

News Cultures and New Social Movements: radical journalism and the mainstream media

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ABSTRACT *Radical media can be viewed as an extremely democratic form of communication, where people normally denied access to the mainstream media are able to speak on issues that concern them. Radical media are especially important for new social movements, where “activist-journalists” seek to establish a counter-discourse to those typically found in mainstream media. One striking technique employed in radical media is “native reporting”, where first-person, activist accounts of events are preferred over more detached commentaries. Most accounts of radical media have treated such practices as unique and defining characteristics of radical media. Little attention has been paid to how these practices might be employed by mainstream media, or indeed to how radical media might borrow practices from the mainstream. This paper moves away from previous binary approaches to explore the relations between radical and mainstream media through a comparative analysis of the coverage of the protests at the G8 summit, held in Genoa in July 2001. The paper argues that borrowings and interdependency are most likely to come from papers that share a similar ideology; hence it compares a member of the UK radical press (SchNEWS) with a member of the liberal press (The Guardian). The analysis is hegemonic, and is particularly interested in how transfers of journalistic techniques, values and ideologies are transformed under differing conditions. Is a counter-hegemonic discourse inevitably diluted by the adoption of its primary features in the mainstream press? Is it possible to radicalise mainstream journalistic practices? The analysis focuses on the presence and nature of “witnessing” by activists, the stylistic construction of such witnessing and how such techniques are transformed in the liberal press. It also examines relationships and attitudes between radical and mainstream journalists. The paper finds that whilst there are distinctive journalistic techniques used in each paper, both radical and mainstream adopt elements from each other, whether in writing style or in news values and framing. The counter-discourse of radical media appears to gain strength from its borrowings. It is argued that the liberal press’s use of native reporting represents an accommodation with a radical technique. Finally, a hegemonic approach suggests a complexity of relations between radical and mainstream that previous binary models have not been able to identify.*

KEY WORDS: *Radical Media, Alternative Media, Liberal Press, Mainstream Media, Hegemony, Gramsci, Political Activism, News Cultures, Genoa*

Introduction

The radical media of new social movements have been examined in terms of their significance for the mobilisation of campaigns through activist information, political education and the critique of dominant ideologies (for example, Atton, 2002; Downing, 2001; and Rodriguez, 2001). There has been little attempt, however, to assay a comparative analysis of the construction of news in radical media and in mainstream media. The present paper will attempt this by attending to the structural and

cultural characteristics of radical media, and will focus on the radicalising of journalistic practices through the “native reporter,” the significance of “active witnessing” and a consideration of the transformation of “social movement news” in dominant media culture.

Defining Radical Media

To define radical media productively has proved to be a fraught undertaking throughout even their modest history as an aspect of media studies. John Downing, in what was until very

recently the only definitive approach to the subject (Downing, 1984), approached it in terms of organisational and political formations. In looking for their unique characteristics, Downing highlighted non-hierarchical, often collective modes of organisation that were coupled with a radical political agenda. This agenda would often, he argued, be played out in a prefigurative politics of communication, through which radically democratic aims (his focus is on leftist, progressive media, rather than what he has later termed the "repressive" media of the far right; Downing, 2001, p. 88) could be actualised within radical media formations.

For Downing these media formations are best realised in the activities of the new social movements. In contrast to earlier manifestations such as the labour or suffrage movements, new social movements may be characterised by the absence of a single, rational outcome. The peace and ecology movements, for instance, tend to work "independently of what the state might concede" (Downing, 2001, p. 24); their aims are often diffuse, at times uncertain, or at least shifting. The current anti-capitalist movement is perhaps even less "rational" in this sense. It has drawn on previous movement philosophies (peace, ecology, anarchism, trade unionism to a degree): the result is a kaleidoscopic, collective vision built on a set of shifting coalitions between socialists, greens, anarchists and other, non-aligned groups and individuals.

The media of new social movements are distinctive in terms of their content and their organisation: accounts of political struggle and the sociopolitical contextualisation of such accounts by those actively involved in them are presented through lateral, non-hierarchical modes of organisation, mostly run on a non-commercial basis. Downing's 1984 definition privileged media that are written and run by non-professionals, by groups that are primarily activist for progressive, social change. From a leftist perspective, Downing highlighted a general political perspective of social anarchism that informs and drives such media practices. Downing explicitly places the organisation of radical media and their journalistic practices in opposition to a construction of mainstream me-

dia that is largely monolithic, centred on profit making, hierarchical organisation and a practice of journalism that, by dint of its routinisation and codification as a profession, is implicitly exclusive. Against this he presents an ideal type of radical media, one that is radically democratic in terms of access and political aims, and that is some undefined way "purer" than the elitism of professional media.

Subsequently, Downing (2001) has acknowledged the limits of his earlier model. He is critical of polarities in his earlier work, of which he identifies two forms. The first he terms an "antibinarism" (Downing, 2001, p. viii) towards the dominant media models of the time. That is, rather than find hope in either the capitalist media of the West or the Soviet media, Downing's earlier position was equally dismissive of both as unrepresentative and ideologically monolithic. The second form he terms "binarism", that is, the polarity between radical and mainstream media. Such separation was, Downing now holds, necessary for him to better "hammer home the merits of alternative way of communicating politically, however picayune they might appear in the first instance" (Downing, 2001, p. ix).

There is a widespread, implicit assertion that the organisational and professional routines of the mainstream media produce a media system that is monolithic and inflexible, within which the representation of dissident, radical and otherwise "unofficial" voices is largely predictable: if heard at all, such voices will be demonised and marginalised. Such an assertion can be found in critical media studies from the US, most notably in the propaganda model of Herman and Chomsky (1994), and from the UK in the ideological thrust of the work of the Glasgow University Media Group (for example, 1976 and 1980).

