attribution of the defiant and transgressive aspects of contemporary documentary activism to the presumably more daring male subjectivity of filmmakers like Michael Moore, Sasha Baron Cohen or Ai Weiwei. The out-there personalities of such directors/artists help reinforce this view. Even the term hooliganism, much like egotism, has gendered implications, when taking into account that it often connotes a machismo or male-dominant unruly collectivity; therefore, reinstating the transformative role of feminist and queer art activism in the video movement as an antecedent for contemporary network-era documentary activism might present us with a more balanced reading of history.

### One among the many

Viewed in this light, we can revisit hooliganism as a form of contemporary activist discourse with broader references rather than merely as the embodiment of Ai Weiwei's singular artistic vision. What a film like *Never Sorry* demonstrates is the crowd-oriented nature of contemporary art, activist and documentary practices. The artists and filmmakers are now on the same side of history (instead of being cynical of the social sphere's populism) as the unruly masses, partaking in a disruptive collectivity without giving up their individuality. The footage featuring Ai Weiwei obsessively documenting the repressive practices of the Chinese government makes this point clear. Klayman shows him not only filming things by himself but also crowdsourcing, archiving and curating material submitted by his followers and other civil journalists, or tweeting, solidifying his image as a network era dissident: one among the many. Interviews about Weiwei's studio-based art practice suggest that there is a collaborative or crowd-sourced aspect to his non-activist work too, which adds another dimension to his approach to collectivity. Early in the film Weiwei states:

At this point, my head is empty. I don't know what I'm going to do. I've been asking everyone around me for good ideas. Actually, I have very little involvement in the production of my works. I mainly make the decisions.

This startlingly honest admission is followed by a commentary by one of his studio assistants: 'I'm just his hands. I'm like an assassin. He says to me, "Here's some money. Go and kill this person."' The assistant's metaphoric interpretation of Weiwei's delegation of the actual production to others as an order for murder and his self-identification as 'an assassin' are equally delinquent in language as Ai Weiwei self-proclaimed hooliganism; these labels once again speak to the normalization of anarchic discourses in the global crowd's social imaginary. At this point, Klayman's choice of including the many agencies, screens and cameras behind Ai Weiwei's collaborative art activist work (there are several sequences that feature cameras – security, surveillance and documentary – pointed at each other and a juxtaposition of screens – mirrors, computer screens and view finders – suggesting a hyper-mediated reality) in the film make her own authorial voice slip into anonymity. It becomes difficult to tell whether she is filming scenes herself or merely

curating footage filmed by others at times. While her approach to Ai Weiwei and documentation is observational and fly-in-the-wall on the surface (as opposed to the Chinese artist, who seems to understand documentation as intervention, provocation or forging new connections through asserting both his individuality and the disruptive collectivity of the crowd), it nevertheless creates a space for alternative re-articulations of the social and solidarity formation through holding Weiwei as a mirror to the Chinese anti-censorship movement's viral archive of dissent.

Virality is a common framework that stems from contagion theory and has been commonly used in explaining the self-spreading tendency of messages, acts, attitudes and moods in the age of networks. In his eponymous book, Tony D. Sampson (2012) defines virality as the contagious forces of relational encounter in the social field, which finds an especially hospitable environment in the Internet era. In the spirit of Gabriel Tarde, Sampson argues that what spreads are micro-imitations: the little gestures of repetition, opposition and invention that do not have to reflect conscious political choices. Richard Dawkins's neo-Darwinian memetic thought contagion model is a variation of this: ideas spread like genes, or viruses in the mind, and lead to creativity or new formulations in the hosts' minds. Network virality, Sampson contends, surpasses categories of disease and instead reaches out to explore new assemblages of affective contagious encounter: 'Flows of contaminating influence and persuasive mood settings ... are transmitted through mostly unconscious topologies of social relation.' In *Never Sorry*, Klayman's coverage of Weiwei's Citizens' Investigation Project, which involved his crowd-sourced compilation of the names of the student casualties in the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, similarly highlights the contagious influence of the artist's irreverent stance against the communist state in a network setting. Weiwei's defiance against state censorship is met by imitative behaviour on a large scale; anonymous crowds willingly take on the dangerous task of revealing and disseminating the names of the deceased on the insecure networks. The imitation turns into self-organized mobilization after a while with network activists continuing their activities even after Weiwei's arrest. Klayman's filming subscribes to the networked model of virality too; the foregrounding of hooliganism, which is itself a phenomenon that describes 'affective contagious encounters' among anonymous crowds (hooliganism has a self-spreading tendency; its anarchic affect is contagious and creates volatile yet powerful social encounters), and her portrayal of the clash between the multiple gazes or documentalities present in the process of filming decentralize her own voice and effectively trouble notions of authorship.

