Echoes of Tactical Media

Voice 1
Voice 5 (in German)
Rob Batterbee
Alexandra Barancová
Voice 2
Eric Kluitenberg
David Garcia
Michael Dieter
David Garcia 1993
Geert Lovink 1993
Various Speakers
Keith Bloomfield
Copper 1
Glitch
Goran Milic circa 1993
Voice 6
Voice 4
Voice 3 (in Dutch)
Global Demonstrations
Copper 2

10 July 2024 at 17:00

Center for Digital Inquiry

climate collapse

University of Warwick

radical imaginaries

hybrid media practices

autonomy

subversive practice

next five minutes festival

pandemic reflection

media activism

escalating crises

low theory.

artificial intelligence

GUESTS

Alexandra Barancová

David Garcia

Eric Kluitenberg

00:22 KEITH BLOOMFIELD

You ready?

00:24 MICHAEL DIETER

We're ready. Hello. Welcome to CDI-TV, 'Echoes of Tactical Media.' We're finally live, after some mishaps, a few glitches. This is our first livestream, so bear with us. I'm your host, Michael Dieter.

00:48 GLITCH

Hello, welcome to...

00:54 MICHAEL DIETER

I'm joined with Alex Barancova, with David Garcia, and then virtually in the background with Eric Kluitenberg. If this is your first time tuning into anything that we've done, or is your first time learning about the Centre for Digital Inquiry, we're based in the UK at the University of Warwick, and we're a research centre. We're interested in critical digital research from the humanities, from social sciences and from the arts. And the topic today is tactical media. Should I read the text that I prepared, maybe, for this event?

01:54 DAVID GARCIA

Why not?

01:54 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, let's do this.

DAVID GARCIA

That's a good idea.

MICHAEL DIETER

Cool. So I assume, if you're watching, you have some familiarity with tactical media, but if not, it's a concept that was first articulated in the 1990s. It's a concept that brings together a set of media, art practices and activism that is often hybrid, that contains elements of subversive practice and appropriation. It's a concept that's been influential in many different domains, but has also been declared, at times, sort of finished or historical.

The four of us that are on this stream have been involved with tactical media and interested in tactical media for some time, but at some point, we came together, shortly after the pandemic, to begin to reflect on what the status of this concept is today. And we did so with this sense that we're living in conditions of escalating and overlapping crises of increasing inequalities, the rise of new far-right movements, this dystopian threat of artificial intelligence, forever-wars, and the looming realities of climate collapse. At this moment, knowledge and non-knowledge are up for grabs at intersections of art, media and politics - something that tactical media, at the time, was very influential in framing and contextualising. So in these times, we were interested in where we find the radical new imaginaries and the sense of autonomy that was once associated with this term, and moreover, why is it that this term, despite being declared dead so many times, seems to also persist and return, and is continually still referred to. So that informed the title of this stream, 'the echoes of tactical media.'

So I think that's a kind of just very brief, sketchy intro. The way we're going to approach this stream, which is itself an

experiment, is a conversation. I'll be the host. I've prepared some sort of questions and prompts for all of us, but I think it's fair to say we'll keep things quite fluid and loose and a bit informal. If you have any questions or comments, we're monitoring the chat, so please feel free to add those and we can respond and bring them into the stream. So as a way to introduce this topic in a little bit more detail, I'm going to ask our guests to introduce themselves, but in relation to how they first encountered tactical media. So I think I'll start just by asking you, Alex, how did you first encounter this term tactical media, and what did it mean for you or to you when you first encountered it? And how do you sort of think about it today?

05:56 ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

Okay, hi, yeah so I think my encounter with tactical media was maybe as more of a newcomer, latecomer, kind of down the waves of its existing being coined and so on. I think maybe something five years ago or so, I encountered tactical media, but really through a kind of secondary access point, being the Tactical Media Files. And so I think to begin with those kind of vague concepts in that sense, and so my engagement with it has also been kind of thinking about reverse engineering what it means, what it refers to, and also some of the questions that you already anticipated, like what relevance does it have today?

And so I guess the idea was also to kind of self-introduce through this question, so I'm currently working as a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam, at the Informatics Institute with the Socially Intelligent Artificial Systems research group, and I think what's actually been quite interesting to me is that I've also heard and encountered this concept of tactical media being really echoed, kind of echoing, also the name of

the stream, back through lots of different channels. I think just three months ago or so, I was in a seminar where someone speaking about critical AI also referred to tactical media as a reference point for their kind of framework that they were working on. So I think it's also been very interesting hearing it come in from different directions. So yeah, that's my short intro/answer to your question.

07:40 **MICHAEL DIETER**

Great and the Tactical Media Files I think we can also return to in our conversation and speak about in a little bit more detail. But I invite David to maybe give us some more detail about this concept. Obviously, you've been absolutely central to first identifying this concept...

08:03 **DAVID GARCIA**

Yeah, that's true.

When I first came to live in Amsterdam, basically an awful long time ago in sort of 1981-82, there was an amazing setup, a technical setup, of local television that was quite unusual because it was the only country in Europe that had a totally integrated cable television setup, but there was very little use made of it at the time because it was only being used to get a better signal on your TV and also to import television from abroad. Because at the time, the Dutch had very strict media rules that prevented people operating outside of the various channels that existed, and so the possibility of making local television was completely forbidden, except, that is, for the pirates and some of the best television in the Netherlands, I think, was being generated by pirate TV in the city of

Amsterdam, where there was a big parabolic dish in the centre of Amsterdam that was importing television from the UK, from Belgium, from Germany. And what the pirates would do was that they would wait by that parabolic dish and at every possible opportunity, particularly late at night, once there wasn't much other TV going on, they would transmit their experimental, outrageous and often pornographic material onto the channels that would completely land by surprise on people's TVs at home. And I found that - as an art student who'd come to do postgraduate [studies] in the Netherlands - very exciting, and it made me completely rethink what video art could be at the time, because this was the period in the 80s when you had MTV on the one hand, with raw entertainment, and you had video art on the other, that was a sort of spectacle of piles of hardware and monitors transmitting their TV out, and this kind of experimental form of television that was mobile, that was illegal, that was subversive, seemed to introduce a whole new set of media possibilities to me.

And so I started doing experimental television, and that was for me - although I hadn't articulated it as tactical media at the time - that was my introduction to what later became formally known as tactical media, when we were forced to define and also recognise the fact that these kind of experiments were happening all across the world as the computer electronics revolution had meant that people had access to camcorders and cable and small computers, [and] for the first time were able to start making their own media, and video diaries became popular. So, suddenly I realised that these kinds of DIY, rough-and-ready forms of television that was so lively and so full of potential were happening all over the world. And so we had this idea of, you know, a group of us at the

time, the idea of doing a festival of these kinds of forms of television, and the Paradiso, which is a kind of pop temple, a pop music venue in the centre of Amsterdam, agreed to host this festival of television, and we called it, in reference to the theorist [Michel] de Certeau, tactical television, for all kinds of reasons that maybe we can go into later, but if you want to know my sense of what the origins were, that was the origins of it, rough-and-ready TV happening all over the world and challenging the sort of monolithic edifice of mainstream television.

12:13 MICHAEL DIETER

Great. And a great picture, I think, of the context that it first arose in the Netherlands, in Amsterdam. And I think we have some footage, a short video that we'll show in a little bit that documents some of those festivals, the Next 5 Minutes festivals, but I'll turn to Eric to introduce himself and give his response. I guess you must have attended the Next 5 Minutes festivals; I'm not sure actually what your entry point into that whole scene is, Eric.

