Activist Reflexivity and Mediated Violence:
Putting the Policing of Nuit Debout in Context

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To better understand the historical trajectory of the policing of Nuit Debout, in this article we argue that the reflexive relationship between police and protest tactics is heavily mediated by the presence of the press and by the emergence of digital technologies. Our analysis focuses on three sets of reflexive activist practice: (a) challenging media representations—the adaptations and innovations that respond to dominant media framing of police–protester relations; (b) "sousveillance" and police monitoring—the recording and monitoring of police violence and the public education around the police's use of force; (c) civic forensics and data aggregation—the gathering, analyzing, and collectivizing of citizen-generated data. Although not intended as a taxonomy, these groups of practices are offered as conceptual lenses for critically examining how activists' tactical repertoires for protesting police adapt and evolve, building on each other to challenge the representational, legal, and material dimensions of state power as it manifests in police–protester relations.

Keywords: policing, social movements, riot control, protest, Nuit Debout

The riot police—CRS—cut off the march in two, supposedly because there were some dangerous elements in the front—I don't know if it's true. They blocked us around 45 minutes. When they finally let us pass, some of the protesters got angry and started throwing things on the police. So they threw tear gas grenades on everyone, including families and children. (Sheil, 2016, para. 16)

Because of tactics of divide and conquer, kettling, and the close-range use of tear gas and pepper spray, protesters involved in the youth-led Nuit Debout movement became highly aware of the ways in which they were being policed. As the protest was deeply entangled with media technologies, debating, recording, and monitoring police violence were aspects of protesters' experiences. In this article we situate the policing of Nuit Debout in the broader context of the reflexive relationship between police and

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protesters, as it is heavily mediated by the presence of the press and changes in digital technologies over time. Our interest is in understanding activist responses to and innovations in dealing with police violence at protests. We argue that these responses work together to form a repertoire of contention for dealing with police that challenges dominant media frames, monitors police behavior, and seeks to make concrete interventions into police use of force.

Repertoires are tied to their social, political, economic, and media contexts and histories. Moreover, acts of contention, and their political and policing responses, are not static. They are dynamic and evolve as the situation unfolds. As such, we bring in the concept of activist reflexivity to assist us in exploring the dynamic relationship between police and protesters at place-based sites of ongoing protest. We argue that by drawing attention to activist reflexivity—the ability for activists to adapt and innovate tactics—we can make static concepts of repertoires more fluid and dynamic.

To organize a discussion of activists' reflexive practices around the mediation and material effects of police violence, we group these practices into three interrelated themes:

a. Challenging media representations: adaptations and innovations that respond to dominant media framing of police–protester relations

b. Sousveillance and police monitoring: the recording and monitoring of police violence and the public education around police use of force

c. Civic forensics and data aggregation: the gathering, analyzing, and collectivizing of citizen-generated data to put formal pressure on authorities

Challenging Media Representations

First, police–protester relations are mediated by the presence (or absence) of the mainstream press, the relationships of the mainstream media with police spokespeople, and the frames journalists employ to represent interactions between protesters and the police. Here we discuss how this framing operates and how protesters reflexively engage with and respond to perceived misrepresentations in media reportage. Protest paradigm researchers McLeod and Detenber (1999) note:

Examinations of news content show that news stories about protests tend to focus on the protestors' appearances rather than their issues, emphasize their violent actions rather than their social criticism, pit them against the police rather than their chosen targets, and downplay their effectiveness. (p. 3)

Protest paradigm scholars further emphasize the social control function of reporting of protest which, as a result enforces the role and legitimacy of authority (McLeod, 1995). Thus, media stories about social movements emphasize, though to different degrees and in different contexts, the deviance of protesters. This is often achieved through the framing of encounters, or the potential for them, between police and protesters. In a time of urban media saturation, the square presents a stage, offering

journalists a go-to site for capturing the protest event (Feigenbaum & McCurdy, 2015). As a consequence, police must manage the square-as-stage to control both the protesting public and the media images it offers. This is reflected in photojournalists' published documentations of these square protests, which manifest the binaries of good activist–bad activist in the media's textual rhetorical framing. They show, on the one hand, images of peaceful assemblies, fingers wiggling in the air, and on the other, glimpses of fires, graffiti, and riot cops in action against agitated protesters. In both of these interdependent visual and textual narratives of good protester and bad protester, the aesthetics rather than the motivations of the protester's resistant body are on offer.

