Digital Media Arts

As Terrain for Inter-cultural Political Activism

By Sohail Dahdal

A Dissertation Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Creative Arts, University of Technology, Sydney, 2014.

Certificate Of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text. I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Production Note:
Signature removed prior to publication.

Date: 30 / 06 / 2014

Acknowledgements

Preface

This creative doctorate is an extension of twenty-five years of work in the new media industry and thirty years back to the early days at university as a student activist organizing demonstrations against the regime in Jordan. When I decided that I was to embark on this journey of creative practice-led research my main goal was to see if it was at all possible for social media to contribute in a meaningful way to social change. This was a considerable time before the Arab Spring and WikiLeaks were big stories in the mainstream media. Much has changed since the early days when I embarked on this research in late 2009. The question of the role of social media in participatory activism has changed from an 'if' to a 'how?', 'why?' and 'to what degree?' Some of the early questions of my research were to be somewhat answered through the facts as they appeared on the streets and through the numerous papers (and books) written about the Arab Spring – specifically the role of social media in the events that have taken place in the last few years. In terms of my research position, this was a big change from the early days when my question about social media as an enabler was looked at with a great deal of uncertainty. The main premise of this argument is now well documented both in literature and popular culture.

I am an artist before I am a researcher, but both are mutually inclusive. Furthermore, I am an activist before I am an artist. Again the two roles are closely entwined, so that in effect this has been a project of passion. Its auto-ethnographic nature means that the 'I' and 'it' are hard to separate. This also means that occasionally throughout this exegesis I will refer to my history as an activist, which is a significant factor contributing to the discussion; this should be seen in the light of the creative work and the research auto-ethnographic approach.

The creative project, consisting of three major online and offline campaigns and an interactive documentary (attached to this exegesis), is an organic dynamic work that relied heavily on constant feedback; the reactions and interactions of those who engaged with it. For this reason, I want it to be quite clear that while this project has been solely created, designed and developed by me, it was also shaped by the contribution of those who chose to engage with the content and sometimes even volunteered themselves to generate actions and content. Finally, this project and thesis is only a beginning that others might build on in order to better understand how can we use new technologies to generate positive and effective engagements with participatory politics and social change, to make the world we live in that bit more pro-active rather than re-active.

Writing Style

In the writing of this exegesis I not only document the creative project and answer the question of this creative doctorate, but also place it in a wider context that involves me

> Sample diary note taken on: date @ time
> Description goes here – these are notes that I have written to myself using an IPhone documenting App. They are not editing and are often written on the fly in an informal language. They might also contain typos that are left as is in the spirit of capturing that moment.

the writer, you the reader and an experiential journey aimed at capturing that elusive process of creative ethnographic research, which is not easily communicated in writing. My approach to capturing that spirit of the process is to pepper my writing with some of the diary notes I wrote along the way. These notes were hurriedly written, sometimes on a bus, often in the middle of a conversation or while watching TV. There are two things to keep in mind in regard to the nature and content of these notes: one, they will be stylistically and thematically separate from the narrative. Hence they might not appear to relate directly to some of the other things said on their particular page. However, often they do. To make it less distracting I have styled these notes in self-contained boxes like the example above. In order to be true to the thoughts of the time, I have not edited these notes; I merely present them, as they serve a secondary conceptual (sometimes atmospheric) purpose.

Table of Content

Table of Figures

Abstract

The increasing use of social media in politics is creating new opportunities for greater public engagement in participatory political activism, raising important questions about the most effective ways for activists and independent artists to use social media. This creative doctorate explores the role that social media can have in shaping Australia's multicultural policies by engaging a wider section of the community in a cultural conversation. The creative component, *Talking Cultures*, is a campaign-based multimedia project that experimentally applies a hybrid model of online and offline campaigns, utilising social media and street art to elicit civic engagement. The major creative outcome of these campaigns is an interactive documentary that connects the street videos with social media exploring the creation of a 'contact zone' of engagement. From a theoretical perspective the research explores the implications of applying the contact theory of social studies to social media campaigns as a way to establish contact and create online political participatory actions within the frame of a 'contact zone'.

The research approach looks at participatory activism in the context of the communicative ecology of multicultural Australia as debated in the mainstream media, on social media and on the street. Using auto-ethnographic action research methods I examine the creative process of implementing *Talking Cultures,* through the artist's iterative attempts at engagement. The research concludes with two key findings. The first is that beneficial to the success of any social media campaign is a hybrid model of engagement that operates on social media and also offline. The second is that in order for a 'contact zone' to be established there is a need for an authority that is not easily attainable solely through social media. This authority can be established by engaging an online personality, enlisting an existing established social media community, or by conducting part of the campaign offline.