12:55 ERIC KLUITENBERG

No, you know, that's very vivid for me, very clear. So I think I was, for a while, already in touch with David and also with Geert Lovink and then we're talking about '94-95 thereabouts. I was teaching up in the north in Groningen at the new media study program that was, very interestingly, mostly tied to the Art Academy, but it was kind of postgraduate education, and located exactly between the university and the art school, which was quite nice, but it was also somewhat isolated, and

at some point in '95 I was still not really aware of the Next 5 Minutes.

We did a quite large event, which I think David you attended, in Tallinn in Estonia, understanding interactivity, about the culture of interactivity, and we brought in there also a lot of political questions about this burgeoning age of networks, and particularly in the country of Estonia at that point, you know, it was out of the Soviet Union, but not yet into the European Union, and it would eventually become the most densely networked country on earth, which it is now, that was quite amazing for this very small place. So we had all these exchanges, people like Richard Barbrook presented for the first time the Californian Ideology paper there, which was a fierce critique of, you know, optimist accounts of network cultures coming out of Silicon Valley and so on. So from that background, I heard about this Next 5 Minutes festival, and I understood, you know, this is way more than just this talk about the digital. This deals with all the media, but it deals most of all with people having an urgency and a real need to be there.

So I went there, and I was just completely blown away - this was Next 5 Minutes 2, in '96 - by the sheer energy of the event. I remember a very chaotic debate at Paradiso where the same Richard Barbrook was declaring his critique of the California Ideology, while net artist JODI were simultaneously in the same space presenting their completely incomprehensible trash web art, and Geert

Lovink was supposed to moderate, and he did not intervene. John Perry Barlow of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and one of these WIRED figures, was hanging there while his ideology was being critiqued. And Caroline Nevejan, who was very instrumental in organising also many important precursor events at Paradiso, was crying out at theatre: "Order, order!" And I was just in the middle of all this chaos and all this energy, and I just loved it. And it was just one thought: I have to be part of this. That was my introduction. And I thought, like, whoa, this is so far beyond the sterile digital, you know. And that was really cool. So it was totally clear after that, there was no question. So I moved to Amsterdam and, yeah, became involved in the Next 5 Minutes, organising it, which was always a very collective effort, that was really great.

16:48 **MICHAEL DIETER**

So thanks for, yeah, even more of a sense of what that period was like. I've always understood it as a real sort of threshold moment, a kind of transition from like one media era into another that we today seem even more deeply enmeshed in. But I guess I want to pick up on the sort of 'part two' of this question about like, what do we think about tactical media today, and what does it mean for all of us today, and even, why are we still speaking about it today? The period that you're describing is interesting because it's one where there's the early web and there's phenomena like net.art. It's, I guess, anachronistically, what we would think of as the Web 1.0 era, but it's also an era of, as you're saying, camcorders, of tactical television, of this kind of cable television and becoming the media in a new way, so quite diverse...

18:16 **ERIC KLUITENBERG**

Yeah, and radio and print zines. Let's not forget that there were all these different media genres, right?

18:23 **MICHAEL DIETER**

Yeah, so quite diverse, not just strictly digital. So keeping that in mind, I guess, like, yeah, why are we still talking about this concept today? Is it still relevant or not? It's a concept that has been declared sort of a victim of its own success, in a way. It signals a sort of participatory culture, the entry of participatory culture. So, yeah, why talk about tactical media in 2024?

19:02 **DAVID GARCIA**

You mean me?

19:03 **MICHAEL DIETER**

Yeah, or Alex?

19:05 **ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ**

Well, yeah, I don't know. Just briefly, I feel it captures a kind of approach that is specific, but broad at the same time. So maybe in that sense, it has some level of continuity. Just the fact that you hear it come back from different contexts, like I mentioned earlier already, like in a critical AI discussion, people referencing tactical media in Amsterdam - I think it maybe begs the question why? So that is an interesting aspect. That's not to

say that hasn't just transformed massively ever since, so...

DAVID GARCIA

Can you just say when it was referenced in relationship to AI? Can you elaborate a bit on that? In what way was it referenced, and how would you see it as a relevant fact within that discourse?

ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

I think very much as inspiration. So thinking from the moment we're in today, thinking about ways in which also as a historical reference people have really tried to use media in different ways to also think about that in the context of the present.

DAVID GARCIA

A kind of DIY approach to these possibilities that are often talked about only in terms of the large corporations that are using it, to think how can we seize back those tools and repurpose them for our own ends?

ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

Yeah, very much.

DAVID GARCIA

Yeah, yeah. I wanted to just, as a way into this question of what it means today, I want to go back to something much earlier, which is as a kind of route into talking about the contemporary, which was another

early experience for me, and something that led directly to the first of these festivals in Amsterdam where these ideas were articulated, and that was the AIDS movement, the ACT UP movement in New York - ACT UP AIDS, and the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power, ACT UP - and that was something that was featured, I believe, quite extensively, in an event you were involved in in Rotterdam recently, where Sarah Schulman, who's a historian of that movement, came to talk, and I was enormously impacted by that movement because, for the first time, I saw media artists fighting for their own lives, because in New York at the time it was a terrible scourge and killing hundreds and thousands or tens of thousands of people across New York, and a large population of them were artists, and they were using particularly video and local cable television as a means of addressing the silence that existed around AIDS at the time and what was so impressive to me was that you had artists who were using postmodern, neo-constructivist movements and practices and methods in the service of a campaign.

Now what I found so exciting was that although political art was a feature of a lot of the discourse at the time, it was very rarely in the service of a particular campaign. That was always thought to be too close to propaganda. But for the first time, you had artists who are often fighting for their own lives, fighting for their own survival, using all the tools and techniques of both media practice and visual art and audio art and all these tools as part of a particular specific campaign. So what you had was not simply art, but the art of campaigning, and that seems to me, at the time, something that we felt we had to somehow capture and see in the wider context from that one specific campaign. And ask ourselves, to what extent was this

notion of art as a campaign, art and media as a campaigning, political tool, something that could be spotted happening around the world. And that was one of the key ideas that drove the Next 5 Minutes festival and informed the definitions, early definitions of tactical media. And it seems to me that that is one element that hasn't gone away, the sense that art can be deployed for specific campaigns at speed, and in ways that are unpredictable and innovative. And so that's, in a way, my way into answering the question of why now and why is it still relevant?

Maybe, Eric, you've got something to add or disagree with in that respect?

24:25 ERIC KLUITENBERG

What was really puzzling about this history, I was based at De Balie, the Centre for Culture and Politics by then, so from late '98 onwards, so in '99 the third Next 5 Minutes happened. It was a brilliant event and very, very energetic still, and that created an enormous diversity of people who all came there for a very clear reason. They all had their own very particular urgency of what they wanted to address, whether they were coming from South Asia or they were coming from, you know, Eastern Europe, or even Russia and other places, or the US or Latin America, etc. So this converging of all these groups was really interesting to see.

It would be totally wrong to say that Amsterdam is somehow the hotbed of tactical media, it was simply that something that was happening all over started to coalesce in that particular place, and I think that something of the ecology that was there, and also just the

means to bring people over and institutions that were willing to host these events, that was super important. But then as we move to the final edition of this festival in 2003, we started to feel already that some of that energy was floating away, that the danger of the festival would be that it would turn into a kind of network meeting. And there were various of those, and we kind of felt like we shouldn't go in this direction.

One of the great things about Next 5 Minutes was also people who organised it, that large group of people, always said, you know, we only organise it if sufficient people feel the urgency for this to be organised. And by 2003 we started to feel, well, maybe, you know, all these things have been established, and there's such a diversity of approaches, and so many people from different places around the planet doing similar, you know, creating similar practices, but each in their own specific context and for their own specific purposes. Maybe it's just run its course, right? We've been a very fortunate to help facilitate this and now it's in the hands of so many, and we should leave it at that. So we decided at some point we are not going to organise it anymore in Amsterdam, but if people in other places want to organise this, then we will support it for and there were some ideas to do it in São Paulo, there were also some ideas to do it in New York.