"Sousveillance" and Police Monitoring

Second, we turn to the activist practice of "sousveillance," or police monitoring. We situate this in relation to the increased use of digital technologies by protesters as a means to watch back. We argue that this has transformed both protester and police tactics. With the continued rise of social media and digital technology, activist practices of documenting the police have taken on new levels of sophistication. Today's practices, such as using secure and anonymous smartphone apps and live-streaming technology, follow on from earlier technological and tactical engagements. Today we see media outlets such as AJ+ and Vice (and, at times, mainstream news stations) recirculate footage of police use of force against protesters. Shared over Facebook and Twitter, these bite-sized broadcast videos can circulate around the world within hours of an incident (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Gerbaudo, 2012).

Civic Forensics and Data Aggregation

Finally, we look at how these often disparate activist recording strategies have been gathered and collectivized by activist-led initiatives to hold police accountable. As corporate social media platforms record and circulate images of police violence, they also archive footage. In our age of big and open data, this footage can be transformed from visual narrative into numbers used in aggregation projects that seek to put formal pressures on authorities to address these acts of misconduct and assault (Gray, Lämmerhirt, & Bounegru, 2016). This process reflects other recent efforts to aggregate citizen and activist media to put pressure on governments and intervene in business as usual (Gray et al., 2016). In the case of Nuit Debout, this meant making formal human rights complaints, using media footage of police brutality that could stand up to the Inspection Générale de la Police Nationale, whose police are, as one protester put it, "à la fois juge et partie [both judge and jury]" (Collectif Stop Violences Policières, 2016, p. 2).

Although not intended as a taxonomy, these groups of practices are offered as conceptual lenses for critically examining how activists' tactical repertoires to protest policing adapt and evolve, with strategies building on each other to challenge the representational, legal, and material dimensions of state power as it manifests in police–protester relations. Although our focus for this Special Issue is on French policing and Nuit Debout, the conceptual framework here arises from our broader research on protest camps conducted over the past 10 years. As such, this conceptual model can be operationalized and applied to examine protester–police interactions across a range of international and social movement contexts.

Before applying this conceptual framework to the case of Nuit Debout, we provide some background to show how the changing relationship between police and protests at physical sites of contention can be understood in relation to the media-rich environment of protests. The following section of this article offers an introduction to the two key conceptual terms from social movement studies that inform our analyses of activists' reflexive practices with policing: "repertoires of contention" (Tilly, 1978) and "activist reflexivity" (McCurdy, 2011).

Repertoires and Reflexivity in Activist–Police Relations

As riot control technologies and techniques develop, activist responses to police violence and their tactics for street-based protest change and adapt. Just as protest repertoires adapt and change, so too do police repertoires (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2012). Police tactics evolve both nationally through the regional sharing of information garnered from policing experiences and transnationally through the circulation of manuals, handbooks, and expert sessions held at conferences, expos, and workshops (Della Porta & Tarrow, 2012). Activist-artist John Jordan (1998) described the relationship between police and protesters as a game of cat and mouse, invoking cartoons of Tom and Jerry that depict, on the one hand, the mouse's ever changing, and often infuriating, escape tactics, and on the other hand, the cat's physical power over the mouse, a battle of David and Goliath.

Exploring this cat-and-mouse relationship further requires unpacking two related concepts: repertoires of contention and activist reflexivity. Together these concepts can help to explain how activists draw upon different resources and tactics available to them to adapt and respond to police powers and police violence at sites of contention. We argue that these responses, drawn from social movement repertoires, display a high degree of reflexivity. We argue that activists are often engaging in strategies that simultaneously seek to counter both media representation of policing and the material effects of policing itself. We begin with a brief discussion of repertoires of contention, followed by an introduction to the idea of activist reflexivity to think about activist–police relations within contemporary protest environments. As discussed in the introduction, we view these protest environments as mediated by participants, journalists, bystanders, and police, along with media technologies, including mobile phones, GoPros, body cameras, drones, and CCTV. These are simultaneously entangled with police assemblages of body armor, batons, tear gas, rubber bullets, and blockades; with activists' adaptations to them—the saline, masks, lemons, vinegar, goggles, and hoods—and with their social, political and economic contexts (Feigenbaum, 2014).

From Repertoires to Reflexivity

First theorized by Tilly (1978), a repertoire of contention is the collection of strategies and tactics a given contextually rooted social movement both knows how to do; is able to do, given the context and available resources; and chooses to deploy. Tilly's work has subsequently inspired a field of repertoire-focused research examining both geographically and culturally bound movements (e.g., Crossley 2002; Spiegel, 2016; Tilly, 2004) and mapping the rise and repertoires of digitally enabled and online protest (Costanza-Chock, 2003; Rolfe, 2005; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2009). Roseneil (1995) notes that the concept of repertoires is helpful when studying social movements, as it afford scholars a means to "[understand] how particular forms of action were chosen" (p. 99). Important in this work for our conceptualization of

activist–police relations is recognizing the role of innovation and adaptation for repertoires. Repertoires, as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) rightly acknowledge, are not static, but instead involve "inherited repertoires," "ritual forms of collective action," and "innovative contention" (p. 48), which may build on or divert from past actions.