The *Talking Cultures* campaigns' results conclude that it is possible to engage the public in participatory political activism using social media but that for this engagement to be strong enough to spill over to the offline sphere, all pillars of the contact theory must be met, especially the need for an authority that can add value to the message. Furthermore it is suggested that social media campaigns should frame their message in a way that would encourage participant to perform offline actions outside the social media platforms into a wider communicative ecology.

Keywords

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The relationship between advance in science and social change is not new. La Boétie, the French theorist of the 16th century, in an essay directed at the authorities, goes to great lengths to warn about the consequences of new technologies on the balance of power and the control of the public (La Boétie 1548). Freire – in his 1970 book *Cultural Action for Freedom* – argues that technology and education have always worked hand-in-hand to encourage and incubate cultural revolutions that then led – in turn – to direct action on the street (Freire 1970). In fact the idea that technology can go as far as creating a revolution can be traced back to the role of the press in the French revolution (Blanning 2003). Technological innovation has become increasingly important over recent years in enhancing and literally creating opportunities for social change, and in some cases, providing the necessary element for revolutions. With this rising popularity of social media platforms many researchers credit these platforms with playing a large role in these recent waves of revolution and unrest like the velvet revolution, the Arab Spring, the Twitter assisted Iran election demonstrations, Occupy Wall Street and more recently – in Brazil – the *Salad Uprising* (Spinks 2013).

This creative doctorate looks at the question of *civic activism* in the context of engaging Australians in the multicultural debate using social media and online/offline interactive storytelling in order to create an intercultural art as a form of public engagement in participatory politics. Civic Participation is situated within and aimed at addressing social and community issues, the emphases here are on the engagement generated by tangible participation, 'that involves a variety of different activities, such as volunteering for non-political groups, raising money for charities, attending neighbourhood meetings, and supporting the social responsibility of a corporation by buying its product or services' (Valenzuela et al. 2011: 399).

The key to this form of engagement or participation is for it to lead to social change directly or indirectly. This social change in the context of civic engagement needs to be a deliberate attempt by an individual or a group of networked individuals to make decisive change to society (Ginsberg 1958). The aim here is to look at outcome of this attempt at social change in the context of social media campaigns and street-based art in order to answer the question of how to elicit online engagement and the likelihood of it translating from online to offline action. In particular, I will explore the effect of this online/offline movement in the

engagement of wider sections of the community. The importance of also looking at offline engagement stems from the increasing evidence that suggests that, 'online and offline communications complement each other and can jointly motivate people to mobilize civically' (Valenzuela et al. 2011: 408.). The aim is to argue that the advances in technology and the rising popularity of social media (boyd 2008) provide an opportunity for more engagement from sections of the community that otherwise would not have engaged in any form of political activism.

The relationship between the social media platforms, content and changes in the nature and volume of engagement in political activism relies heavily on dialogue that starts with stimuli and response, and can be symbolic in its interaction (Mead 1934; Silva 2008). This dialogue and interaction results in an engagement with a goal or specific campaign. It is not isolated in the social network, but in fact forms part of a larger outer network. As a result, the actors engaged, the technology used and the world context at the time form an integrated ecosystem. This ecosystem can be best explained by using communicative ecology theories: 'At the core of communicative ecology principles is that social life is constituted by and through a communication process' (Altheide 1995: 59). In addition, it is important to note that this ecosystem consists of not just many actors but also many media platforms all working together: 'In modem societies, most of the information we have about members of other communities, and in general about people different from ourselves, comes not through any direct relationships, even the casual ones formed constantly in urban streets and shops. Rather, it comes through the media' (Calhoun 1998: 391).

The method used in this doctorate is Participatory Action Research (PAR), which has been applied to the *Talking Cultures* project, which forms the creative component of this Doctorate of Creative Arts. *Talking Cultures* is designed as a multi-phased, multi-modal campaign that forms the basis of an iterative process of observation, reflection and planning. It draws on the techniques discussed in Tacchi's studies that link creative research situated within a communicative ecology with a specific form of Action Research that is ethnographic in nature. Tacchi refers to the collection of these methods as Ethnographic Action Research or EAR (Tacchi 2003). *Talking Cultures* uses these research methods and applies them to each campaign in order to observe the role of social media and street art in the engagement of actors around the issue of multicultural Australia. The aim is to create an open and equal dialogue that allows the public to engage in the multicultural debate.