### **Digital dissidence, virality and contagious archives**

What easily spreads in the digital era, then, is the affect and disruptive aesthetics of revolt. In the case of the hooligan documentation of Turkish Gezi protests (similarly anti-government and anti-censorship in its orientation), the memetic power of a central figure like Ai Weiwei was distributed among multiple network-based players, such as the hacktivist group RedHack and Besiktas soccer team hooligans. Images of these players were instantly converted into virtual memes or avatars as icons symbolizing the resistance and disseminated widely, indicating that the overarching logic of organization for the protests was one of virality in this case too. One of the most shared videos pertaining to the summer protests was fittingly titled '140 Blows of an Uprising', making a subtle allusion to Truffaut's iconic film on youth rebel

*The 400 Blows* (and its affective register) as well as the role of Twitter in mobilizing the masses shut out from mainstream media. There is much to be said about the use of social media during the protests, especially considering that the Turkish government scandalously blocked access to Twitter and YouTube for an extended period of time following them, but what is of particular interest to film and media scholarship is the unruly documentation of the protests and the aesthetics of revolt that emerged out of its disjunctive yet contagious archives.

Although Gezi movement is often seen as a social media-driven uprising, documentation in the sense of both filming and archiving audiovisual material played a significant role in allowing communication and forming alliances among disparate interest groups with conflicting demands. A significant portion of the documentary videos produced reflected an art activist impulse with contagious as well as contaminating influence, blurring the boundary between art, politics and mediation. The following taxonomy demonstrates the complexity of the aesthetic styles and influences reflected in them. Documentary forms and practices of documentation from Gezi protests included but were not limited to:

- (1) Independent documentary films: This was the most traditional form of documentation during the movement, producing videos that were intended as proper documentary films. Early examples included independent news site Global Uprisings' 33-minute video documentary *Taksim Commune*, Çapulling Sinemacılar's *Gördüm / I Saw* (which had a music video aesthetics to it), Dominic Brown's *The Beginning* and an experimental style film showing Aerial, drone footage of the protests. These films collectively established what we might call an audiovisual *aesthetics of revolt* early on, which has had lasting influence on the country's social imaginary. My use of the phrase 'aesthetics of revolt' is inspired by Sean Cubitt's commentary on contemporary Korean cinema during a scholarly discussion on Cornell University's – empyre – listserv (2013).

In the aforementioned online discussion, Sean Cubitt associated the celebrated arrival of computer generated imagery (CGI) in successful South Korean films like *The Host* (2006) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) with a 'spectacle of revolt'. Both the CGI-dominated films oddly feature documentary-like mass protest scenes at key moments, which seem to have been influenced by the viral documentary imagery that had been etched into the minds of Koreans during the mass student protests that democratized the country. The audiovisual documentary archive of the Turkish protests similarly seems to have seeped into the collective unconscious. The two local electoral campaign videos of the ruling and main opposition parties following the protests bore a documentary aesthetics of revolt. The video of the Islamist Justice and Development Party showed a mass sea of people flocking from the Asian side of the city to the European side on the Bosphorus Bridge, presumably to protect the nation from inside and outside threats. The scene was reminiscent of the famous moment in the summer protests, when protesters living on the Asian side of Istanbul took on the almost Sisyphean task of crossing the Bosphorus bridge on foot to join the protesters on the other side, after the government suspended public transportation to prevent the movement from growing. Here, the influence of the summer protest's aesthetics of revolt on the ruling party was especially peculiar, considering

the excessive police violence that the PM incited to crush collective action. It seemed to be operating at a subconscious level, pointing to the contagious (and in the ruling party's case, contaminating) potential of viral documentary imagery.

There were also other clusters of independent documentary films that evoked metaphors of virality and contagious influence directly in their formal strategies. Crowd-sourced documentary projects like 'Gezi Parkı Documentary' and the amorphous 'Artık Yeter!' (Enough is enough!) made it a common practice during the protests to preserve the anonymity of their videographers by using their blood types instead of names, despite the professional look of their footage and websites. Other than the documentaries made by foreign journalists or filmmakers, most of the documentaries found on the web hid crew names, partly in fear of persecution and partly as a bio-political statement. By hiding their identities, the videographers took on the role of the faceless hacktivists or culture jammers in a certain sense, showing the failures of the system without fear of penalty, while the biological, blood reference evoked ideas related to transmission: of ideas, influence and a collective defiant stance against immanent violence.