For its application to be empirically useful, this idea of innovation within repertoires of contention must be further unpacked. We do so using the concept of activist reflexivity to acknowledge that social actors undertake activism with a set of skills and experiences which may be drawn upon, adapt and expand over time. Wall (2000) briefly acknowledges the idea of "activist reflexivity" (p. 79), attributing his phrasing to Roseneil, and although Roseneil (1995) does not use term *activist reflexivity* directly, she emphasizes the need for repertoires of contention to be viewed as "flexible and open to innovation" (p. 99). By deliberately using the concept of reflexivity, as Wall does, our intention is to explicitly acknowledge the reflexivity of social actors to continuously monitor and change their actions consciously and unconsciously based on both existing and incoming information (Giddens, 1984).

Within media and communications, Cottle (2008) has challenged scholars to question how "media awareness and reflexivity [are] built into the tactics deployed by demonstrators and their subsequent interactions with the news media" (p. 864). Meanwhile, McCurdy (2011) showed how activists protesting the 2005 G8 Summit took a "critically-reflexive approach" to media relations underwritten by perceived understandings (lay theories) of how media work. These lay theories were then shown to reflexively inform and translate into activists' media-oriented practices.

It is, of course, not surprising that activist knowledge informs activist practice. Giddens (1984) has argued that "the theorizing of human beings about their action means that just as social theory was not an invention of professional social theorists, so the *ideas produced by those theorists inevitably tend to be fed back into social life itself*" (p. 27, emphasis added). Therefore, acknowledging activist reflexivity and what Giddens refers to as the "reflexive monitoring of activity" (p. 5) is simply to state that activist are very often aware of the institutions and structures that shape and affect their capacities to protest.

Before exploring Nuit Debout and the labor protests in France, we offer a brief overview of how mediated violence is shaped by the context of French policing and the broader—often hidden—context of the global riot control industry, in which France plays a dominant role. To situate the policing of Nuit Debout in these broader contexts, we offer examples from key moments in France's history of protest policing to look at how the rise and spread of riot control tactics, surveillance practices, and less lethal technologies (tear gas, rubber bullets, etc.) have influenced both police and activist practice, charting these developments alongside changes in activist use of digital technologies for sousveillance (Brown, 2016; Brucato, 2015). Here we focus in particular on France's "atmospheric policing" that uses less lethal weapons to control the atmosphere of the space of protest (Feigenbaum & Kanngieser, 2015).

Protest Policing in France

France has long been known for its role in the containment and repression of protest. The French police force first took shape under the model of the king's police, which Della Porta, Fillieule, and Reiter

(1998) described as "a state police under strict control of central government, with a very wide range of tasks," and the styles that dominated French policing were "more brutal, more repressive, more confrontational and more rigid than those in England" (p. 112). Intimidation and efforts to prevent public gatherings dominated French policing in the early 20th century. A law on demonstrations from 1935 dictated that protesters must declare their intention to gather or march three days in advance. Della Porta et al. argue that this law allowed police time to exert intimidation tactics, putting limits on protest, banning gatherings, and increasing the risk of violence to protest participants.

France is also thought to be the first country to develop tear gas for policing, back in the early 1900s. A newspaper clipping from 1912 discusses the possible use of gas against a gang of burglars, though historians are undecided whether this marks tear gas's first use (Coffey, 2008). We do know that France was the first country to use tear gas in the First World War, to lure German soldiers from the trenches. Soon after the war France adopted tear gas as a policing technology both at home and in its colonies (Feigenbaum, 2017).

After the Second World War France formed the Compagnies Républicaines de Sécurité/Republican Security Companies (CRS) trained in riot control. Since the mid-1960s, riot control policing in France has taken on a more modern and professional form as the National Police reorganized to better police urban areas (Deane-Drummond, 1975; Dupont, 2007). Like the United States and other European countries that faced mass civil unrest in the late 1960s, French protests culminating in May of 1968 were aggressively policed and saw heightened tensions and mistrust between police, youth, and the public (Mathieu, 2008; Quattrocchi & Nairn, 1998).