One key addition to EAR is the focus on the value of my unique position as an activist artist and a researcher who is embarking on a question where the results and the process are entwined in such a way that the key value of the research is the personal experiences encountered while putting the campaign into effect. Essentially, I use modifications of the EAR methods to be more auto-ethnographic.

The choice of the topic *multiculturalism* is important in-so-far as it aims to engage diverse communities in Australia in participatory politics. Much research shows Australians of non-Anglo-Saxon backgrounds are under-represented in politics (Zappala, 1999). The subject of multiculturalism in Australia has recently been at the forefront of the political debate and the media. More importantly, it has been a topic of debate since the early 1970s with the introduction of Australia's multicultural policy, which aimed to replace that of the concept of integration. In addition, some of these debates poignantly questioned the relationship between policy and social capital in reference to the cultural value of a multicultural Australia (Jakubowicz, 1981; Hage, 1999; Hage, 2005; Jakubowicz, 2011). The importance of this debate in shaping our future as a nation cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, the choice to look into the Australian multicultural debate is significant in relation to my ethnic background and the choice of an autoethnographic approach to my action research. In this case the value of an artist working in an autoethnographic capacity and within his or her own cultural space is important in providing a new dimension to the research. Moreover, it supplies a new perspective that adds to knowledge of the research that otherwise would have not been possible. An insightful example of this has been described by Somerville and Perkins (2003), who were involved in interdisciplinary, intercultural research collaboration on the north coast of New South Wales in Australia that involved Indigenous archaeology, oral history and eco-tourism with the local Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation. Tony Perkins, the leader of the Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation, has indicated how the research intends to recover archaeological evidence and oral histories of the Indigenous people (Somerville, M., & Perkins, 2003).

The *Talking Cultures* campaign attempts to move this discussion about the future of multiculturalism in Australia to social media and to examine the nature and level of engagement that this topic can produce. Furthermore it seeks to trigger intercultural dialogues resulting in ethic community engagements with the wider Australian public.

I have found it necessary to draw on two distinct fields of study. The first is communication studies, looking into communicative ecology theories in the context of the above mentioned

Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) methodologies (Tacchi 2003). The second is the contact theory of social studies, which states that in order to create a meaningful discourse, we need to have an open and equal environment, authority and a clear goal (Altheide 1995). It is important to clarify two key terms here. Firstly, what does social media in the context of this research mean? In this case the term 'social media' refers to current (and future) technologies that allow the formation of communities and provide easily accessible tools for the dissemination of content. These technologies provide content and enable communication and interaction between the actors in the community and the rest of the Internet users outside that particular social media tool. Secondly, 'participatory political activism' can be defined as any form of action that has a political nature. This activism can be as nominal as 'liking' a Facebook page or it can be involved in the formation of offline groups that carry street actions. This research is concerned with activism that revolves around the type of civic engagement that uses Alinsky's style (Alinsky 1971) of civic counter public activism discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

There is empirical evidence to support the notion that the contact theory has a positive effect on intergroup when all its conditions are met. Some studies report that a positive effect can be achieved even with some of the key conditions not met (Pettigrew 1998: 68). Consequently I became increasingly interested in applying this positive effect of the contact theory in the context of social media, particularly its effect in generating dialogue that could be applied to the online environment. The main premise in relation to establishing a contact is that once a contact is established, there is a significant reduction of prejudice against the outer-group. Thus there is a greater chance for intercultural dialogue:

> Hegemonic representations are characteristic of closed groups, in which stereotypes of others are created and sustained through propaganda. Groups that are more open to encounters with other groups are characterised by emancipated representations that allow diverse attitudes and some form of dialogue, as long as the central precepts are not violated. Liberal groups allow unrestricted plurality and diversity of opinions, and are characterised by polemical representations that allow voiced opposition. (Sammut and Gaskell 2010: 4)

This research aims to understand social media in terms of a symbolic interactionist engagement within the frame of communicative ecology, thus social media is an almost perfect place for the creation of a contact zone (Pratt 1991). This critical juncture relies on the mix of these fields of research to explore the possibility of creating a contact zone that is able to strengthen the role of social media in the engagement of ethnic communities in Australia (Jakubowicz 1981) in participatory political activism.