- (2) The second form of documentation in Gezi protests was hooligan activist videos. The manifesto-like video mentioned earlier, *Everyday I'm Chapulling* was the most iconic example and employed a compilation aesthetic. Another provocative activist video, *Bunu ben kırdım, çünkü / I Broke this Billboard*, moved from hooliganism to vandalism, with the subjects interviewed making unapologetic statements about the minor damages that the protests have caused in the city (after an MP complained about billboards damaged). The confessional format and the documentation of destruction (blamed on the protests rather than police brutality) worked both as an agonistic strategy and a form of space-making; politicizing the limits of civic expression allowed the subjects to reclaim a sense of ownership on urban space (resonating with Saskia Sassen's discussion of digitization's influence on 'public making against the privatizing and weaponizing of urban space'). Several activist documentary videos adopted an ironic tone instead of a hooligan or anarchic one. Videoccupy's *3 States of Video Activism* identified liquid, gas and solid forms of police aggression as states that the citizen journalists often found themselves in, filming against water cannons, pepper gas and rubber bullets and batons.
- (3) A relevant practice involved documentation of activism. This refers to films or compilation videos that did not necessarily employ art activist strategies in their filming or editing but documented, in somewhat conventional narratives, activist practices. *Çocuklarımızın Gözünden Gezi Parkı / Gezi Park from the Perspective of Kids* was a self-contained documentary video chronicling the artful activities at the Gezi Park Commune's kids workshop.
- (4) One of the more hybrid forms of documentation that emerged out of the Gezi movement was the activist music videos. Numerous bands, amateurs and protesters released songs about the protests. These were widely shared through social media and albums compiled by anonymous people. Curated soundtracks in the form of zip files quickly found new hosts on the network. Most of the songs accompanied compiled imagery from the protests, with some released as official videos by the musicians themselves. Rapper Ozbi's

activist music video *Asi / Rebel* featured a dramatized footage as well as documented imagery. A popular band Duman, associated with the garage rock scene, released the song ‘Eyvallah / So Be It’ as an open-source clip for general use and allowed YouTube users to make their own protest documentary videos with the music in the background.

- (5) Animated documentaries were smaller in number, yet they brought critical acclaim. Ayçe Kartal’s hand-drawn short *Tornistan / Backwards Run* covered the censorship of the protest footage and police brutality by Turkish mainstream media, winning multiple awards at national film festivals. Notably, the film was self-censored (made use of ellipses and animated non-protest-related footage shown on mainstream TV channels) to convey the violence of censorship.
- (6) The Remix Video: Remixing was also one of the most popular forms of activist documentation. A popular Soundcloud clip remixed the PM’s lines with ‘Barbara Streisand’ – a nu-disco song by American-Canadian DJ duo Duck Sauce. This was then featured under several videos on YouTube.
- (7) Last but not the least, algorithmic curating gained prominence as a network-based defiant documentary practice. In a very short amount of time and despite heavy censorship, people on the streets produced a large body of audiovisual and textual materials using social and amateur media. The challenge came with the archiving and presenting these materials for establishing collective memory and dynamic forms of solidarity. Curatorial archives, differently from self-contained imagery and documentation, problematize issues of power, narrative, discourse and collective imagination. The techno-curatorial climate in which contemporary social justice movements rapidly spread allows the masses or anonymous crowds to have access to the channels of curating in a contagious manner too; curating takes on a self-spreading tendency. This poses certain challenges. While curatorial sites challenge the oppressive voice of official history, they establish contestable archives and troubled histories themselves. It can be argued that the numerous curatorial websites dedicated to the Gezi protests disturbed the official archive by highlighting the disjunctiveness of the protests (in terms of the demands of various interest groups) instead of collective harmony. It became common to see a video of Istanbul’s trans pride marchers presented next to Kurdish or Alawi Muslim protesters, for example, pointing to the contagious potential of algorithmic curating to establish archives of conflict. In the absence of a free public sphere and free press protected from repressive state censorship, the meaning of these archives was left unnegotiated and tensions unresolved. In other words, network virality allowed all the problems ingrained in the question of archiving (its struggle to pin down in time the memory of on-going and in situ/context-bound activism) to surface.