None of that ever materialised. And we kind of felt like, well, maybe it's a bit over. And then there was an issue - was that *Third Text*? I

don't know exactly anymore - in 2004 that ran under the title of 'Whither Tactical Media?' And it seemed to suggest like, well, okay, it's over, and that's that. So we started to think more and more like tactical media had its moment, and it was incredibly productive and beautiful and interesting, intense and difficult and problematic, and all these things at the same time. But we're kind of past that stage, but it's really essential to have that reference point in the past and to know that this happened and it marked a certain territory and a certain collection of practices. That was very interesting about it. So we kind of saw it like almost as an historical thing. But what we then started to notice is that for years, people kept bugging us all the time, when are you organising a next edition of the festival? And we saw that people completely ignored the whither tactical media argument and just did stuff that was somehow in a similar direction and called it tactical media themselves. And what is really amazing about that is that this is going on until this day. There's continuously all kinds of groups, initiatives, people we've never, ever met, we have absolutely no connection and or a very faint one, and they start to label themselves/activities as tactical media. So this is really puzzling, and I wouldn't have a definite analysis of it. I would just observe it that this is happening. So there seems to be something recognised in that that early work, still today, that seems valuable to current conditions, and rather than completely explaining them - why that would be so - I think it's just interesting to note that.

MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, I just want to pick up on why, at least for me, why I think it still travels as a concept. So for me, I came to it much later as well, not through Tactical Media Files, but through, I think it must have been Geert Lovink's book *Dark Fiber*, which was a collection of his essays from the '90s. And I think I must have found it in there, the co-authored piece with David. And when I first read that book, it struck me as a very weird collection of writing from what I was used to reading as a student. I think an accurate term for it might be what McKenzie Wark calls 'low theory,' in that there's a lot of the writing in that collection and in the tactical media essay 'The ABC of Tactical Media' is sort of impure, in a way. It's sort of close to, if not a sort of empirical set of conditions and a set of practices, that it comes from somewhere quite grounded. And so for me, I think part of the reason why tactical media as a concept still resonates is because within that low theoretical articulation or a set of problems that we still are grappling with today, whether that's around participation, how to link together aesthetics, politics and the technical and technology. So there's also multiple ways of thinking about tactical media. We could think about it historically, and that's part of what I think David and Eric have laid out. We could think of it as a movement with specific artists involved and festivals, but on that conceptual side, where it carries those problems into the present, I think that's how it can still resonate. So that's something I think we should just expand on a little bit more. But before we do that, we're going to play a short video that, David, I believe you made a couple of years ago. That is a compilation of footage from those earlier tactical media festivals in Amsterdam.

DAVID GARCIA

No, exactly. This is a compilation with a lot of artists other than myself contributing to leaders and bumpers

and images. It gives you some sense of that sort of rough and ready aesthetic of tactical media. It also covers a group called Vacuum TV, which is a group from Budapest in Hungary. And these were a group of journalists who were excluded from mainstream media and went into cabaret and improvised with kind of rough-and-ready artifacts to communicate a media message without necessarily traditional platforms of mainstream media. Yeah, so it's, it's about eight minutes long, and you'll see us all when we're sort of young and embarrassing instead of old and embarrassing and so, yeah, just play the movie.

33:43 **MICHAEL DIETER**

Okay, behind us? I'm not sure. Full screen, alright, here we go.

33:50 **GLITCH**

[Video 'Next 5 Minutes: International Festival of Tactical Media' begins]

35:35 **DAVID GARCIA 1993**

This is the basement of Paradiso. These are the offices of Paradiso, and this is the headquarters for the Next 5 Minutes conference and exhibition.

35:47 **VOICE 1**

The next five minutes will be a three day exhibition and conference on what we have called 'tactical television.' By this, we mean television that has no fixed relationship to the institutions and ideals of the

established media. Whether this tactical position is taken voluntarily or not, it produces its own norms and values, it's own stylistic quality. The Next 5 Minutes wants to explore this quality, evaluate it and also celebrate it. Although the concept of the Next 5 Minutes arose from the visual arts, the project has been developed by people with a variety of backgrounds. The Next 5 Minutes is considered an interdisciplinary project, a collaboration of art, social science and media activism.

36:31 **VOICE 2**

The next big thing that we have to do with the whole group is put the whole program together and see which workshops we're going to do by whom, yeah?

36:43 **VOICE 1**

Since tactical television is a broad subject, we divided it into five main topics. On each of these, there will be a series of lectures and workshops, culminating in an open panel discussion. Both groups and individuals have been invited. Most of them will bring work to show and many have unique stories to tell.

37:03 **GORAN MILIC CIRCA 1993**

In our case, the problem was that Yu-Tel was in the building of Television Sarajevo, and that the leaders of Serbs up in the hills, they kept phoning us, saying that we must broadcast their statements, that we must broadcast their propaganda. In case we don't do it, they're gonna shell the television.

37 : 25 VOICE 3 (IN DUTCH)

That thing you're holding in your hands makes it a lot easier to make television; it's a very small device, quite cheap... it seems as if it was invented for tactical television: it's a very tactical device.

37 : 39 COPPER 1

You've got permission to go round filming around here have you?

37 : 43 VOICE 4

You don't need it without a tripod, do you? You're supposed to be the law, not me.

37:57 **COPPER 1**
[Inaudible]

37:57 **COPPER 2**
Turn it off.

37:59 **VOICE 4**
Get off.

38:00 **COPPER 1**
I just want to check the serial number on it.

38:02 **VOICE 4**
You don't even know the serial numbers of the stolen ones!

38:19 **COPPER 1**
Of course we do.

38:21 **VOICE 5 (IN GERMAN)**
In his flat a cameraman panned his amaetur camera to the street to see if the disturbance was having an effect...

38:25 GEERT LOVINK 1993

In eastern Europe one can't really make a distinction between strategic and tactical television; they rather speak of independent TV themselves... this means independent video and TV groups who produce their own programmes... which they try to broadcast on national television... or groups who run an independent TV station in the city... these independent groups are struggling against the old power structures... meaning the old state television, where former Communists are still in charge.

39:24 GLOBAL DEMONSTRATIONS
[Chanting]

39:24 VOICE 6
So, how important are the visual arts to tactical TV?

39:27 DAVID GARCIA 1993

Well, I think they were one of the first groups who seized the portable video equipment when it became available in the '60s. And I think consequently they played a significant role in creating the language of what has subsequently become, for us at least, tactical TV.

40:16 GEERT LOVINK 1993
Next 5 Minutes.

VARIOUS SPEAKERS

[Inaudible] Yeah it's a bit from the Iron Curtain. I don't need iron [inaudible] [laughs] I really think you're teasing me! I don't think think I... No, it's a TV test! Do you like this? Yeah I do, I mean I think it's fun [laughs] maybe it's different. Yes, nice television! Like this, or... I like you're spectacles. Here, try. [inaudible] Will you try? This is a kind of test, we are from an independent TV group in Hungary [inaudible] old spectacles [inaudible] new spectacles. Wow! Even better than it used to be? Wow. [Laughs] Beautiful, beautiful. [inaudible] [laughs] You have a nice picture? Yeah, I do! Oops. [laughs] And, er, I think you can move too. Move? Maybe try move a little. Yoohoo! Ooh! [laughs] Good! It's nice! It's a good screen yeah? Amsterdam is cool like this. [inaudible] Amsterdam. Yeah! Change the channels like this... other channels!