Although the present paper focuses on the UK, the issues it raises go beyond narrowly national practices. To study radical media is to critique the social construction of mass media news that is based on a complex of newsroom routines and rituals, conditions of production, notions of professionalism and objectivity, rehearsed standards of writing and editing, as well as accident and opportunity (Allan, 1999).

Radical media studies also explore the responses of radical media to such constructions by constructing their own news, based on alternative values and frameworks of news gathering and access. These values proceed from a wish to present other interpretations of stories and to present stories not normally considered as news that challenge the prevailing "hierarchy of access" (Glasgow University Media Group, 1976, p. 245) normally found in the mass media. In the latter, an elite of experts and pundits tends to have easier and more substantial access to a platform for their ideas than do dissidents, protesters, minority groups and "ordinary people": "powerful groups and individuals have privileged and routine entry into the news itself and to the manner and the means of its production" (Glasgow University Media Group, 1980, p. 114). The primary aim of radical media is to provide access to the media for protest groups on those groups' terms. This entails developing media to encourage and normalise such access, where people of low status (in terms of their relationship to elite groups of owners, managers and senior professionals) can make their own news, whether by appearing in it as significant actors or by creating news themselves that is relevant to their situation.

A Hegemonic Approach to Radical–Mainstream Media Relations

A comparative analysis of radical and mainstream media formations requires methodology that goes beyond Downing's binary models. A hegemonic approach appears well suited for such an analysis and should encourage us to examine them not as discrete fields of symbolic production, but as inhabiting a shared, negotiated field of relations, subject to "contradictory pressures and tendencies" (Bennett, 1986, p. 350). The classic features of hegemonic practice—the notion of an unstable, non-unitary field of relations, where ideology is mobile and dynamic and where strategic compromises are continually negotiated (Gramsci, 1971)—might thus be applied to a study of the relations between these two media formations. Hegemonic analysis presents these two media formations not as independent, but as articulated

in terms of their cultural practices. That is, media practices may be viewed as movable; they may articulate to bourgeois (mainstream) values in one instance, but become joined with radical values in another.

Raymond Williams has written of the complexity of hegemony that it is not "singular" and "that its own internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended; and by the same token, that they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified" (Williams, 1980, p. 38). His division of cultural practices into dominant, residual and emergent suggests how challenges and modifications may be made. Against his theorisation of the dominant culture as "selective" he first places those existing practices "which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture" (p. 40) but which are still practised—he cites religious practices and the power of the rural past. These comprise a residue of cultural practices, discarded by the dominant culture but still resonant throughout the wider culture. Emergent practices are those that are newly created: "new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences" (p. 41). It is tempting to assign radical media—at least as a symbolic practice of new social movements—to the latter, emergent culture. But that would be to ignore any residual traces within radical media; it would be to ignore the historical place of those media.

The present analysis is not about to reveal a benign transfer of practices between two sets of equally matched media practices; it is about struggle, the aim of which (in Gramsci's terms) from the point of view of the bourgeoisie, is to contain and to incorporate dissident values of subordinate groups within an ideological space (Hebdige, 1979, p. 16). This ideological space must then appear permanent, natural and common-sensical, even as it is continually contested. In media-analytic terms we can thus come to examine mainstream news texts to judge how they set out the limits of that "common sense" (Allan, 1999, p. 86). Similarly, we can examine radical media practices for examples of how naturalised media frames and ideological codes can be disrupted. We can look

for the movement of specific practices across media, say of dissident practices into the mainstream, and ask to what extent such practices have been shorn of their ideological, counter-hegemonic power. For, as Williams reminds us, hegemony is a flexible process, able to accommodate and tolerate an immense range of alternative meanings and values, "even some alternative senses of the world" (Williams, 1980, p. 39). We must also be alert to counter-flow: are there examples of mainstream practice in radical media whose naturalising power has been similarly disrupted in their new setting? This is to suggest the possibility of a counter-hegemony arising from those residual and emergent cultural practices, an oppositional set of practices that, rather than preferring to exist alongside the dominant culture, seek to change society. What is at stake is how differing sets of media practices, each with their own routines, rules and ideological codes, socially construct reality. How and on what occasions they come together—whether through collision, incorporation or dissidence—will in large part determine this reality of social experience.

Using hegemony as the activating concept, this paper will explore the relationships and dynamics between radical and mainstream media at two levels: the employment and development of particular styles and genres of journalism across these two media types, and the attitude of radical journalists to their mainstream counterparts. These relationships will be discovered firstly through attending to historical trends and secondly through a contemporary, comparative study of media coverage of social-movement activism, that of the demonstrations against the G8 summit meeting held in Genoa in July 2001. Before turning to cases, we need to situate the news culture of social movements in a wider, historical context.

Understanding Radical News Culture

The publications that grew up around the British "DIY politics" and protest groups of the 1990s came largely from the radical environmental movement (Atton, 1999a; Searle, 1997). The movement's embrace of autonomy, local activism and the absence of any centralised or

hierarchical organisation—preferring instead an anarchistic model of affinity groups, horizontal communication and the empowerment of local groups freed from a single ideology or strategy—resulted in hundreds of media formations (Atton, 1999b). Many were short-lived, existing only during the life cycle of a particular protest or action or until funds ran out. Many were set up only as communication networks for activists: these focused on the committed activist; few of them sought to convince or mobilise an audience beyond those already involved. Some actively sought to broaden their audience, though of these only a few were explicitly aimed at civil society at large (including the mass media) and even then only on their own terms (such as *Squall*; see Atton, 2002).