1.1 Exegesis Structure

The next three sections of this chapter (**Chapter 1: Introduction**) elaborate on the nature of the question this thesis seeks to answer. Section 1.2 (The Question of Engagement) details the main question that this doctorate explores. Section 1.3 (Uncharted Territory) highlights the unique position I occupy as a long time activist, established new media artist and a researcher. This unique position and the auto-ethnographic nature of this exegesis lead the reader to the last section of Chapter 1, section 1.4 (Introducing Talking Cultures), which details and summarises the creative project to give the reader a clear picture of the scale of the project and its multi-phased campaigns.

In **Chapter 2, Context**, I review the existing literature about the role of technology in social change and the value of generating a contact zone online and offline to elicit engagement in participatory politics. Chapter 2 is divided into 5 sections. Section 2.1 (Research as an Art Form) introduces my research methodology and my use of ethonographic action research and communicative ecology to explore the creative project. Section 2.2 (The Nature of Activism) looks at literature that explores civic engagement and the history of this type of activism. Section 2.3 (The Rise of Social Media) looks at the history of social media from the early days of the Internet until the emergence of more recent forms of social media platforms. Section 2.4 (Technology and Activism) looks at the relationship between technology and activism. Section 2.5 (The Australian Context) looks at activism in relation to the Australian multicultural debate.

In **Chapter 3, The Making of Talking Cultures**, action research commences, looking at the iterative process used in the implementation of the creative project, which begins with street video interviews and concludes with *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary. Here I detail my experience as an independent artist/researcher with limited resources, engaging the public in an intercultural dialogue through art. Section 3.1 (A Dynamic Iterative Process), looks at the core of my methodology, using an iterative process and applying auto-ethnographic action research to observe and modify my campaigns. In this section we will also go through some of the failed iterations to highlight the importance of responding to these failures – and reflecting then reinventing. Section 3.2 (A Question of Openness) looks at the *Questioning Cultures* street video campaign. Section 3.3 (Expert Interviews) examines the *Culture Salon* campaign. Section 3.4 (Participatory Collective Action) looks at the *Culture Mob* campaigns and the two virtual flash mobs. Section 3.5 (The Contact Zone Interactive Documentary) looks at *Talking Cultures'* final major creative piece.

Chapter 4, Results and Discussion highlights the key results of the research and includes my own reflection on the impact the *Talking Cultures* campaigns were able to have in relation to the creation of a contact zone. Section 4.1 (A Hybrid Model of Engagement) discusses the importance of running hybrid online/offline campaigns. Section 4.2 (Open Dialogue Equals Weak Content) examines the problems that come with creating open dialogue to satisify the conditions of the contact theory. Section 4.3 (Low Engagement in Positive Contact) discusses the impact of positive contact verses negative contact on participatory engagment. Section 4.4 (The Medium is the Message) relates the creative project to the wider context of media within a communicative ecology. Lastly section 4.5 (Social Media vs. Interactive Documentaries) examines the merits of creating an interactive documentary as opposed to just using existing social media platforms.

The last chapter**, Chapter 5, Conclusion and Recommendations**, summarises the results and presents some recommendations for independent artists and activists interested in the matter of the use of art to generate engagement. Section 5.1 (Key Outcome) looks at the key contribution to knowledge resulting from the auto-ethnographic action research looking into the limitations and then elaborating on the key findings. Section 5.2 (Words for Activists) provides practical advice to independent artists that plan on creating campaign-based artwork aimed at creating civic participatory engagement. Section 5.3 (Future Action Research) provides a starting point for future action research that aims to further explore the question of participatory engagment through social media and future technologies.

1.2 The Question of Engagement

Recently, with the increased use of social media, a new field of research has emerged, one that is mainly concerned with the effect of social media on participatory politics, activism and dissent against the State. Emerging from this are two opposing arguments. That of the techno-optimists argues that social media is important in helping and even enabling activism. Many researchers who champion this view include Shirky and Castells (Shirky 2008; Castells 2012). Castells draws from his networked-societies theories, where he cites examples of movements that have prospered as a result of digital communication: 'It is through these digital communication networks that the movements live and act, certainly in interaction with face-to-face communication and with the occupation of urban space' (Castells 2012: 229). He goes on to claim that the use of these technologies not only contributes to engagement but in fact becomes an essential part of the actions that result from this engagement: 'The more the movement is able to convey its message over the communication networks, the more citizen consciousness rises, and the more the public

sphere of communication becomes a contested terrain' (Castells 2012: 237). Shirky goes even further by arguing that social [media] tools directly aid social change: 'our social tools are dramatically improving our ability to share, cooperate, and act together. As everyone from working biologists to angry air passengers adopts those tools, it is leading to an epochal change' (Shirky 2008: 304).

