Adrienne Russell, **Journalism as Activism: Recoding Media Power**, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016, 200 pp., $22.95 (paperback), $64.95 (hardcover).

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The central claim in Adrienne Russell's latest book, *Journalism as Activism: Recoding Media Power*, is that a fundamental shift in the dynamics of our contemporary media environment has been taking place over the past two decades. This shift, both in the form and site of media power, owes much to the emergence of a new generation of activists and media makers who have imbued this space with what Russell calls "hacktivist sensibilities"—a notion structuring a new set of common values that revolve around the ideas "that information should be free, authority should be mistrusted, and decentralization of power and skill and production promoted" (p. 16). In the book, Russell investigates this power shift by exploring three main sites of its occurrence: the networks, technologies, and practices it engenders.
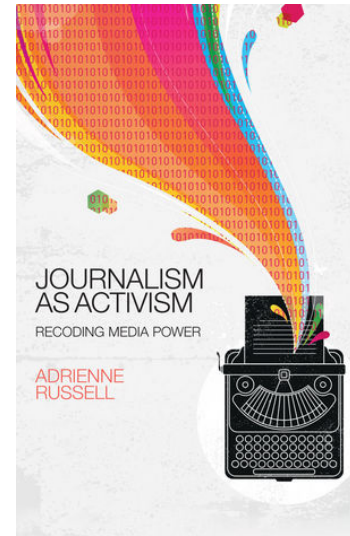
The new networked sphere of media, according to Russell, emerges as a result of changes in journalism and in the structures of social movements. As "communication becomes the primary mode of organization" (p. 32), social movements have largely adopted the new logics of networks and of aggregation by providing a much more flexible and personalized environment for individuals to interact together and to act on their beliefs. These changes are carried over into the field of journalism, where the legitimate space of input, debate, and discursive struggle, as well as the actors inducted into that space, expands to include activist spaces and voices. Russell conducts an empirical network analysis of the media coverage of three media events: the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011, the People's Climate March in 2014, and The Day We Fight Back online protest for Internet freedom in 2014. By looking at the sources, voices, and outgoing references prevailing in these coverages, Russell argues that this emerging *mediapolis* affords activists and social movements greater influence in setting the public and political agenda as well as a broader toolkit for mediation that goes beyond legacy news.

Russell also locates this aforementioned power shift in the ways activists and social movements attempt to leverage emerging technologies and tools, as well as challenge and shape their developments to advance their values. Commercial platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have become important tools for activists serving a wide variety of purposes from amplification, reporting, logistics, and coordination to shaping new types of collective and political subjectivities. However, beyond reconfiguring existing tools, this new environment offers possibilities for targeted technological innovation led by the activist networks themselves that attempt to provide alternatives to the commercially available tools and to overcome their

shortcomings in terms of privacy and security. These tools are designed by activists and for activists, helping them to, among other things, coordinate their responses (e.g., Zello and FireChat) and to report and verify their stories (e.g., Ushahidi and Checkdesk). Russell contends that the openness and flexibility of the current technological environment, and the efforts of the activists to diversify and pluralize their technological inventory, lead to a more evenly contested discursive environment in which "networked publics are pushing back technologically and by sharing their points of view with mass audiences" (p. 106).

A further site of contestation in this new pluralized mediapolis described by Russell is over the field of legitimate journalistic practice. Insurgent actors and movements, from whistleblowers to data journalists, have managed to destabilize some of journalism's longstanding notions, such as objectivity, and have offered new imaginings of the notion of public good in journalistic practice. Thus, the emphasis in the examples the author brings (e.g., Glenn Greenwald and Tim Pool) is on the values of radical inclusiveness, transparency, and a direct and interactive relationship with the public. These new movements are opening the field of journalism on several fronts. First, they challenge the supremacy of objectivity as the only conduit to truth. They are also fundamentally changing the cultures of modern newsrooms by integrating a culture of data sharing and openness brought over from the hacktivist community and informed by new technologies. Finally, as Russell points out, these actors are expanding the legitimate site of journalistic practice: "They work at an environmental advocacy group, at an online startup dedicated to leaks, at a youth-focused commercial news site, and at a data-collecting and mapping platform" (p. 137).

These changes converge in a mediapolis that is conceived as a pluralized space of contested realities where "media appearance constitutes reality, where speech and action converge to produce materiality" (p. 151). The difference, however, is that the contestations today are on the fundamental rules and norms of this mediapolis rather than on the access to it. Activists and social movements are attempting to reorganize the media environment to integrate new values and practices aligned with their hacktivist sensibilities. The journalistic field, as a site of these contestations, is thus being transformed both in form and in content. The blurring and porous borders between audiences and producers highlight an expanding population of new networked publics that are eager to assert themselves, and interact with and influence the makeup and structure of this mediapolis.

Russell's analysis of the new practices and tools that are shaking up the journalistic field is very penetrative, especially in its attempt to identify some patterns in the changes in the field. Indeed, she is correct in her observation that foundational notions of objectivity and technocratic supremacy are being challenged more than at any time before. Moreover, her holistic approach in tackling the issue from the angles of networks, tools, and practices should be applauded. Russell's approach is further enhanced by the impressive catalogue of empirical case studies and examples that she brings in to explore each of these three angles.

Journalism as Activism aims to draw the complexity of this new media environment through an impressive breadth of examples; however, Russell's account is open for critique on two main counts. In making its argument, the book sometimes has the effect of simplifying this maddening congruence of influences and contestations into one between "the old and the new, between the controlled and the free

or open, and between conceptions and appreciations of things amateur and things professional" (p. 152). This highly normative conception of these self-styled hacktivist sensibilities, and the networked environment they furnish, betrays the book's main shortcoming: It does not engage fully with the substantial critical literature surrounding them (e.g., Dean, 2010; Markham, 2014). Fundamentally, the implications of the entanglement and constitution of these practices, technologies, and networks within late or "communicative capitalism" (Dean, 2010) could use a more critical examination. Thus, although distrust of authority and expertise might be a welcome consequence of these participatory media technologies, it also leads to a "decline of symbolic efficiency," according to Dean (2010), so that skepticism eventually "extends to local knowledges, knowledges rooted in experience, and anything at all appearing on the Internet" (p. 111).

Furthermore, the underlying assumption of the progressive and emancipatory nature of these movements, and of the changes they bring about in the media environment, comes across as needing further justification and qualification. It obscures the immense heterogeneity, internal conflicts, and the great spread of values within these networked spaces (Karpf, 2017). The dichotomy Russell constructs between the old and the new, and the controlled and the free or open, is loaded with the assumption that the new represents a broadly progressive phenomenon. Such an assumption is far from being uncontested, as the new can also be populated and weaponized by more reactionary and antidemocratic forces (cf. Alberg Peters, 2015; Ekman, 2014; Karpf, 2017).

The aforementioned critique notwithstanding, Russell manages in her book to provide a concise and highly interesting account of the struggle to redefine journalism for a new technopolitical context. Moreover, and in defense of the author, it is abundantly clear that the rate of technological, as well as political, change over the past decade has far outpaced our ability to properly account for it. It is indeed an unenviable task for scholars who are attempting to make sense of momentous and diverse changes from the Arab Spring to the election of Donald Trump. From this perspective, *Journalism as Activism* represents a laudable effort to theorize how some of these developments constitute and are constituted by our fluid media environment.

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