What is the nature of this opposition, this refusal to compromise? How can it inform our understanding of the relationships between radical and mainstream? In the UK, *SchNEWS* is one of a number of nationally distributed radical papers that appeared or came to prominence in the 1990s (others include *Counter Information*, *Do or Die*, *Green Anarchist* and *Squall*). *SchNEWS* was first published in 1994 and has since also become available online. As a weekly news-sheet it functions as a forum for issue-based journalism from a radical perspective. It has critically examined the role of industry, politicians, the military and right-wing pressure groups in anti-environmental campaigns. It has featured reports on squatting, animal rights, alternative urban communities, the creeping criminalisation of rave culture—indeed the criminalisation of civil protest itself. *SchNEWS*'s agenda can be seen as a model for many radical media. First, it offers a form of journalism in opposition to the mainstream, where topics untouched by the mass media are examined and where activists, protesters and dissidents have a platform for their own voices. Second, following the arguments against consolidation made by Ben Bagdikian (1997) and Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (1994), *SchNEWS* implicitly argues that the political economy of the mass media prevents certain topics from being discussed for fear of invoking the wrath of proprietors, editors and advertisers. It is not

only important for the paper to cover such topics but to establish itself in economic opposition to such consolidation. The paper contains no advertising and has no cover price: it survives precariously on donations of money and equipment from its readers and supporters. In essence *SchNEWS*'s agenda is the foundation for all radical journalism, easily as far back as the radical English press of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, if not before: we might also consider the writing and self-publishing of Abiezer Coppe during the English Revolution as radical journalism (Harrison, 1974; Hill, 1975). Despite their differing aims and constituencies, we might find a continuation of such practices throughout the history of radical media in the UK.

Atton (2002) has drawn on the history of the amateur journalist as evinced in the English radical press and in various twentieth-century versions of the activist as journalist, such as the proposal for worker-correspondents as an necessary part of radical trades union activity (*Workers' Life*, 1928/1983) and the British Socialist Workers' Party's experiments to include workers as writers in its paper *Socialist Worker* (Allen, 1985). Similar impulses underscore the development of the anarchist press in the UK (Quail, 1978), the peace movement media, the underground press of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Fountain, 1988 and Nelson, 1989) and the radical local press of the 1970s (Minority Press Group, 1980 and Whitaker, 1981). Such a history points to a definition of radical media that has at its heart the transformation of "social relations, roles and responsibilities" (Atton, 2002, p. 27) within journalistic practices. This accounts for radical organisational and political formations in such media, as well as the radical expansion of who is able to become a journalist; it enables an examination of the meaning and function of journalism in radical media.

Radical media may be characterised by their attempts to free themselves from the power of government, the state and other dominant institutions and practices. In social-movement terms they can be thought of as instances of the "free spaces" theorised by Melucci (1995). In Melucci's reading of social movements the role

of the network and that of radical media as activators of that network assume a key position. Organisational forms are the building blocks from which the network can be developed. These forms, as Melucci asserts, tend away from the traditional, hierarchical and bureaucratic forms of social organisation. Just as collective action "eschews existing channels of resistance" (Welsh and McLeish, 1996, p. 30) and maintains "an informal and irreverent posture towards the established norms and rituals of mainstream politics" (Scott, 1990, p. 34), so do radical media seek to transform the practice of journalism. In contrast to their mainstream counterparts radical media are characterised by loose internal structures and by autonomy between the groups thus organised. Loose structures are most commonly realised in social movements by the absence (or at least, the reduction) of hierarchy and by an anti-authoritarian ethos. Job rotation is common, as is the sharing of jobs and skills. Such a philosophy and structure encourages journalistic practices that can achieve those primary aims of radical media already noted: to give a voice to the voiceless and to invert the "hierarchy of access" by developing media spaces where activists and "ordinary" people might present accounts of their own experiences and struggles.

Native Reporting in Radical Media

We can conceptualise this technique journalistically as "native reporting". Native reporters use their role as activists in order to represent *from the inside* the motives, experiences, feelings, needs and desires of the wider social movements they thus come to represent. Dealing with events and actions, their contributions superficially resemble eyewitness reports in mainstream media. "Native reporting" can usefully define the activities of radical journalists working within communities of interest to present news that is relevant to those communities, presented in a manner that is meaningful to them and with their collaboration and support.

This technique is not new, though its antecedents are arguably less "amateur" than its contemporary instances. In the twentieth century we might consider much of George

Orwell's journalism as native reporting. Whether in his brief polemic pieces such as "How the Poor Die" (Orwell, 1965) or in his book-length works such as *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Orwell, 1989c), Orwell's populist literary style was wedded to a practice of social research that found him living with his subjects. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* (Orwell, 1989a) and *Homage to Catalonia* (Orwell, 1989b) he spoke of his direct experiences as pauper and militiaman. His approach drew on that of Jack London, "following a literary model into actual experience"; "for a while he went native in his own country" (Crick, 1980, pp. 190 and 110). We must remember that throughout his career, despite his work at *The Observer* and the BBC, Orwell contributed essays and letters to numerous, small-circulation, radical journals. Indeed, we might consider his work and his attitude towards commercial media as precisely that of the radical media activist, wherein his

distinctively radical... populist stylistic devices and the political contempt for "big business" were quite at home precisely where he published them. (Crick, 1980, p. 116)

Robert Chesshyre has also used the term "native reporting" to describe the practices he sought to relearn in the 1980s upon his own return to Britain, following his posting as *The Observer's* Washington correspondent (Chesshyre, 1987): "coming home, one had to learn again the native idiom" (p. 13). For Chesshyre, this meant relearning a method of reporting about local, everyday "situations with which readers can personally identify" (p. 31). He observes how such reports drew many positive responses from readers

who have something to say and want to join in [...] They know more than their masters do of what it is like to have a child in a comprehensive school, or to be unemployed, to try to start a business. They are the reliable witnesses. (pp. 31-32)