Although often criticized by its own public, the CRS serves as a model of excellence on the international stage, often training nations abroad ("France to invest $47 million," 2016). In addition, France continues to play a leading role in the transnational trade of police weaponry and equipment. Every other year Paris plays home to the world's largest internal security expo, Milipol, which showcases both domestic and international riot control manufacturers (Milipol, 2015). Started as a hunting business 200 years ago, France's Verney-Carron has been manufacturing riot control equipment for the last 25 years. Among their stock of 44 mm projectiles and grenades that "allows the forces of law order [*sic*] to destabilize troublemakers" (Verney-Carron Security, 2016, p. 1), the company produces the controversial Flash-Ball line of products. These 44 mm impact munitions are rubber balls shot at high velocity, designed to incapacitate. They are used by the CRS and are part of the standard equipment requisition for the broader National Police.

Also making bespoke police equipment, French company SAE Alsetex is known for its Cougar MS multishot grenade launcher that is capable of firing multiple rounds (up to 20) in short bursts (Alstex, n.d., p. 1). These launchers are designed to work with 40 mm rounds of smoke, tear gas, and flash-bang grenades (the last of which make an extremely loud sound and bright flash of light for disorientation and discomfort). Alsetex's single-shot launchers for 56 mm grenades are distributed to both the French National Police and Gendarmerie.

Despite manufacturers' efforts to distance themselves from bad publicity associated with maiming young protesters, France's particular brand of riot control continues to make headlines. Numerous young people have lost eyes, suffered concussions, and been seriously injured (ACAT, 2016). One 2009 medical study on Flash-Balls found that

> Even if the penetrating power of the less-lethal weapons seems to be limited, the impact may produce distant and severe injury. Skin penetration may be observed due to the high-energy impact delivered by a short-range shot with resultant severe or lethal injuries. (Pinaud, Leconte, Berthier, Potel, & Dupas, 2009, p. 174; see also Wahl, Schreyer, & Yersin, 2006)

Such medical studies currently have little impact on the riot control industry or France's protocols for protest policing. As such, citizen and NGO efforts to document police abuses, monitor police weapons, and inform the public about the dangers of riot control continue. Perhaps the most notable case occurred in 2014 when 21-year-old ZAD protester Rémi Fraisse was killed by an SAE Alsetex stun grenade explosion after police fired these munitions on unarmed civilians during protests against the airport expansion. Protests swept France following Rémi's death, drawing international attention to France's violent riot control practices.

In late November 2015, thousands of climate change activists gathered in France's capital for protests during the World Climate Change Conference (COP21). Both COP21 and the protests surrounding it were held under a nationwide state of emergency because of the Paris attacks earlier that month that killed 130 victims and injured hundreds more. Using emergency powers granted after the mass shootings, French police and security authorities placed a ban on street protests, enacted curfews, and put at least 24 known activists under house arrest (Wood, 2017). The state of emergency, which was set to expire in February 2016, was subsequently extended by a parliamentary vote to last until May 26, 2016 ("French parliament extends," 2016).[1] Thus, in the spring of 2016 Nuit Debout and the broader labor law protests unfolded within this broader context of France's violent riot control practices and diligent police monitoring. Still using the terror attacks as a justification for escalated force and control of civilians, emergency powers and curfews remained. With these emergency powers, French authorities forbade several activists from participating in the labor law protests (Wood, 2017). Official requests for protests were subject to tight management, protesters were placed under heavy surveillance, and the state technically had the power to dissolve protests in the interest of public order (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

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[1] France's state of emergency was subsequently extended by a series of parliamentary votes in May 2016, July 2016, and December 2016. On July 6, 2017 French parliament voted to extend the state of emergency until until November 1, 2017 ("Seven terror plots foiled so far in 2017 as France renews state of emergency," 2017). See http://www.france24.com/en/20170706-seven-terror-plots-foiled-2017-france-state-emergency-macron

Mediated Violence and Nuit Debout

Originally conceived as a response to proposed reforms to France's labor laws, Nuit Debout came to fruition after weeks of planning with its nighttime occupation of Place de la République on March 31, 2016 (Plyers, 2016). In the wake of social movements such as the Indignados and Occupy, French activists assembled at Place de la République as both a protest and a public occupation. Yet unlike the Indignados and Occupy, Nuit Debout was a nightly protest as opposed to an uninterrupted physical occupation of space. Moreover, Nuit Debout organizers had filed a "déclaration de manifestation" allowing them to protest for three days beginning March 31 (Astier & Binctin, 2016). The nightly Nuit Debout occupations continued beyond the scheduled end date of April 3, 2016, as did the activist structures constructed from a pastiche of wood pallets, cardboard, and plastic. However at 5:30 a.m. on April 11, one week after the scheduled end of Nuit Debout, police entered Place de la République and removed activists and dismantled structures, telling journalists that they were doing so because the protest permit had expired ("Nuit debout: Évacuation," 2016). Responding to the police raid, activists obtained a subsequent protest permit that same day, and Nuit Debout continued, meeting as normal the evening of April 11 and onward.