MICHAEL DIETER

Great, welcome back.

From that historical footage, I want to take us more up into the present, but I'll do that with reference to the ABC essay that I mentioned earlier. So when I was looking over that text again for this stream and our conversation, this moment kind of jumped out at me, this definition of tactical media, where David and Geert Lovink at the time wrote that "tactical media are what happens when cheap, do-it-yourself media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and expanded forms of distribution, from public access cable to the internet, are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by or excluded from the wider culture." [1] So I thought it was interesting that from the beginning, there's a sense of the outsider, but there's also this kind of affective dimension, this sense of both exclusion and some kind of aggrievement or antagonism. And I wondered whether at the time when you were writing this, you were also thinking of this scenario in relation to different forms of politics and even reactionary politics, because when I read this definition today, I think it could be a perfect definition of things like the toxic masculinity that you see in phenomena like Gamergate, or the kind of manosphere of Andrew Tate, among so many other online rightwing movements and phenomena that we've seen since the alt-right.

So I wonder, how do you make sense of these kinds of connections? Are these also 'echoes' of tactical media? What does tactical media mean now when it seems as if it refers more and more to the actions of far-right actors and influencers, ideological influencers?

50:55 DAVID GARCIA

Well, thanks for that, because I think it's very relevant. I mean, I'd love to claim that we had anticipated the rise of the new far-right forms of tactical media. Because I think at the time when we wrote that essay, I can't speak for Geert but I can speak for myself, I think we saw it as overwhelmingly a progressive movement, and we, certainly, so far as I could tell, weren't anticipating the uses that it could be put to, although, in principle, there's no reason why we shouldn't have.

I've got a few thoughts about that, which is that, you know, like all forms of media, there is no guarantee that those forms of media won't be used for progressive ends. And indeed, a lot of tactical media has been critiqued by what we're calling in the Anthology of Tactical Media 'tactical media and its discontents,' the people who believe that we shouldn't be believing that being busy with media is what politically active people should be doing. We should be organising; we should be thinking outside of the media and actually trying to produce concrete changes in the world around us, and if possible transforming society as a whole, and that all this media stuff is just a distraction getting in the way. And I think for a lot of people, those arguments, particularly and most articulately put by people like Jodi Dean and others, were very persuasive. And I think a lot of people who had been very involved in these experimental forms of media as a way of doing politics became disenchanted with that approach and looked elsewhere. And I think that gap was filled by the alt-right.

I think once people left that sphere for many different reasons, particularly with Anonymous that was persecuted by the US political establishment and the forces of law enforcement and, in fact, imprisoned

people from that movement. I think a lot of people decided that that space had become toxic and no longer politically progressive or useful, and I think that space opened up room for the alt-right to be able to take advantage of those possibilities and occupy that space.

And so I think this approach or these views, that the rise of the alt right and their ingenious use of 4chan and 8chan to produce new forms of tactical media for reactionary means, is a reason to stay away from it. I think far from it. I think use of those spaces demonstrate that we can't afford to abandon those spaces, because if we do those spaces will quickly be built filled by reactionary far-right forces. So that's my take on that issue. Maybe Alex or Eric have got something to add to that?

54:28 MICHAEL DIETER

Eric, do you have any any follow up thoughts?

54:31 ERIC KLUITENBERG

I can respond but I don't know if Alex wants to respond.

54:34 ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

Go ahead, Eric.

54:39 ERIC KLUITENBERG

Okay, well, you know, I very much agree with this general point that David is making, that these kind of media and communication spaces, they do not have a singular politics

behind them. There is a lot of implicit politics already in the design of the technology, design of the media, the formats and so on, the political economy of networks and all of that, which sort of allows certain things in and excludes a lot of others. But there is no strict mechanism that says that this can only be exploited for progressive emancipatory purposes or for reactionary ones. So I agree with that.

But at the same time, beyond the alt-right, we saw something really interesting happening. We saw it occasionally before, but never that overt. And it happened particularly around the first Trump campaign. So then we're talking 2016 and what we saw emerging there was that things that came out of the underbelly of the internet, so to speak - 4chan, 8chan and indeed Anonymous that was anyway coming from those kind of circles - moving slowly into other, let's say, domains within the internet reaching other constituencies and so on, which was then somehow linked up with an official campaign, mostly, of course, through the work of people like Steve Bannon and so on, and linked up with a super mainstream political campaign for what is purported to be the most powerful political office on the planet. Whether it is that or not, we can debate, but you know that's usually the formula. And that was completely counterintuitive.

Tactical media always said it's not about just the alternative channels. It's about cutting across between countercultures and

mainstream cultures, and connecting to the mainstream channels. David can say all kinds of things about that, how also the BBC with Video Nation Shorts and so on, putting the camera in the hands of ordinary people so that they could film their own lives, but within a broadcast, mainstream media context. But to see that so overtly, that connection between what we now call the alt-right and the presidential campaign of Trump implied something that I think is deeply problematic, and that is an inversion, literally, of this division that always underwrote tactical media: of the tactical and the strategic. And if I may, I would like to say something more about that. Is that okay, Michael?

58:09 MICHAEL DIETER
Yeah, of course.

58:11 ERIC KLUITENBERG
Yeah, so I'll try to keep it brief, but you know, the notion of tactical media never came from the military context, far from it. It was always related to the thinking of Michel de Certeau, and especially his division or opposition between the tactical and the strategic, and the tactical in his understanding was basically all the operations of people who were essentially powerless, but because they managed to somehow escape the power grid that was trying to control their territories that they lived in and their lives, their operations across that territory allowed them to temporarily appropriate that territory and put

it to their own uses, and particularly so by being only slightly visible or even invisible in these operations. [2]

As a result, these operations needed to be not just temporary, but also nomadic, constantly moving from place to place, wherever there's an opportunity, and if something closes down, you move to another terrain. And that is continuous, whereas strategic power in de Certeau's understanding was all about conquering basically a territory or gaining control over it, and holding that control and controlling the territory, fencing it off, etc. And you could map that very nicely onto the media sphere, where you could say, like, okay, technical media is all these nomadic practices that try to appropriate media structures whenever there's an opportunity, and strategic media is the mainstream and mostly state and corporate media that try to basically fortify an existing power structure.

What we saw happening in the Trump campaign was that these tactics were fully appropriated, still bearing exactly the same dynamic and the same kind of appearance, but now in the service of an entirely strategic political agenda. And so there's really an inversion happening there, where you see that suddenly this division that de Certeau proposed doesn't work. And this question is, I think, still somewhat unresolved.

01:00:51 DAVID GARCIA

But that's really interesting, Eric, if I can just interrupt because...

01:00:54 ERIC KLUITENBERG

Yeah, sure.

01:00:56 DAVID GARCIA

...that inversion that you described is also persistently denied, where you have these people who are in power, but are constantly clinging to the identity of being insurgents. Trump still sees himself as an insurgent force operating against the establishment, and this notion that attempts to square the circle to resolve the dichotomy that you've identified by a kind of cunning reinversion whereby it continues to see itself as an insurgent force, even though it's as much part of the establishment as anything else.

01:01:42 ERIC KLUITENBERG

Yeah. So, concretely, the continuous reference of the Trumpists, let's say, to the 'Deep State.' That is a clear example of that, what you're describing, David.

01:01:55 DAVID GARCIA

And do you have the same thing happening in the Netherlands at the moment? Because you've got an insurgent rightwing party that has managed to seize power in some form or another. Is the same narrative of the establishment being put about by them? Is this a consistent narrative across Europe at the moment?