Among others, we should also consider the work of John Pilger and Paul Foot as native reporting, particularly since much of their earlier, pioneering work was written for the popu-

lar press and addressed a broader, less elite audience than did Chesshyre's. However reliable their witnesses may be, though, in the forum of mainstream journalism these witnesses need their Chesshyres, their Pilgers and their Foots. By contrast, native reporters in radical media work as members of a community whose work enables that community to "analyse one's historical situation, which transforms consciousness, and leads to the will to change a situation" (Traber, 1985, p. 3). Here, native reporters are at the centre of things as participants, and their work is precisely to feed discussion and debate from the perspective of the grassroots and to function as "information for action". Native reporters seek to take back what is "their" news. This second interpretation is perhaps more powerful than Chesshyre's, since it suggests the actualisation of his "reliable witnesses" as recorders of their own reality. But we can identify a historical linkage between the two types of native reporting through attending to Curran and Seaton's (1997) examination of the factors that governed the demise of the English radical press. The reform campaign against the "taxes on knowledge", they argue, succeeded where those press taxes failed (particularly through the widespread evasion of stamp duty). Neither was the radical press vanquished by prosecutions for seditious libel, it was fatally weakened by reform by liberalisation of press ownership that led to the "industrialisation of the press, with its accompanying rise in publishing costs [and a] dependence on advertising" (Curran and Seaton, 1997, p. 41). Although the "native reporting" of the radical press continued precariously in a paper such as the *Daily Herald*, such writing continued longest, in a more etiolated form, in mass circulation papers such as the *News of the World*, "whose radicalism was the product more of commercial expediency than of political commitment" (Curran and Seaton, 1997, p. 29). The adoption of the radical discourse of "a more socially anchored journalism of a community or movement" (Golding, 1999, p. 15) by mainstream publications in the mid 1850s has been well argued by Peter Golding (1999). Throughout the twentieth century we have seen the persistence of a

“professionalised” form of native reporting (as in the writing of Orwell, Foot and Pilger).

Those non-professional journalists who gather and present news as part of their own lives embody their own history, experience and opinions within a publication. They are “authorising” themselves to speak, validating their lives, making their voices public. Their voices may be thought of as examples of “witness activism”, whether the “witness video” activists of the British video magazine *Undercurrents* (Harding, 1997) or Nick Couldry’s (2000) “witnesses of the media age”, where “ordinary people” can in various ways disrupt the framing of the mass media, and denaturalise the dominant social processes of the media. It is to how these “ordinary people” witness political events in which they play an active, dissenting role and how they present their witnessing as native reporters working within radical media to which we now turn.

Witnessing in the Radical Press

The remainder of this paper examines the coverage of a single event, the G8 summit held in Genoa during July 2001, an event that drew tens of thousands of social movement activists from across the world and which at the time of writing is arguably the most prominent example of anti-capitalist protest mobilisation. The G8 summit was notable for the security surrounding the conference (the “ring of steel” in the city centre; the restriction of movement for protesters and residents; the unprecedented police numbers on the streets; the severely restricted transport links) as well as for the police reaction to protesters, leaving one dead and dozens hospitalised. Genoa also saw a raid on the building housing both the Genoa Social Forum (one of the key organising committees for the protest) and its Independent Media Centre (part of a worldwide, web-based radical media project known as Indymedia). For this analysis I shall compare the coverage of this event by *SchNEWS* and *The Guardian* (along with its sister Sunday paper, *The Observer*). *SchNEWS* is the most frequent of all new social movement publications in the UK, publishing weekly. Where others such as *Squall* (now only

publishing online and updated only irregularly) provide lengthier, analytical articles, *SchNEWS*’s publishing schedule allows it to respond more rapidly to contemporary events. Despite its brevity (typically two sides of A4, at times double that length) it offers a rich resource for the study of media activism in the UK. In the 1990s, *The Guardian* developed its environmentalist agenda largely through the work of two writers: the paper’s environment correspondent, John Vidal, and George Monbiot, a writer with a very visible history as a professional campaigner, protester and public speaker (he is a member of the Steering Committee of the Globalise Resistance coalition). Vidal wrote pioneering articles on the aims, philosophy and tactics of Earth First!; he was the paper’s key correspondent in the “McLibel” trial and published his journalism as a book (Vidal, 1997). This makes *The Guardian* a likely candidate for the extension of these sympathies into the framing of its news around activists as witnesses and native reporters. The extent to which it does so and the manner in which this is achieved is one of the aims of this analysis.

SchNEWS devoted over half of a double issue of its weekly news-sheet (issue 314/315, 27 July 2001) to coverage of Genoa. It published no issue on the weekend of the G8 conference, explaining its absence to its email subscribers thus: “Sorry folks, no issue this week because for some strange reason most of our crew have gone on holiday to Italy” (*NOT SchNEWS*, 314, 20 July 2001)—an announcement that is typical of *SchNEWS*’s off-hand, ironic style. Its Genoa coverage appeared under headlines that draw attention to the paper’s use of populist language. Headlines such as “Welcome to G-Hate”, “The G8—Pasta Caring” and “Putin his foot in it” are reminiscent of the punning, tabloid-style writing that is a feature of the paper’s editorial approach. Such an approach subverts the dominant frames of tabloid writing—typically concerned with legitimising discourses of law and order—the targets are (predictably) not those we expect in UK tabloids such as *The Sun* or the *Daily Star*. *SchNEWS* uses tabloid humour ironically to critique the dominant forces of “world government”. It is not protesters that are filled with

hate, but the “G-Hate” summit itself. Vladimir Putin, Russia’s premier, is portrayed in the headline as insensitive at best (the story beneath it is far more critical, highlighting his support for the brutality of the Italian police against protesters, whilst turning a blind eye to repression and torture in Chechnya). *SchNEWS* goes so far as to employ a crude national stereotype in its “Pasta Caring” headline, but in the story that follows there is none of the stereotyping of Italians that such a headline might suggest in a British tabloid. Instead the phrase is used to introduce a bitter denunciation of the G8’s policies towards developing countries.¹