Paralleling popular strategies employed to police site- and square-based, ongoing protests (Feigenbaum, Frenzel, & McCurdy, 2013; Gillham, Edwards, & Noakes, 2013), Nuit Debout's geographic center at Place de la République was met variably with tolerance (negotiated management) as in the example above and with aggression (escalated force) as discussed below. Describing the actions of police on April 28, the day of a major labor law protest, a communiqué from *Des étudiant.es des Beaux-Arts* (2016) commented:

> Nous avons été gazés, trainés à terre, humiliés, pour la seule raison d'être restés sur la place après minuit. La plupart d'entre nous ont été blessés par les CRS et leurs matraques, gaz lacrymogènes, grenades de désencerclement et autre flashball. [We were gassed, dragged down, humiliated, for the sole reason of staying (in the square) after midnight. Most of us were injured by CRS (riot police) with truncheons, tear gas, flash-bang grenades and Flash-Balls.] (para. 3)

Most of Nuit Debout's escalated-force policing occurred late at night and around the periphery, with violence enacted on the fringe both physically and rhetorically. Police PR and media coverage used familiar framing, pitting the good nonviolent protesters of the movement's center against the anarchist fringes set on destruction (Birnbaum, 2016; Collectif Stop Violences Policières, 2016). Likewise, direct actions involving property damage to buildings and police vehicles occurred outside of the central space of the square in Paris, pushing physical skirmishes to the area's edges while those in the central meeting space of square were often kept in place through strategies of containment and intimidation (e.g., police lines encircling the periphery of a space, the use of street cordons to block exits, the presence of heavily equipped riot control police to create deterrence).

The pitting of good protesters against bad protesters provides a justificatory framework for police to use escalation of force whenever the terms of their negotiated management are challenged. For

example, on April 18, 2016, Paris police chief Michel Cadot was quoted at length in an article for the English-language French newspaper *The Local* headlined "Violence Undermines France's 'Nuit Debout' Movement" (McPartland, 2016). Cadot was reported as saying that the violence "just cannot be accepted." He blamed "the organizers . . . for a lack of control which is allowing these incidents to happen," stating that after midnight, "small, violent groups . . . try either to march, or to attack the security forces and damage shop windows or businesses, especially banks, nearby" (McPartland, 2016, para. 8). Using the article to publicly amply and broadcast his message, Cadot continues, "I want to remind the organizers of these gatherings of their responsibilities and ask them to stick to their commitment to stop at 1:00 am and to ensure that the participants disperse at that time" (McPartland, 2016, para. 9). This choreography of "strategic incapacitation" (Gillham et al., 2013) in protest policing has been performed in square-based uprisings from New York to Greece.

Challenging Media Representations at Nuit Debout

This good protester–bad protester binary framing was not lost on protesters in France. Following a decision by one of France's leading labor unions, CNE, to support multiple tactics to stand up to the media's profiling, Nuit Debout protesters held a day of discussions on police violence in Place de la République. Maintaining their nonviolent stance, participants refused to play into the police and mainstream media's representational frame, adopting the same position as CNE (Birnbaum, 2016). The discussions also marked a formal recognition and emphasis on links between the policing of Nuit Debout and labor law protesters and the policing of migrant and racialized communities in France (Birnbaum, 2016).

Social movements like Nuit Debout always comprise competing and contradictory ideologies, but this refusal to play into the good–bad protester frame without explicitly condemning or condoning fringe violence shifts the gaze back onto police violence and reveals a reflexive awareness of how the mainstream press and police often work together. In recent years, police have expanded their public relations efforts, aiming to control policing images through the development of routines for media communication and special press teams and by managing information flows (Lee and McGovern, 2013). Image and perception, Lee and McGovern (2013) argue, have become as important to police work as more traditional metrics such as arrest rates. In media-saturated environments (Brown, 2016) and during protest events, this image management becomes even more crucial to police work.

Protesters in France have a long history of speaking back to the media through the creation of their own activist media forms. The widespread use of posters as a means for counternarrative in May 1968 is well documented (Deaton, 2013; Feenberg & Freedman, 2010; Heller, 2010; Kugelberg & Vermès, 2011; Rougement, 1988), and its iconography has spread into contemporary movements' contentious artistic practices. As discussed in this special issue, Nuit Debout protesters followed in this tradition, adapting and creating several activist media strategies.