01:02:00 ERIC KLUITENBERG

Yeah, but in a sort of perversely twisted way, because we have the situation that while by far there is no majority for what is called a radical right. We have now a very split-hair discussion in Dutch media about the distinction between 'radical rightwing' and 'extreme rightwing.' So extreme rightwing, that's basically neo-Nazi, fascists and so on. We cannot accept that, but the radical rightwing is very right, but it's also acceptable to the system, more or less, which is a bit weird.

So the radical right, in that division of categories, kind of won the election in the sense that they became the largest party, and normally the largest party delivers the prime minister. However, that was not acceptable to other coalition candidates, and since they didn't have a majority, they needed to form a coalition. So what has been agreed now is that all the party leaders, in the end four parties who are together in this coalition, remain in the parliament itself, and they are not part of the executive government, and basically a technocrat has been appointed as prime minister like a grey mouse that actually, interestingly, is a former head of an intelligence service of the Netherlands, the civil intelligence service of the Netherlands. Basically, the Dutch version of the CIA, to make it more clear, and the effect of this is that the party leader of this so-called radical right movement, can just freely continue to act as a rebel, indeed, say the most atrocious things in parliament, even critique the technocrat prime Minister in full public display

on the cameras, even though he himself appointed or at least found this prime minister ready to perform that role.

So you have a very twisted form of the mechanism that you are describing, David, right now in the Netherlands. Where that is going to lead, we don't know, because we've had so far only one major debate, which became immediately an enormous chaos. And chaos is also a strategy right out of the playbook of Trump-Bannon - creating chaos as a strategy. So where this is leading, nobody really knows.

01:05:27 **DAVID GARCIA**

And just to bring it briefly back to tactical media, one of the leading lights of the radical right was actually part of a tactical media TV programme run by artist Raul Marroquin, and his name was Martin Bosma, and in a way his media training happened in that programme where he was the host for a long time, and a lot of people thought that his pranks and his jokes were pretending to be from the far right. Well, we learnt our lesson. Better late than never.

01:06:02 **ERIC KLUITENBERG**

Yeah, and this person is now chairman of the parliament.

01:06:05 **DAVID GARCIA**

Yeah.

MICHAEL DIETER

I want to open things up to another strategic dimension, and keep with this problem of tactics in relation to strategy, and think about the 'platform condition' and the mainstream platforms that were we all seem to be completely dependent on.

One way of introducing this is that Geert Lovink sent me a comment while we played the Next 5 Minutes video, and said, "Great video. 30-years-old stuff. Feels sad that it is so topical. Why is this not forgotten history?" We also were commenting on how so many of the practices that are in that short video, in a way, have become ubiquitous and become themselves almost normative, or at least hegemonic social practices, or even practices that are involved in ubiquitous forms of social tension, contestation, critique. And we were thinking, in particular, about the camcorders that were being used, and how that has just become completely embedded in everyday life through smartphones and apps and platforms.

I want to read a quote from Felix Stalder from back in 2006 about tactical media, where he said: "the movement as a whole began to dissolve as increasingly people were doing tactical media without thinking about tactical media. In a way, tactical media was so successful in establishing new political practices that it could no longer serve as a distinctive approach that would define a particular community." [3] And I think that there's one response to this which, Alex, you've already sort of sketched out, which is that tactical media is a kind of approach, and Eric sort of alluded to this as well, that's always nomadic. So it can always occupy another avant-garde trajectory or position. But, on the other hand, when we think of these platforms and the ubiquity of how these practices have become formalised into these strategic corporate systems, in a way, we all still have to deal with them at some point or another, even if you're, let's say, tactically subverting or aiming

to appropriate or intervene in an aspect of our political social conditions that are not about platforms. Whatever you do at some point, it seems, will end up on the platform, and will be communicated or engaged with or shared.

So I just wonder, to open things up to the problems of platforms, what does that mean that tactical media as we understand it historically is also something that has led, as Stalder put it, to being dissolved as such? Does this mean that we must think of the tactical in a new way, and that it has to be thought about now in terms of platforms? I want to just throw that open to, I don't know, Alex, whether you have any thoughts about that?

01:09:48   ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

I did see David reaching for the microphone.

01:09:53   DAVID GARCIA

My reflex actually, yeah.

01:09:56   ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

Okay, maybe a few points. From my perspective, as someone for whom tactical media has always been, to some extent, a historicized concept, it really is more a kind of practice that is useful to invoke by analogy, not necessarily by the concern about whether it as such, as at its height of activity in the mid-90s, is still a thing or not. So that concern kind of drops off for me as one to think about this question.

But when you were speaking, one thing I thought to link back to was something that Eric was saying earlier about this idea that the ethos of technical media was not necessarily about simply operating

within alternative spaces and hanging on the fringes, but also about cutting across the mainstream as well.

And so to bring that back to the question of platforms as well, I think a similar approach is also, as you introduce this topic, quite useful in this context, because I think that's exactly what we need, right? We need to find ways to formulate alternative approaches that can nevertheless scale, so not that they become exclusively alternative, very hard to use, very difficult to manage tools, or ways to create communities around specific issues, but also that it's something that you can practically employ, for example, in the context of education, right? So we don't have a university running on Microsoft services. Like, how could we think of alternatives in that sense that actually can work?

DAVID GARCIA

Just getting back briefly to de Certeau, when he was describing tactics and strategies, he went right back to plants and fishes and camouflage and all the techniques and tricks and hoaxes by which the weak turn the tables on the strong. And it feels that that is the persistent theme of the 'tactics versus strategy' idea of something which is not tied to any - like Felix talks about a 'tactical media community.' Well, instead of thinking about a community, perhaps think more as a set of practices that recur and have recurred since the dawn of life on Earth and predators versus prey, actually having to operate together in a world, and that notion of focusing on how the weak turn the tables on the strong, and the kind of guerrilla warfare approaches of people in their struggle to survive and prosper and assert themselves in a difficult world. So

that feels to me that it escapes temporary technological language or vocabularies like 'platforms', and goes into something which is much more fundamental in a way, and that's why I think a lot of these things feel as relevant today as they did yesterday, because those operational factors still apply as rigorously as they did then.

MICHAEL DIETER

I think if we stay with de Certeau, we stay with tactics and we forget about media, because I feel like that's where we're going, we can make that argument. But I'm just wondering as well, how would you describe that aspect of de Certeau? Because it's a primordial sort of creativity. Is that a romanticism? Is that a humanism? Because it's certainly something about power. It's something where de Certeau is speaking to conditions of alienation. Because there's something in that as well that speaks very deeply to me, that I always return to, and I just wonder how do you describe that aspect of his work?

DAVID GARCIA

I think it is a kind of a romanticism, and I think its limits have been ably illuminated by the triumph of the Trumpian approach, which is to actually show how electoral politics, traditional electoral politics, can be appropriated and repurposed. And so there is something which is limited, if you just stick to the tactical rather than think imaginatively about how it can be repurposed and taken away from simply momentary, temporary, nomadic appropriations and reconstituted as through a desire for power and a desire to use those techniques to attain power through the electoral process. And I think that's what has been radically innovative about the alt-right, and it's

something that those of us who are on the left need to learn those lessons of and from. Maybe Eric has got something to add to this story.

ERIC KLUITENBERG

Mm, not so much. You know, as always, things are never entirely clear cut. That's the problem. And maybe that's also why it's so interesting to discuss these issues. And one of the things that strikes me is that when you talk about the alt-right, and in this case the clearest example we have so far around this collusion with the Trump campaign, with that came a whole set of resources and capabilities that most activists do not have access to massive amounts of cash, connections to all kinds of mainstream channels and so on, political in-roads. Once Trump became the candidate for the Republican party, of course that completely changed the game and the rules of the game. And most activist groups and initiatives never have access to those kind of channels, resources, capabilities, and this is complicated, so you would almost have to go back to the origins of socialist and social democrat worker movements and labor unions and so on, and the kind of organising that was taking place there, and how an emancipatory political agenda, which was at the core of this, could be connected to larger scale resources and structures. But how that would work out in the current sort of media ecology as well as the wider political economy that we are immersed in is, yeah, that's a really daunting question.