Violence dominates the stories. The event is referred to as the “battle of Genoa”: there are “attacks” by the *carabinieri*, who use “extreme force” in their “state violence”—“the streets soon became a war zone”. The brutality of the raid on the Genoa Social Forum and their conduct in the streets (leading to the death of one protester and the dozens hospitalised) are detailed in the brief quotes from activists that introduce each news feature:

It was just endless, I really thought I was dying. It’s a horrible thing when you feel your bones breaking inside you. And after a while I just tried to keep one eye open, trying to stay alive. I finally blacked out and couldn’t remember anything else till I woke up in hospital. (Marcus Covell)

After all the people had been brought out either to the hospital or jail everyone flooded in. The cops had sent in cleaning teams, but it was still a mess. Blood was smeared on walls and the floor, the gear of everyone was torn open and thrown everywhere. Doors and windows were smashed. The computer terminals were lying on the ground in pieces. Absolute chaos. (“Eyewitness”)

Two distinct approaches to activist media emerge here. First, accounts such as these demonstrate *SchNEWS*’s commitment to giving “voice to the voiceless”. Yet these witnesses are not *SchNEWS* journalists, though they are activists (Marcus Cavell is radical journalist working for Indymedia). Their words are employed in a similar way to how mainstream journalists would use them: as first-hand experience, as vox pops. *SchNEWS*, just as in mainstream journalism, does not give its pages over completely to such voices; it places them in a story written

by its own journalists. But we must remember that *SchNEWS* itself is written by activists, who were also involved in the events these witnesses are recounting.² The paper’s native reporters maintain a position in tension, between opening up a journalistic space within which such voices might speak and declaring their own support for the aims of the protesters (of whom they are, after all, a part). This is achieved by a simultaneous standing aside from the action recounted by witnesses, and then returning to the centre of the story to give a fuller, contextualised—though emphatically activist-led—account of the events.

In the “battle” protesters are largely portrayed as innocent victims. Reports itemise the weapons used against them: “tear gas volleys”, water cannons, “driving tanks at high speed” into the crowd: in the face of this attack, “the only thing to do was run”. Beatings were delivered by the *carabinieri* during the raid on the Genoa Social Forum against unarmed, defenceless protesters, while many people were asleep. Police claims that the protesters were armed and violent are disputed. The exception is members of the anarchist black bloc, who have been a feature of previous anti-capitalism demonstrations. Here *SchNEWS*’s coverage is carefully nuanced. It stresses the alleged infiltration of the black bloc by *agents provocateurs* in the pay of the *carabinieri* at the same time as it appears to justify the bloc’s violent tactics, not against the person, but against certain classes of property: “banks and multinationals guilty of human rights abuses such as McDonalds and Nike”. The paper’s “Black Propaganda” report quotes “a statement from some Black Bloc involved in Genoa” which argues that such violence is justified as “symbolic actions”, though it condemns “the destruction and looting of small shops and cars. That is not our policy.”

Alongside the physical violence the paper places the metaphorical violence of the “P.R. war”, waged from within the Red Zone itself (the cordoned site of the G8 conference) largely by, *SchNEWS* argues, mainstream journalists:

While the carabinieri were busy arresting and assaulting people in the Indymedia centre it was a

very different story across town in the official press centre inside the red zone. The divide between life inside the red zone fortress, with its well-defended borders, and life outside, was a pretty neat metaphor for the world the G8 were in Genoa to sustain. Inside, the Ferrero Rocher was piled up on the tables (just like the crap adverts) getting guzzled by corporate journo, delegates and other hangers-on whose every need was catered for by an army of local servants (no doubt chucked out of the zone at the end of their shift). Hundreds of metres of computers laid on for the world's press along with books, CDs, DVDs and everything else you'd need to explain how sane, rational and useful the G8 are.

Mainstream journalists are portrayed as a corruptible herd, mere propagandists for the G8. There is no likelihood of their being independent or critical, nor are they individually distinguishable. There is no mention of those journalists who were critical of the G8 and the police violence, who explicitly supported the protesters, writers such as John Vidal, George Monbiot and Naomi Klein (whose sympathetic coverage we shall encounter when we turn to *The Guardian*). This attitude towards mainstream journalists is not restricted to *SchNEWS*. Jim Carey, a founding editor of *Squall*, has written of how his paper was frequently contacted by freelance journalists looking for leads and how on a number of occasions *Squall's* articles were plagiarised by mainstream journalists (Carey, 1998). Following these experiences Carey is extremely wary of meeting the mainstream press on their terms. He has acknowledged that very few alternative journalists get to sit at the high table of the mass media, and even when they do "it's only for a vol-au-vent" (Carey, 2001). On the rare occasions when such journalists are invited to contribute to the mass media, it tends to be a once-and-for-all contribution.

Little attention is paid in *SchNEWS* to the work of professional journalists. Only one professional journalist is named in the entire paper, Anna Politkovskaya, special correspondent for the Russian bi-weekly *Novaya Gazeta*, and award-winning author of *A Dirty War: a Russian reporter in Chechnya* (Politkovskaya, 2001). Her experiences at the hands of the Russian secret police in Chechnya, where she was arrested and tortured, are used as evidence of Vladimir Putin's support for brutality, referred to earlier.

On three occasions *SchNEWS* writers cite other media approvingly. The story of a "copper who broke ranks" to compare the Genoese police actions with those of fascist Argentina is credited to the Italian left-wing daily, *La Repubblica*. In a story on the infiltration of the anarchist "black bloc" protesters by police, footage from the Italian television station La7 is described as showing " 'black bloc' protesters climbing in and out of police vans in the red zone". The final source, the *African Monitor*, is used for a brief quote to refer to the G8 leaders as "opulent idlers hiding inside a steel cage" (in a story that focuses on the crippling debts owed by the countries of sub-Saharan Africa).