As discussed in greater detail elsewhere, specific movement practices to resist and challenge dominant narratives included the creation of Nuit Debout TV (which used the hashtag #LiveDebout) and Nuit Debout radio (#RadioDebout). Activists running both the radio and television stations used online and

digital tools and platforms to broadcast and stream live on the Internet through channels such as Periscope and YouTube, where Nuit Debout established its own channel: TV Debout (RT en Francais, 2016). These activist practices of self-representation and self-mediation may be understood within a context of tactical media, specifically activist media production at the site of protest (Feigenbaum & McCurdy, 2015). This ethos is reflected in a tweet sent on April 7, 2016—the day Radio Debout began—on the radio's Twitter account: "Radio debout, c'est de la radio DIY qu'on fabrique tous ensemble [Radio Debout is DIY radio that we all make together]" (Radio Debout, 2016).

Consistent with activist media practices at other protest camps, both the Nuit Debout radio and television stations used a bricolage of available materials such as tarps, twine, cardboard, and wooden pallets to create their studios at the site of protest. The technology required, such as video cameras, microphones, lights, computers, and portable 4G dongles for Internet access, were sourced from movement participants and, in particular, journalists affiliated with Radio France (Quairel, 2016; Riemer, 2016; RT en Francais, 2016). These activist media practices are often engaged to counter misrepresentations in the mainstream media and to provide voices to discourses about police and activists that may not otherwise be given attention. In addition to a Web radio and TV presence, Nuit Debout activists actively used corporate social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook and the activist-run social network Weriseup.net. In addition, Nuit Debout activists maintained online chat forums and produced analog and digital posters, zines, and newspapers such as *Nuit Debout Nantes* to mobilize, communicate, and represent the movement (Sorci, 2016).

Among the representations countered through activist media practices are representations of police–protester relations. For example, an episode of Radio Debout from April 16, 2016, examined the challenges and paradoxes of policing Nuit Debout (Geekgix, 2016). Of note, counter–Nuit Debout hashtags also emerged on Twitter, including #PoliceDebout, which was frequently used to express solidarity with French police, particularly a police counterdemonstration against activist aggression held on May 18, 2016 (Samuel, 2016).

Sousveillance and Police Monitoring at Nuit Debout

In the era before live streaming and the immediate uploading, posting, and sharing of images, police could seek to control the representation of their activities through the confiscation and destruction of activist or journalist media. These practices occurred during the spring protests in France. A photographer from Collectif OEIL told a reporter:

> Le soir, les forces de l'ordre pointent des lampes torches en direction de nos appareils pour nous empêcher de filmer. [At night, the police point flashlights at our devices to prevent us filming them. They also aim at us with Flash-Balls (rubber bullet guns) to deter us from doing our job.] (Perrotin, 2016, para. 13)

These intimidation tactics use not only riot control weapons and equipment to intimidate people but also the elemental and geographic qualities of the protest space to "atmospherically govern" the event (Feigenbaum & Kanngieser, 2015). In other words, police use the light, the air, the night, the periphery,

and the architectural space of the square to exert both physical and psychological force (Weizman, 2015). When media are present at the site of protest, the police must make their own PR decisions on whether to negotiate order backed by the threat of violence or to gain control through acts of atmospheric governance to delegitimize protest through force and through the material and visual production of chaos. Although there is not space to explore this issue here, the rise of police body cameras and debates surrounding their use play out in relation to these PR and mediated dynamics of protest (Maruani, 2016).

The ability for police to intimidate and to destroy filmed evidence of their abuses means that protesters need new ways to store and share this documentation. As digital recording technologies got cheaper and more mobile with the spread of smartphones, the ability to record the police proliferated. This paralleled the rise of social media, which allow activists to post and share these recordings (Bock, 2016; Brown, 2016). In recent years this has further developed into the creation of apps that allow activists to securely capture and send video and has paralleled the rise of video streaming technologies that allow for the real-time display of video through online viewing platforms.

As Nuit Debout protesters knew, sending footage through live streams protected content from being destroyed. GoPros and live streaming on Periscope were used to make instant copies of videos so that even if phones were taken or smashed or SD cards were destroyed, there would still be footage (Fradin, 2016). Protesters also used social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter to share videos. Some of these videos were picked up by mainstream broadcasters, amplifying their potential impact.