The different forms and practices of documentation from Gezi protests listed above charts out some of the ways in which hooligan (unruly, contagious, and self-spreading) documentality manifests itself in the context of a social justice movement that is both similar to and different from what Ai Weiwei and his viewer followers are spearheading in China. In the Chinese and Turkish contexts discussed in this article, hooliganism emerges as a distinct incarnation of unruly documentary activist

practices that can take the form of an individual, performance-based expression (embodied by a singular artist like Ai Weiwei, whose often critiqued celebrity status reinforces its agonistic and memetic impact) or be channeled by a crowd-like collectivity, which favors anonymity and highlights the contagious affective encounter between conflicting interests. In this sense, the endorsement of hooligan activism by Ai Weiwei and Turkish Gezi protesters suggests that documentary artivisms might exist on a spectrum, with the rebellious figure of the agent-provocateur not always representing a singular vision. A memetic and self-spreading understanding of (or a contagion-based interpretive framework for) art activist strategies complicates the traditional division between individualistic and collective/collaborative representational attitudes in documentary.

Art activist documentation in the form of hooliganism or other anarchic culture jamming practices rarely presents a homogenous picture with clearly definable boundaries or prescriptive frameworks. It is for this reason that this article remains mainly exploratory in its mapping of the different manifestations of hooliganism, which mostly involves the appropriation, co-optation and transgression of various documentary styles, formal structures, performance-based strategies and civil disobedience tactics. Artist documentary practices also do not have a simple utopian, liberatory discourse. Their transgression of ethical, legal, narrative or archival boundaries bring about challenges, for both our understanding of the contemporary political scene and the potential/limits of documentary. What remains to be seen (and explored in more comprehensive as well as argumentative studies on the topic) is the potential of the hooligan or art activist documentation once it becomes co-opted by 'the programmed visions' (Chun 2013) or oppressive forces of media and data culture. When it becomes contaminated or manipulated by power or alternatively, when it spreads, penetrates into the social imaginary, and tears the fabric of the political system (if not the traditional fabric of documentary) itself. Yet perhaps, this is also where its promise lies.

### **Disclosure statement**

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### **Notes**

1. It is important to note that soccer fan clubs and their (literally) hooligan activists have played an important role in the democratization protests in more than one country in the last few decades (South Korea is a memorable example). Fandom communities' highly efficient methods of self-organization are becoming increasingly important in the mobilization of global social justice movements, which are guided more by temporary allegiances among amorphous interest groups and swarming individuals than the uniting power of dominant ideological discourses, in the digital age.
2. I mention Ai Weiwei's name alongside documentary filmmakers since he is an enthusiast for audiovisual documentation himself. His YouTube channel 'Aiweiweidocumentary' features more than 90 documentary videos credited to 'Ai Weiwei Studio Documentary'.
3. One could even trace the origins of unruly documentary activism back to the avant-garde (the artistic precursors for The Yes Men and Banksy can be easily found in Fluxus, DADA and UBU Roi in particular) and situationist documentary movements, establishing a longer lineage. However, it is important to do this with caution. Grant H. Kester argues that while an artful radicalism was integral to the avant-garde movements (with the rhetoric of nineteenth century art viewed as founded upon provocation, as a response to modernity),

they understood the notion of the artist-as-provocateur as only suggesting a particular type of subject, who is sceptical of mass culture and collectivity (2011). A similar rhetorical distinction seems to exist in the interpretive frameworks used in analyzing provocative or agonistic films in documentary media scholarship. The existing body of writing especially on pre-90s films often approaches their radical tactics in relation to a formalist self-reflexivity, while dismissing their origins in the inventory of actions generated by various collectivities in a rapidly globalizing world.

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## Selective Filmography

- 3 States of Video Activism* (Videoccupy, 2013)
- Ai Weiwei: Never Sorry* (Alison Klayman, 2012)
- Başlangıç / The Beginning* (Dominic Brown, 2013)
- Exit through the Gift Shop* (Banksy, 2010)
- Media Burn* (Ant Farm, 1975)
- Sherman's March* (Ross McElwee, 1986)
- Snowpiercer* (Joon-ho Bong, 2013)
- Taksim Commune: Gezi Park and the Uprising in Turkey* (Brandon Jourdan and Marianne Maeckelbergh, 2013)
- The Age of Stupid* (Franny Armstrong, 2009)
- The Ambassador* (Mads Brügger, 2011)

*The Atomic Café* (Jayne Loader, Kevin Rafferty, Pierce Rafferty, 1982)

*The Host* (Joon-ho Bong, 2006)

*This Is not a Film* (Jafar Panahi, 2011)

*Tornistan / Backwards Run* (Ayçe Kartal, 2013)