Professional journalists are otherwise considered as "corporate journo", safely pampered in the Red Zone—an area that *SchNEWS's* own journalists were not tempted by, despite being encouraged to stay there by the press room ("you'll be safer inside", they report a press receptionist telling them). This suggests that *SchNEWS's* own correspondents were permitted to avail themselves of the Red Zone's press room, that they were regarded as "proper" journalists, if only by a receptionist. The paper itself is in no doubt about its writers' status: they are referred to as "journalists" and "correspondents", even on one occasion, self-deprecatorily, as "hacks". As we are seeing, though, a combination of position (activist) and writing style (subverting tabloid conventions) of these journalists sets them apart from their mainstream counterparts. A further distinction is found in their bylines, of which there is only one, under a set-off quote: "*SchNEWS* Correspondent". None of the stories in this (or in any other issue of *SchNEWS*) is attributed. This is in large part due to the paper's collective approach to writing and editing, wherein members of the core editorial collective

rely on people coming in [to the *SchNEWS* office], ringing up, writing stories, passing us bits of paper in the pub, taking bits from the paper [i.e. the mainstream press], [and from the] underground press. Someone starts a story, someone else adds a bit, someone else has their say—means you can't have an ego or say "that's my story". (From an interview with Warren, a member of the *SchNEWS* collective, cited in Atton, 2002, p. 95)

Witnessing in the Liberal Press

The Guardian had set its ideological agenda as early as February 2001 in an article by George Monbiot, who saw in the “ragged coalition of greens, anarchists and socialists”, with whom he had been touring Britain as part of the Globalise Democracy campaign, a far-reaching critique of neoliberalism and corporate freedom, where the protests in Genoa would show “a unity of purpose ... an oppositional accord which overrides our differences” (*The Guardian*, 8 February 2001). Regular coverage began in early June with a contextualising piece by the high-profile anti-globalisation campaigner (and author of *No Logo*—Klein, 2001), Naomi Klein. Her account of the squatted *centri sociali* throughout Italy (which would play a major role in the organisation of the Genoa protests through the Genoa Social Forum) uses terms familiar from studies of radical media (such as in Downing, 1988). The centres constitute a “parallel political sphere” encouraging “a new politics of engagement” (*The Guardian*, 8 June 2001). Both reports highlight their authors’ personal involvement in the anti-capitalist movement, Monbiot as a keynote speaker at public meetings throughout the UK, Klein as supporter and commentator.

These two early reports set the framing for the reporting of the G8 protests themselves. The paper’s agenda is shared with the movement and its media. Apart from contributions from Klein and Monbiot, reports from staff writers are supplemented by pieces written by representatives of relatively high-profile organisations such as those by Sara Parkin of the Real World Coalition and Jeremy Rifkin, president of the Foundation on Economic Trends. Otherwise they are by writers with proven mainstream expertise, such as Noreena Hertz (author of *The Silent Takeover* [Hertz, 2001], described by *The Guardian* as “the It-girl of anti-globalisation”). Media activists do not appear at all as contributors except on a single occasion, where Katherine Ainger of *New Internationalist* provides an overview of the issues underlying Genoa and, significantly, despite her being a veteran protester, justifies her decision not to take part in the Genoa actions.

How then did *The Guardian* and *The Observer* present activists as witnesses? Naomi Klein’s report cited above presents activists as witnesses only once, in her introduction, where an anonymous squatter has a single sentence attributed to her. In the rest of her report, despite her engaged journalism (she clearly shares the activists’ ideology and agenda) her witnesses are conventionally authoritative (she cites *Le Monde*’s support for the Italian squatting network). By contrast, a report on the police raid on the Genoa Social Forum and the ensuing treatment of demonstrators in police custody in a lengthy news feature (c. 2000 words; *The Observer*, 29 July 2001) uses activists frequently as primary sources. British activists, both witnesses and victims of the police brutality, are used as sources for the narrative of the raid on the building that housed the Genoa Social Forum, where no mainstream journalists appear to have been present. Among these was Mark Covell, the Indymedia journalist (described in the report simply as a “journalist”) who suffered broken ribs and a punctured lung at the hands of the police: “I heard my ribs break, like snapping matchsticks. I thought, my God, this is it, I’m going to die.” Vivid first-person comments are interpolated into a dramatic reconstruction of the event, similar to, though far lengthier than, the reporting in *SchNEWS*: “‘I heard the man next to me cry, ‘Please stop’,’ she said; ‘Anyone who got isolated by themselves was in trouble. It was a nightmare,’ said Sue, a teacher from north London.” The report is detailed in its coverage of events, extremely sympathetic to the protesters and vivid in its use of first-person narratives.

In *The Guardian*, one of the Britons arrested during the demonstrations is accorded respectability by being described as “a computer consultant for a charity and the son of a former honorary physician to the Queen” (*The Guardian*, 27 July 2001). This is odd, since the paper otherwise appears to have no need to thus legitimise the protester’s actions and indeed has been supportive of their cause and their strategies since the outset. On the other hand, this might be read as a dramatic device, demonstrating that even an employee of an NGO (“a charity”) and from a respectable family should

feel justified in taking direct action against capitalism and globalisation. Weight is added to this latter interpretation by the next activist to be interviewed in the feature, “a web designer for the Genoa protesters’ Indymedia site”. Neither this reference to Indymedia, nor the presence of one of its journalists (Covell) in another story are followed up by the paper. This is interesting, since during the protests activists used the Indymedia website to file copy and stream video footage of the protests onto the internet. The weekend of the G8 summit saw hundreds of hours of video and hundreds of thousands of words being distributed across the internet: a media saturation that, whatever doubts the mainstream media may have had about its professional standards, might have deserved some comment. *SchNEWS* reports that during the police raid on the Genoa Social Forum building—which also housed the Genoa office of Indymedia—“Indymedia kept going. There were continual multilingual updates and a web radio broadcast throughout the protests, with millions of hits on Italian Indymedia throughout the protests.” It is not until well after the summit that an article appeared in *The Guardian* (20 August 2001) by Paul O’Connor, a founder of the activist video magazine *Undercurrents*, that sought to explain the significance of Indymedia in Genoa: “by allowing anyone to publish their own text, audio or video reports online, Indymedia aims to ‘erode the dividing line between reporters and reported, between active producers and passive audiences’”. O’Connor critiques the links between alternative and mainstream reporting too, noting that a BBC reporter caught up in the raid saw the value of publishing his own, unedited account of his experience through Indymedia.