In a video of police brutality from one of the larger demonstrations that went viral, a peaceful middle-aged man is shown receiving a baton blow from an officer on May 1, 2016. He shouts at the officer (in French), "You are being filmed, chill out" (Medialien, 2016, 0:03). This retort marks not only the protester's reflexive awareness of the power of video for monitoring police abuse, but as Beebon Kidron pointed out in relation to Greenham Common back in the early 1980s, it shows a reflexive awareness of the psychological and behavioral impact that being recorded can have on police use of force (Greenham: A view from the stalls, 1984). This form of surveillance as a way to monitor use of force is evidenced in recent arguments for the deployment of body cameras (Lippert & Newell, 2016). The seconds-long video clip ends with the person recording the incident on film being sprayed in the face, at close range, with an aerosol lachrymatory agent (likely a pepper spray or tear gas).

Citizen witnessing and police monitoring were used so prevalently during these spring protests that graffiti appeared reading "Filme un flic, sauve des vies! [Film a cop, save lives!]" (Fradin, 2016, para. 1). Journalist Andrea Fradin (2016) wrote that the second the CRS riot police appeared, smartphones came out of pockets as quickly as saline (to protect against tear gas). Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, and blogs pulled together content of brutality, and montage videos circulated on YouTube. Of those incidents caught on film that received the most media coverage were a police officer kicking a young woman in the stomach, nonviolent high school students being beaten, and journalists aggressively struck with a flash-bang grenade (Fradin, 2016).

Civic Forensics and Data Aggregation at Nuit Debout

Shared documentations of police brutality and injuries caused by riot control weapons can go a long way toward challenging mainstream media frames and creating solidarity across time and place (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015), but individual images are difficult to use when making formal or official cases against the police. For this, multiple images of the same incident are needed, often documented from different positions and perspectives. In addition, official medical reports are often required. Yet, for fear of arrest and related concerns, many protesters do not seek hospitalization for protest injuries. This means that most documentation of injuries is done by street medics in ad hoc field stations (often tents or vehicles) set up at sites of protest.

Under a continual rain of tear gas, with their meager tent protected by the bodies of 30 protesters linked together around them, street medics at the May 1 demonstrations treated a range of police-inflicted injuries. Writing for Paris-luttes.info, an anonymous medic says:

> Nous avons vu et soigné des blessés graves, des tirs tendus au flashball, aux grenades lacrymogènes, aux grenades de désencerclement. Des tirs au visage, dans les yeux, les mains, sur les membres, sur tout le corps. Nous avons vu des doigts à demi sectionnés, de la peau brulée, des personnes sous le choc, terrorisées. [We have seen and treated serious injuries, (from) Flash-Balls (rubber bullets), tear gas, and flash-bang grenades. Shots to the face, eyes, hands, limbs, all over the body. We saw fingers severed in half, burnt skin, people in shock, terrified.] ("Témoignage d'une StreetMedic," 2016, para. 3)

The recurrent, excessive use of force that took place at and around Nuit Debout eventually brought in human rights observers from Amnesty International and led to an independent inquiry by a team of members of parliament, NGO workers, and journalists. In addition, protest participants and street medics started a grassroots initiative to gather evidence for Défenseur des droits (DDD) (Defender of Rights). Working with DDD instead of the formal police complaints office could help keep witnesses and testifiers safe from repercussions from formally documenting an incident with the police. Organizers of the initiative, Collectif Stop Violences Policières, set up a secure e-mail account and called for submissions of videos from witnesses and medical documents or photos of injuries from those who had been attacked with police weapons. They also called for evidence of kettling and images of police probably not wearing their identification.

In the end they collected 104 reports between March 31 and July 5, mostly from Paris, with some from Rennes, Nantes, Lille, and Marseille. These reports covered 65 individuals. Use of force abuses included excessive use of pepper spray fired at people's faces at point-blank range; grenades shot at very close distances, often toward journalists and voluntary medical teams (sometimes while they were assisting injured people); Flash-Balls shot at head height; and flash-bang grenades thrown in the air, not on the ground as they are intended to be used. In addition to these abuses and misuses of weaponry, they had cases of unarmed people being bludgeoned while lying on the ground, of kettling and containment, and of the obscuring of officer identification (Collectif Stop Violences Policières, 2016).

Through the aggregation of this evidence, Collectif Stop Violences Policières argued that these were not isolated incidents, but instead were sustained and regular attacks that point to the institutionalization of violence in French policing. They made explicit links to the violence against nonwhite French citizens in the suburbs and migrants in Calais and against environmental protesters such as Rémi Fraisse, who was killed at La ZAD, an ongoing protest against airport expansion (Collectif Stop Violences Policières, 2016).