01:17:48 MICHAEL DIETER

Some questions from the chat or comments. One of them was that we should use less animated spinning black cubes in the background, which I disagree with.

01:17:59 DAVID GARCIA

More spinning black cubes.

01:18:01 MICHAEL DIETER

But a question from Nate Tkacz: "Do you think the framing of politics as antagonism, weak versus strong, has run its course? Is it modern? And do you think more about things like care, reconciliation, friendship, etc.?" This is something that came up this morning a little bit. We were talking about care and the turn, especially in the pandemic moment, but that whole history of feminist thinking around care, and theorisations of care, and whether there is a relationship of some kind to tactical media. Is there a tactics of care? But also, I think other than that, I think Nate's question is really about like where we are politically at the moment, in terms of the different approaches we may adopt, the different kinds of orientations to politics.

I don't know whether you have - do you want me to read the question out again? I've basically spoken over it. Has antagonism run its course? Is it modern? Do we need to think more about care, reconciliation?

01:19:37 DAVID GARCIA

We were in a workshop this morning, and this idea of pirate care came to the fore, didn't it? Of Marcell Mars and...

Eric Kluitenberg [Refers to previous speaker]

Tomislav Medak

David Garcia [Continued]

...yes, they've [been] very involved in a project around the idea of pirate care and the possibility of intervening in institutional care models in ways that are disruptive, but in a productive and less confrontational or contestational way. So I think Nate's question is really interesting. I'm skeptical about whether antagonism is intrinsic to politics by definition, because, in a way, politics is a way of addressing the fact that there will always be conflicts of interest and the idea that they can always be resolved in ways that make everybody happy and are always something that everybody's interest can be taken care of, I think is impossible. So I think politics as a means of articulating conflict and being able to express conflict without necessarily coming to violence is one of the purposes of politics. And imbalances of power, I think, are also something which are inevitable because, simply, the world isn't static enough to be able to accommodate the possibility of the balance of power always being equal. So I think those moments when rebalance will have to happen, and the weak will really have to turn the tables on the strong, is something that I don't believe we can ever do without as long as human beings remain the way they are, without wanting to be too fatalistic.

01:21:59 ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

One thing this question made me think of also to add, maybe as a dimension to what you're saying, David, but I think I've been quite interested in some people thinking about activism, climate activism,

thinking about movements, and thinking about what they need as kind of a concern for caring for one another in terms of also, for example, mental health. So I think this question of antagonism, or the position of antagonism, carries a lot of work, right? It is kind of grounded in criticism, but then that begs the need to go against that, it asks the people taking that position to do a lot of work against that. And I think recently, I've heard quite a few people thinking more from the position of, okay, if we want to get a better climate, get better living conditions and so on, at the moment the people who could do that work are, you know, burnt out or on the edge of burnout, or kind of not necessarily doing so well. So I think that dimension of care can definitely have quite an important role to even be able to do that work as a kind of necessary precondition. I think that goes hand in hand with nurturing a culture of care and kind of, yeah, taking a break sometimes as well.

01:23:23 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah. I also don't know whether, even if we think of tactical media historically, it's ever been so exclusively defined by an antagonistic politics by itself. And I don't think Nate means that with the question, but certainly it's implied that by the quote that I read out about "feeling aggrieved by the dominant culture." But I think you could return to the Tactical Media Archive, and you could probably find many examples of work that have an antagonistic aspect to it, but also other sort of affects and emotions that they also are, you know, inside or they are channeling.

Even as a way to also segue into another topic, when I think of the work of Yes Men, yes there's antagonism to their interventions, but there's also humor, and there's aspects of hope as well in some of their projects that they did around

identity correction. The project I often think about these days is their quite meta one, The New York Times Special Edition (2008), where they printed a newspaper with fictious good news in it and distributed it in New York. It's an absolute example of fake news, and you could read it, on the one hand, as a kind of as a critique of mainstream media emphasising these negative narratives that incite anxiety and panic and that kind of reactionary dimension to news reportage. But then, on the other hand, that project had this really meta dimension of, like, what kind of world do you want to live in, and giving people an imaginary - a hopeful, utopian imaginary - about what might be possible otherwise. But also the reason I think about it often is because of this fake news aspect. So I wanted to introduce this as well, because I think this is another aspect of tactical media that was present in its historical form that is ubiquitous now and is strategic now...

01:25:49   DAVID GARCIA
            The hoax.

01:25:50   MICHAEL DIETER
            ...the hoax and disinformation campaigns as really an aspect of mainstream political culture, and I know that that's something that you've been working on, David. You have, last month, just curated a new exhibition in Amsterdam at Framer Framed that's called...

01:26:16   DAVID GARCIA
            Really?

01:26:16   MICHAEL DIETER
            ...Really? Art and Knowledge in Time of Crisis. So I think one response to this kind of fake news environment has been the

development of things like OSINT - open source intelligence - and new forms of CivicTech, and then also, of course, the work of Forensic Architecture and this idea of a kind of collective, participatory and aesthetic assembling of facts and truth, something that Paolo Cirio called a movement of 'evidentiary realism.' But I think also what interests me in the Really? exhibition is that it seems to present a break with that trend, of the radical politics of truth, at least in terms of facts. And there's also something of a recognition of reappropriating fiction. So I wonder whether you could speak a little bit about that - the thinking behind that exhibition, and whether there's a trajectory you see from that earlier tactical media moment that is still relevant when it comes to disinformation and ignorance, and the politics of knowledge and the aesthetics of knowledge.

01:27:48 DAVID GARCIA

Well, the Really? exhibition had a progenitor, which was called As If, and that was an exhibition that was also done at the gallery Framer Framed in Amsterdam. And the idea behind As If was that there might be a way of thinking that instead of 'what if,' instead of asking the question 'what if,' or demanding change, you might actually act as if change had already taken place. One of the inspirations for that was the project, I think it was in Hamburg, which was called Park Fiction, where a group of residents, working-class residents, in sort of an area on the edge of the docklands, were subject to a power grab from a corporation that was trying to build luxury apartments on the edge of the water because dockland architecture is often used as a way of creating very pleasant living conditions for very wealthy people. And this group of residents, working-class residents, decided to oppose this project by creating something that they said, "you can't build there because it's a park, and you're not

allowed to build over a park." There was no park there, but they decided to imagine and act as though a park already existed, and they held festivals and they also made a connection with Gezi Park in in Turkey, in Istanbul, which had been occupied. And so this whole idea of acting as if change had already taken place proved to be a very effective political strategy.

And that exhibition that we mounted there, one of the best examples was an installation from the artist Ian Allen Paul, where he created, imagined that the Guantánamo Bay place where people were being held in the so-called War on Terror were released, and that space was turned into a museum of art and culture. And it was even occupied on Google Maps. And I believe it still exists, that there's this museum of art and history in Guantánamo Bay, which doesn't actually exist. And he created the orange jumpsuits and posters and acted as if such an environment existed. And this exhibition that we mounted in Amsterdam and went later went to Basel and to Liverpool, was all around this idea of acting as if change had already existed. And so this picture you paint of hope being a tactic and getting away from the antagonistic notion of tactics versus strategy is something, yes, that is part of that development of exhibitions that was there. But maybe Eric, who's been left out of this conversation, needs to come out a bit. It's the penalty of being a virtual presence is sometimes you are forgotten.