The Guardian’s “computer consultant” story of 27 July 2001 uses its interviews with the two activists to fill almost half of the feature, showing that at on occasion the liberal press appears to stretch its routine framing of activists and dissidents (generally they are given only brief vox pops in which to speak, as in the *Observer* piece) and to approach the radical media’s notion of native reporting. Similarly, John Vidal’s biographical piece on a single Spanish protester

(Rogelio Sastre-Rosa) gives over half of his feature to the activist’s own voice (*The Guardian*, 23 July 2001). Vidal arranges the activist’s account of his history and current experiences to present a rich, complex picture of anti-capitalism. Sastre-Rosa notes how “different” the police are in Genoa from those patrolling the “Reclaim the Streets” demonstrations in London and how they were eager to use tear gas. Yet Vidal’s account acknowledges the protesters’ various roles as protagonists: it is the attempts to pull down the “wall of steel” surrounding the summit that provoke the police attack. Sastre-Rosa argues that it was the anarchists who “destroyed a city and were not stopped at all” whereas the police “attacked the peaceful demonstrators”. He is also given space to argue his reasons for protesting at Genoa: “The tools of democracy give people no say. In that way I think direct action is justified.”

Whilst none of his other pieces draws on the activist experience in such depth, throughout his reports from Genoa, Vidal consistently explores the complex picture of the G8 protests: the brutality of police raids; the violence of some black bloc anarchists and evidence for their role as *agents provocateurs*; the debates between violence against property and violence against the person; the “parallel summit” organised by demonstrators and taking place at the same time as the street violence. His account of the raid on the Genoa Social Forum (also 23 July 2001) highlights events already familiar to us from the *SchNEWS* eyewitness reports, and also relies on eyewitness testimony: blood on the floor, smashed computers, savage beatings, protesters “trembling in fear”. Vidal is as careful to nuance his assessment of the black bloc protesters as carefully as does *SchNEWS* (23 July 2001) and his critique of the White Overalls in advance of the summit (19 July 2001) draws on Italian members of the group to present a sober, politically situated exploration of their non-violent tactics that shares far more with the piece from *Squall* than it does with *New Internationalist’s* shallower picture. Vidal shows himself as a journalist committed to the same issues of social justice as those of the protesters of whom he writes; he demonstrates high degrees of concordance and

sensitivity to their arguments, strategies and tactics. His reporting displays a sophisticated understanding of the issues from the activists' perspectives, due in large part to his extensive access to and use of activist sources. Ultimately, though, his writing gains from his detachment from those activists—he is writing about them, not for them. Whereas *SchNEWS*'s reporters, as we have seen, stand aside to let their witnesses speak—before returning to offer activist-led contextualisations of their witnesses' accounts—Vidal's "position in tension" is one where it is not possible, for reasons of professionalism and "objectivity" (however fugitive a notion that is), to inhabit that ground of activism. His position is far more difficult to sustain. If that of *SchNEWS*'s native reporters is a technical one, then Vidal's is an intellectual one. His native reporting (if we may think of it as such) is more concerned with resolving the collision between a commitment to grassroots protest and a professional obligation to "detachment" (and that in the context of a liberal press).

The only eyewitness report written completely by someone involved in the protests is that by Noreena Hertz (*The Guardian*, 22 July 2001). Her participation is oddly hybrid. Of the three days she documents, the first finds her travelling to Genoa by ferry and train, where she emphasises the diverse nature of the activists, who yet are united by their cause:

Among them is a 50-plus-year-old Manchester secretary who had never been on a protest before but had "just had enough." John, who is 18, has just taken A-levels at a comp [comprehensive school] round the corner from where I grew up. Also there is Brian, the pacifist priest, and Doris, an 82-year-old pensioner. Age range diverse, accents diverse—this is not a middle-class rebellion, not anarchist chic—this is people who are united by ideals, not by class.

Friday, the day of Carlo Giuliani's death, finds Hertz strangely alone: "I walk for miles in search of the non-violent demonstrations that I am sure must be taking place." Her solidarity with her travelling companions, her fellow protesters, is absent; she learns about Giuliani's death from the television in her hotel, where she sees "image after TV image of cars burning

and smashed-up shops". This seems detached and isolated behaviour for either an avowed protester or an eyewitness reporter. The final day of her diary does find her briefly "back on the streets with hundreds of thousands of others". Yet at the close of her report she is once again "away from the crowds" in an alleyway, pondering the nature of the movement, whose "objectives and its very essence keep on shifting".

Whether we should consider these solitary episodes as dramatic devices or not, they do show a very different form of journalism from the engaged narratives and commentaries in *SchNEWS* by activists in the thick of the "battle for Genoa". Hertz's writing does not draw on the protesters' own experiences either during or after the violence in the streets, unlike the *Observer* piece. Her ambiguous relation with her fellow protesters (Is she with them or observing them? Why did she not use them as sources for locating the non-violent events she was seeking?) goes some way to explain the deep scepticism within the radical media towards the professional journalist. Despite her avowed participation as a demonstrator her status is evidently that of movement intellectual alongside Monbiot and Klein, a privilege won by her mainstream visibility as a published author with Heinemann and her imputed "It-girl" reputation—once again, the media valorises through individualising rather than through the collectivism that was the hallmark of this and similar protests.