These information aggregation activities speak to the data turn and the possibilities for civic data collection. There is a growing activist ethos building on practices of sharing and storing toward methods of aggregation shows how events are recurrent, interrelated, and systemic (Gray et al., 2016). In the case of Collectif Stop Violences Policières, we also see what we term, building on Eyal Weizman's (2014) work on forensics, a *civic forensics*: citizen practices of interpreting a use-of-force incident that draws together video and photographic information derived from the architectural site with witness testimony to reconstruct events from the perspective of protesters, or what Weizman discusses as "public truth." This tactic is both reflexive and adaptive, able to respond to the dismissal of recorded incidents as isolated events. By harnessing expert knowledge, understanding riot control as an industry, and using media images produced through citizen witnessing and sousveillance practices, Collectif Stop Violences Policières was able to reject both bad protester and bad cop binaries. Building on France's long historical trajectory of diligent police monitoring, the collective's practices of aggregation and citizen-led identification enabled them to situate the excessive use of force as a structural and embedded epidemic in protest policing.

Conclusion

These acts of police monitoring and the building of both local and transnational solidarity networks through sharing are significant developments of the digital age. They mark reflexive adaptation and innovation in protesters' repertoires of contention. As technologies specifically designed for citizen witnessing such as live streaming, secure file transfers, and apps for documenting the police emerge, these repertoires further expand. This sharing can happen in an instant, and time also moves in rhizomatic ways, creating genealogies of brutality and resistance that move across geographic locations and social movement contexts (Feigenbaum et al., 2013). Often through the manifestation of "hashtag publics" (Rambukkana, 2015) that draw together disparate images over Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Flickr (among others), affective resonances develop that amplify issues. They allow people both to speak back to mainstream media representations and to discover and speak to each other.

Although there has been growing attention to the potential of sousveillance and digital activism in communication studies internationally, less attention has been paid to the importance of media literacy in relation to policing. Activist trainers often cover knowing your rights, yet topics of the right to film and photograph, deeper literacies of how police operate behind the scenes, where equipment comes from, or even what is being used against civilians on the streets remain obscured. The question then is how to combine media literacy and media skills with expanded literacy on policing to continue to innovate repertoires of contention.

Our preliminary work in this article to historicize, contextualize, and specify police–protest relations is an effort to embed such literacies into our social movement scholarship and activist repertoires from a media and communications perspective. We argue that protester–police relations need to be situated in the media-saturated context of contemporary urban protests. Likewise, activists' reflexive adaptations that expand repertoires to include safe storage, streaming, backup files, and secure apps for police monitoring need to be situated historically in relation to both protesters' previous engagements with changing media technologies and to changing police repertoires. Finally, protester–police relations must be read in their national and international context, and riot control needs to be considered a global profit-making industry. The political economy of policing is far bigger than what gets captured in mainstream media's protest frame. It is also often left out of activist debate, which remains focused on the cat-and-mouse game on the streets rather than what goes on behind the scenes. These absences exist largely because the riot control industry is hidden from public view, with little public regulation. This lack of public information masks the political economic incentive for police to use the weapons the industry manufactures. Protests can be PR for riot control businesses—real life demonstrations of the power of their products (Feigenbaum, 2017).

The recurrent transformation of public squares in this current wave of social activism demands both a spatial and a temporal reading of protest policing that is attuned to news framing and media schedules and to the sousveillance practices of protesters and citizen witnessing. These historical and political-economic contexts are crucial for understanding how police violence is mediated at sites of protest. They are particularly necessary for understanding how policing repertoires come into play during ongoing protests where tactics shift and change. At the same time, repertoires of sousveillance adapt to these shifts in both policing and media technologies and techniques. As images of brutality get captured, shared, and archived, they also lend themselves to practices of aggregation. In an age of big data in which metrics and analytics are used as means of expertise and as technologies of control, civic data projects and citizen-generated data have the ability to "change what counts" (Gray et al., 2016).

To further explore issues of mediated violence and activist reflexivity, it would be helpful to look at cases in depth from participant-observation or ethnographic perspectives. A multimethod approach that combines contextual research on policing with empirical observations would advance the conceptual framework offered here. Comparative cases that examine transnational policing contexts in relation to how media is engaged and entangled in protest policing would also build upon this knowledge base. The complex and often hidden dynamics of policing, language barriers, and the sensitive nature of the topic make such research challenging. Interdisciplinary collaborations that bridge communication studies with policing studies and criminology may thus offer a fruitful way in. The impacts of the rise of police body cameras on protest policing would also be interesting to explore through this conceptual lens. As watching becomes an increasingly contested terrain of protester–police relations, questions of perspective and evidence come to dominate debates around use of force, asking not only who is counting but also, whose camera? Whose grenade? Whose forensics?

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