01:31:15 ERIC KLUITENBERG

It's fine. I was listening as I love the story about the background from which that particular project was developed. But if I may, I would like to sort of link a little bit back to the care question, because I think it's quite interesting,

and also the question of hope. The only area really where I see hope in terms of politics at the moment is in what is usually referred to as the commons, the movement of the commons, or whatever, the practices of the commons better. Let's not call it a movement. Let's talk about practices. Which is being done by, you know, a multitude of people around the globe in very, very different contexts, agriculture, water, fisheries, even air, cleaning, police services, community services, knowledge production of different kinds, as well as sharing productive infrastructures and all these kinds of things. And within that, and sort of linking to the field of tactical media, there was always a very clear recognition that the digital commons and using the internet infrastructures to distribute expressions, media, documents and so on, information, but also knowledge and ways of working, and communication infrastructures to begin with, that this could be, and in many cases, is very productive.

However, I think that a lot of people have started to realise that this 'lock-in' that we see, particularly through the platformisation of internet culture, on the one hand, and the internalising mechanisms - so what Jodi Dean has been theorising very early on, that it creates insular networks of circulation, that even contestational expressions, expressions of outrage, rage, critique, continue to circulate within the insular networks and structures that are maintained by large capital, where this capital is basically not interested in the content at all, but only

interested in the circulation, and the circulation being increased through controversy only means that the structure, and the power structure behind it, is reinforced, rather than weakened. So the large players, Meta and so on, basically are saying, 'yeah, critique me, come up with your critique', because it means more circulation, which just starts to increasingly strengthen their strategic position, to use those terms again, and Dean has described this whole process as the decline of symbolic efficiency. So whatever kind of statement you make, whether it's contestational or caring or so, it gets absorbed into this power structure when it circulates in the digital networks.

Nobody will deny that these digital networks can have certain emancipatory potentials, but ultimately, through these kinds of mechanisms, they may end up just reinforcing those large-scale power structures. And the inevitable conclusion that quite a few people have taken from this is that if we want to build networks of care - care, first of all for us as human beings, but of course, also care for all these other residents of the planets - and if we want to develop that further, we need to step outside. Also we need to step outside, not to leave the network, but to really create operations outside of this network and create non-digital, non-electronic, therefore very local, and maybe trans-local - so from local to local - networks that produce care. Care for the weak, but also care for all these other living entities.

So typically within new ecological thinking and practice, a lot of that is moving offline, and what I think is this figure of the commons, of the sharing of resources, which is not shared just out in the open, no, there is a community that takes responsibility for the resources that are being shared in a commons. That's a very distinctive characteristic of the commons that that taking of responsibility, the community structure that is behind it, that is one of the few hopeful areas, because it's very productive in many situations, particularly in situations where government and corporate structures are not functioning properly, are not delivering what people need. And then people create this third space, which is just among each other, and a lot of that activity is offline in local communities and so on, and in local initiatives. It reveals, in relation to tactical media, also the limits of the network and the media system, and that is interesting from our perspective, I think.

MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, I was going to say everything you're describing sounds so far away from the tactical. It sounds more like taking up the strategic question, and certainly there's also a postdigital aspect to it.

I want to introduce yet another troubling topic for tactical media, if we think about it in the present, which is in relation to artificial intelligence. Part of that, to link back to what Eric is saying, we could mean thinking about the problems when it comes to the extractivism of artificial intelligence technologies, when it comes to the commons and the digital commons, and there's a whole set of, I think, quite difficult questions there. But also it seems as if AI, at the moment, the

trouble that it seems to be creating is also very tactical, and I noticed last week that Google DeepMind researchers published this paper that's a taxonomy of GenAI misuse tactics, and the whole framing of this article is really about, you know, thinking of the social challenges of AI, not in terms of 'Will AI replace us?' 'Will the singularity come and create all of this havoc?' but more on this tactical use of the existing systems to produce misinformation, to generate scams, to flood platforms with all kinds of toxic and reactionary content.

So I wonder, is there a space for progressive tactics when it comes to AI, when it seems as if the technology is already so dominated by the tactical and so associated with this kind of toxicity? And I want to ask Alex whether you have a response to this, because I know that this is something that you've worked on, at least in terms of thinking through what are some of the challenges that AI introduces for knowledge, subjectivity, intelligence. What are the bigger social, cultural questions?

01:40:26 ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ

Yeah, big question. But I think maybe to start from the kind of the innate tactical nature of, let's say, AI research as a field, I think that that's quite an interesting way to think about it, that then you're caught in this kind of... you'd be caught in this kind of tug of war situation where, I guess, in the process of development of new models, you have very much, from the mainstream AI researcher approach, you're also doing a very tactical kind of practice of trying to beat the benchmark, to get the better model, get it out there, get better accuracy, and so on. So in some sense, it feels like to counter that, you almost need to step away and think not just [how to] counter that with other tactics, but then kind of stay in this stalemate back and forth, but more to take a step back and think about how, amongst all this hum and models

being trained on models, outputs on generated content, this kind of feedback loop, how can you step out of that? So maybe a level-up insurgent tactic, like how can you be heard or discerned among the feedback loop that exists within these systems? I think that that's a space where maybe also some of the things that you're also speaking about in the context of an 'As If ethos', or even the more media-artistic practices. How can we think a bit otherwise about how we might define a system, how we might define intelligence, and really propose alternatives from that level that maybe undercut this race of better models and so on? That's one space where we can move. I'm not sure whether that's the tactical; it becomes, kind of...

01:42:27 **MICHAEL DIETER**

...at times what you were saying sounded like accelerationist, like critical accelerationism, if that could even be a thing, but then as well, you're saying, okay, but it's about sort of precisely undercutting that accelerationist drive for optimisation and leveraging tactics to just game the next model. Yeah, it is a big question.

01:42:52 **ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ**

No, no. I think that that is kind of the default of the field. But then the challenge is how not to get caught up in that, right?

01:43:01 **MICHAEL DIETER**

I don't know whether either Eric or David have any thoughts about this.

01:43:06 DAVID GARCIA

I'm way out of my depth.

01:43:08 MICHAEL DIETER

Yeah, I feel I'm out of my depth too! But we're also getting towards the end of our session. I was alerted to a question in the comments, but I don't have access to the comments here. Maybe one of our helpers can load that up.

01:43:34 ROB BATTERBEE

There's a question about the temporality of tactical media in the algorithmic flow of streaming media. What is the equivalent of interventions and cuts in this slow medium and infrastructure?

01:43:50 MICHAEL DIETER

I don't know whether that all came onto the stream, but the question is, if I could rephrase it, what difference do algorithmic streaming media make to the tactical in terms of temporality. So where and how do you cut across? How do you intervene in this reorganised flow of temporality that's based on algorithms?

01:44:19 DAVID GARCIA

Hm. Well, certainly seeing this streaming initiative where these forms of communication, and these forms

of the appropriation of telematics, of communications technology, to re-imagine what television is, and an era when we no longer know what television is, it's completely reinventing itself as we speak, seems to be... and the fact that they can be extended to a two-hour session where we can be talking to each other without caring or being interested in whether or not we have a huge or a tiny audience... the temporality of media experience and consumption seems to be in continual transformation, and I think we can embrace that. And I think processes like this, or like UKRAiNATV, are embracing and exploring these new forms of temporality, which I think are extraordinary and in some ways kind of hopeful.