The witnessing that does occur mostly takes place within the expected frames and routines of the liberal press; unsurprisingly the space that activists are given to speak is not under their control, neither do they speak on anything but matters of immediate experience. In this respect, however sympathetic they might be to the activists' cause, the papers are reproducing, if not the hierarchy of access *in toto*, at least that hierarchy's routinised insistence that "ordinary people" (for so they are portrayed, despite their extraordinariness) may only speak on matters of which they know—for the mass media, these are matters of direct experience. Geopolitics, corporate and government critiques and ideological discourse

remain issues for experts, whether the papers' own or the movement's (self-appointed or "mainstreamed") spokespeople (such as Monbiot, Klein and Hertz), whereas in *SchNEWS*, as we have seen, political commentary is provided by activists, alongside their eyewitness accounts.

Conclusion

The counter-discourse presented by the activists writing for *SchNEWS* gains much of its counter-hegemonic effect through its subversive use of a tabloid writing style. This counter-hegemony is further extended by the paper's critique of mainstream journalism and by the radical media's general suspicion of dealing with mainstream media institutions. There is no sustained relationship between the two media formations; the liberal press's deployment of the occasional "radical voice" (as in the case of *New Internationalist's* Katherine Ainger) might be seen as a classic example of a dominant hegemonic practice's ability to accommodate aspects of an emergent practice. Noreena Hertz's "witnessing" offers further evidence of such accommodation. It is noteworthy that both she and Ainger (in different ways) present "activist accounts" that are ultimately separated (physically and ideologically) from the lived experiences of those on whom they report. By contrast, *SchNEWS's* journalists always remain at the centre of things; they also remain anonymous, apparently eschewing any desire to be recognised as "names".

This is not to say that the mainstream media's incorporation of a radical news practice (in this instance, of native reporting) results in that practice being completely diluted. Whilst the liberal press inevitably produces a very different type of journalism from that of the radical media, there is no denying the platform that on occasion is given to the voices of activists. Liberal and radical journalists appear to share very similar assumptions and ideologies about Genoa: they both highlight "the battle for Genoa" and display a profound commitment to exploring the brutal tactics of the police and the global strategies of the G8 nations. Both use activists to tell their stories for them. Both formations appear dependent upon each other: for example, *SchNEWS's* style is drawn from tabloid journalism; *The Guardian's* primary sources, whilst not being exclusively drawn from the grassroots protest movement, are dependent on close links with aspects of that movement (say, through the campaigning work of George Monbiot). In spite of this interdependence, access for activists to radical and mainstream media remains stratified and this, in the end, remains the most significant difference between mainstream hegemonic news culture and its radical counterpart. Aspects of Downing's binarism between radical and mainstream journalistic practices thus remain, though a hegemonic approach to comparative analysis goes some way to nuancing relationships between the two and to identifying some significant aspects of inter-media articulation in terms of those practices.

Notes

¹ The online *Squall*, whilst offering lengthier, more analytical articles, also employs similarly colloquial headlines in its coverage of Genoa: "Basta Blaster!" and "Ain't No Stoppin Them Now" introduce a feature and an interview that deal with the Italian direct-action group Ya Basta! It is worth emphasising, if it is not already apparent, that such headlines do not denote any trivialisation of the issues within the reports. An interesting converse example might be found in *New Internationalist's* coverage of the direct-action group the White Overalls, of whom Ya Basta! are part. The White Overalls are so named because they dress in white overalls, heavily padded to protect themselves from police attack. In an article titled "Resistance is the Secret of Joy" (*New Internationalist*, August 2001, pp. 24–25), John Jordan and Jennifer Whitney argue that the White Overalls are evidence of the power of carnival, that they are a "comedy army". Jordan and Whitney argue that "resistance and rebellion" should be "fun" and draw on their own experience as activists of "organizing and mixing pleasure and rebellion at anticapitalist actions". Their sentiments are in stark contrast to the portrayal of the White Overalls by a Ya Basta! activist in *Squall*, who finds in their defensive padding a "biopolitics" of self-defence that stands against the "violent defenders of an order that produces wars and misery". Far from mere comedy, "the padding on the comrades' bodies signifies instead the passage to another political grammar". Neither *Squall's* nor *SchNEWS's* reports employ language as ideologically dense as this, but neither do they ever approach the rather trivial characterisation in *New Internationalist*.

- ² The four pieces, each one at least double the length of *SchNEWS*'s articles, that comprise *Squall*'s online coverage of Genoa, present further variants on this model. Like *SchNEWS*, its writers are all activists, yet in its coverage *Squall* gives over far more of its space to the direct speech of those activists whose words *SchNEWS* tends to embed in its own reports. A 3500 word "Statement of Jonathan Norman Blair" details one activist's experience of the police raid on the Genoa Social Forum, his beatings at the hands of the police, his subsequent treatment in prison and his eventual deportation (after being judged to have been illegally arrested). The language used by Blair is strikingly similar to that of the activists cited by *SchNEWS*, especially in his description of the police raid: "They eventually left the room and as we lay there in a pool of blood they threw some of the window frames and other furniture on top of us." Blair's account stands alone, with no introduction or comment by *Squall* itself. Whilst the brief "Basta Blaster!" contextualises the Ya Basta! group's role in the Genoa protests, the two lengthy articles linked to it present the group's voice in more direct fashion. *Squall* reproduces an English-language version of the group's "Declaration of War against the Powers of Injustice and Poverty"; its interview with a Ya Basta! activist is in a simple question-and-answer format, where the respondent's answers take up almost the entirety of the article. These contributions are striking not only for their length and their focus on the voice of activists; we might also ask why, in so flexible a medium as web journalism, do we not have more of them. It is as if these pieces are expected to stand as a discursive, analytical set of contributions, recognising that papers such as *SchNEWS*—with which *Squall* shares an annual book-length collection of news and features (*SchNEWS Squall Yearbook*, 2001)—will offer more timely, if briefer contributions.

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