01:45:28 MICHAEL DIETER

I think in there, as well, is a question about, I mean, the platforms, a lot of them, are built for 'trending,' the algorithms are designed around trending topics. So I guess that's a starting point. Do you lean into that and aim to go viral? Or is the challenge for tactics to try to build something more long-term within conditions that prioritise, you know, the viral hit and the constant churn of trending topics? So I think there's a tension there, but once you start introducing the media ecology that we deal with now - which is increasingly also quite fractured, I think, with lots of back channels with multiple platforms, all with their own different algorithmic behaviors - I think it becomes quite a serious question if you're invested in a certain form of tactical media that aims to become visible, that aims to have that kind of classic subversive impact.

01:46:52 DAVID GARCIA

Well, that's the question of visibility, isn't it? Because I remember one of the first essays that Eric wrote that really grabbed my attention was 'Media without an

Audience.' [4] The idea of just using media to talk to yourself and maybe a few close friends and not worry about it, not be always searching for maximum impact, but to treat it more like a kind of fine art environment, where maybe you do at some point scale up, but it's not something that you're obsessed with or care about from the outset. And maybe that's one of the most important lessons of tactical media, that scale and large-scale interventions aren't the be all and end all.

01:47:38   MICHAEL DIETER

I'm thinking of a way of sort of rounding things out. And one way to do it would be to do it would be to think about both the commons and this approach to, let's say, fostering longer-term initiatives and maybe even some of the comments that were made around friendship or care, solidarity would be another term. And I wonder whether we can talk, just to finish up, a little bit about the role of archives, which has been central to the work Eric's done on tactical media, and also that Alex you've been involved with, so just to bring things towards a conclusion, can we talk a little bit about the Tactical Media Files? Maybe I'll ask Eric just to give us a quick kind of introduction to the origins of the Tactical Media Files, because I'm not sure I actually know this, like when did you first develop this initiative, and why? And then maybe both you and Alex can speak a little bit about some of the research you've done on living archives and the challenges and opportunities and potentials of archiving this kind of material that's based on hybrid media activist practices. So Eric, the Tactical Media Files?

01:49:11   ERIC KLUITENBERG

The Tactical Media Files, we see it as a documentation resource, and we called it a living archive, though it doesn't satisfy all the

criteria that would be needed to literally call it a living archive.

For us, it was important that this is connected to practices and to meetings like this one, but also physical meetings, of course, and so around these exhibitions that David mentioned, we also organise discussions, conference-like discussions with Alexandra. We did a really nice double event called 'Strategies for Tactical Archives,' discussing literally these kinds of archiving questions and the Tactical Media Files was pretty clear how it came about. There was still a team at De Balie where I was based working on streaming media in the context of that political cultural centre and on development of content management systems and archiving systems and so on. And we kept on getting, as I referenced already earlier, these nagging questions very regularly, when are you going to organise another edition of the Next 5 Minutes, and so on. And we got a bit annoyed by those questions, but we also felt like more and more is disappearing of this material, and it's really not visible anywhere. There's a physical archive at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, but it's not very accessible, because first of all you would physically need to go there. And secondly, it's not catalogued, what is there. Thousands of tapes without any catalogue, so you would have to go by hand through all the tapes later on. And the print work is also not catalogued. So that is an issue.

And so we decided, well, we can use these opportunities that are in De Balie and create a basic web archive. And so we asked David to make a really good selection of video tapes from this unsorted archive at the International Institute of Social History, digitised that, and we collected writings from readers and from all kinds of sources, and put that together, which was quite a nice overview of what we so far understood tactical media to be, and then over the years we kept on updating this material, but very irregularly, because I am convinced that it's a long term operation, exactly because it doesn't have an institution behind it now, and it doesn't have a budget. It's a zero-budget operation, and I think that exactly created its resilience. There's nobody depending for their income on this edifice. It's just there to give you access to materials. And yes, it's very incomplete, and it could be much better, but it is important that it's there. It's been there since November 2008 so by now it's sixteen years old. For an online archive that's very old, and I hear from people every now and then that they are using it, or they are referring it to their students, and so on. And that's enough. That's really enough.

Now in terms of the temporality of that, I think it is very important, because tactical media was always tied to this urgency, and I already expressed my initial enthusiasm, you know, being introduced in '96 to this whole universe of tactical media, so to speak, that this enormous energy and urgency was constantly there. But tied to that was also an incredible focus on the right here, right now. You know,

no sense of extended time. It's all about 'we have to act, there is a problem, we need to come up with, with something, a response, an intervention.' It's all about the event...

01:54:01 MICHAEL DIETER

'The next five minutes'...

01:54:03 ERIC KLUITENBERG

...at some point, we termed it trapped in the eternal now, and there's always now, now, now, the next five minutes. Actually, five minutes is way too long. The next five seconds, no, the next half second, no, even faster.

So that is a problem; you need, if you want to have a critical reflection, a little bit like what we're doing in this discussion here, you need time. You need to stretch time. So the temporality needs to be stretched. But then what we noticed over the last years, and that's a really interesting sort of opposite movement, is that, particularly with all these algorithmic systems, and the way in which, you know, design is really tested on test subjects to measure their effective responses to interfaces, to flows, new posts coming in. How do you create a maximum production of endorphins, and so on, through your flexible and real-time design? It has created this sense that you also need to understand how this micro time that is exploited there, how that actually works. Only if you understand both things, both dimensions of time, can you really develop a critical perspective on where to go

in response to these systems. And this becomes all the more urgent now with the current wave of what is then called generative AI. And so the temporality is, on the one hand, yes, these kind of documentation systems can help to extend our understanding of time and our temporal awareness and consciousness and our sense of what we might call some kind of history here - super contentious concept, of course, history - but on the other hand, we also need to understand the shrinking of the time horizon. It's really complicated. So this question about temporality, I think, is one of the crucial ones that we're up against now.

01:54:42 **MICHAEL DIETER**

Speaking of time, we are almost at the end of our two hours, and it's been an epic session, but I do want to give Alex also your opportunity to speak a little bit about your work on strategies for tactical archives, because I feel like that's another entry point for you to tactical media as just maybe some final thoughts to bring things to an end.

01:56:56 **ALEXANDRA BARANCOVÁ**

Okay, well, final thoughts sounds pretty daunting, but I think, more as a continuation of what Eric was just saying, because that's very much the kind of departure point that we took for this event that we organised in Rotterdam, 'Strategies for Tactical Archives,' in which we looked at possibilities, the potential of using documentation in a broader sense, which can be archived, doesn't have to be, but what role documentation can play to exactly, like Eric was saying, expand this temporality and the different timelines that we're

working on as well, which I think resonates very well with the previous question that you posed, how do we exist in this context of, or what does it mean to be in a context of kind of algorithmic temporality? I guess time in an algorithmic system spans the system's existence or lifetime. So how do we find other ways to also understand what is going on? How can we aggregate and share knowledge with community organisers, for example? This is one of the things during this event that we're now talking about that we spoke about, how can we make it so that event-based or practice-driven organisations don't necessarily have to start all over again every time, but are there means for exchange of experience, for connecting, that can help make these processes a little bit more efficient, or just a bit more easy, a bit more easygoing. So that's a bit the context. I don't know if there was something specific that you were also...

FOOTNOTES

1. David Garcia and Geert Lovink, 'The ABC of Tactical Media,' *Nettime* (1997), https://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9705/msg00096.html ↑

2. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. ↑

3. Felix Stalder, '30 Years of Tactical Media', in Public Netbase: Non Stop Future New Practices in Art and

    Media, Novi-Sad and Vienna: New Media Center_kuda.org and World-Information Institute / t0, 2009. Available at: http://future-nonstop.org/c/e16b26b29c7f48f115390ac507917892; and: www.tacticalmediafiles.net/article.jsp?objectnumber=42801 ↑

4. Eric Kluitenberg, 'Media Without An Audience' (2000), http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors0/kluitenbergtext.html ↑