On the opposing side of this argument is a school of thought that proposes that the Internet can be detrimental to the promotion of participatory activism by creating a generation of *slacktivists* (or slack activists). 'Slacktivism,' is a 'low-risk, low-cost activity via social media, whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity' (Rotman et al., 2011: 821). As opposed to practical activism which is all about 'the use of a direct, proactive and often confrontational action towards attaining a societal change.' (Ibid.) They use it in such way that it lacks tangible actions and therefore produces a counter effect by lowering the intensity of street engagement when it is explored online. This argument puts the role that social media plays in a negative light, claiming that online campaigning only distracts from street activism by providing an outlet for any participants who might have otherwise felt obliged to take more substantial real-world action. Furthermore, it claims that once engaged online, the ties and engagement created are weak because of the low entry point resulting from the ease of online engagement. The popular writer and columnist Malcolm Gladwell argues in his famous New York Times article, that 'The evangelists of social media', such as Clay Shirky, 'seem to believe that a Facebook friend is the same as a real friend and that signing up for a donor registry in Silicon Valley today is activism in the same sense as sitting at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro in 1960 [was].' (Gladwell, 2010: 46.) He goes on to explain that social media, 'make[s] it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact' (Gladwell, 2010: 49). Gladwell is not alone in his criticism of the techno-optimists. Morozov, in his book *The Dark Side of the Internet,* warns of 'a naive belief in the emancipatory nature of online communication that rests on a stubborn refusal to acknowledge its downside' (Morozov, 2010: xiii). These views, somewhat dismissive of the power of social tools, assume that online actions are somehow less important than offline actions. This is too generic and completely ignores online campaigns that have already successfully enabled tangible change. Karen Skinner, campaign director in Australia for another online petition platform *change.org*, said slacktivism was a lazy term, 'At the core of this dismissiveness of slacktivism is the belief that real social change requires deep commitment – things like sit-ins or marches on Parliament' (Moses, 2013).

The premise that social media will increase the number of people engaged in participatory politics is substantiated by numerous studies with empirical evidence as in the case of the effect of the use of Twitter in the aftermath of the Arab Spring (Wilson and Dunn 2011), however it is clear that the role of social media is not unique. It should rather be thought of as part of a larger ecology that extends to other more traditional media tools and other cultural and social factors. I also question the latter argument, which claims that a lack of engagement is a failure that results from the use of technology. The counter-argument, however, is that the failure of online engagement to translate into tangible action is often a failure of the goals and methods of the campaign, rather than the fault of the tools. The question of a level of engagement relies on various factors but is usually scaled up or down based on the amount of time spent performing the task, the complexity of the task and the number of physical activities needed to perform this task.

In Valenzuela *et al.* study of online/offline civic engagement they scale engagement using two scaling systems, one for actual offline engagement based on the type of engagement being volunteered such as attending a meeting, fundraising, and consumer decisions like to buy or to boycott. They then use a second variable for online engagement, where online engagement is measured by how much talk there is about the issue online, 'the results of this study showed evidence that suggests that 'online and offline communications complement each other and can jointly motivate people to mobilize civically' (Valenzuela et al. 2011: 407.). The task here is to bridge the gap between these opposing arguments, by examining how to increase the level of engagement so that it can be more effective both online and offline. The primary question is how we can use social media in participatory political activism in an effective way that can both engage wider sections of the community and translate this online engagement into offline action. The main premise for this middle ground view becomes much clearer the more one reflects upon it. If the online campaigns are run well enough with clear goals, then it is indeed possible to create strong engagement that can extend and translate to offline actions. The creation of social bonds online is a difficult process, though the bond once a group identifier is established can be strong enough to lead to offline actions, thus the online actions have to translate to offline actions that in turn feedback to the online campaign (Schumann and Luong 2011). More interesting are the extra benefits of alternating the online and offline, creating a snowball of online/offline actions (ibid.). My unique position as an artist, researcher and activist allows me to observe and test the importance of social media tools to validate the argument that, for stronger engagement, the secret is in the methods and the goals, not in the tools.

1.3 Uncharted Territory

I've been interested in social change and political participation since my early days as an activist at university in Jordan in the late

Diary note taken on December 18, 2012 @ 12:34pm
Must add my activist time at uni of Jordan and my photo club, who I am is key part of this project.

1980s (Dahdal 2011). This has carried through to when I immigrated to Australia and after I studied film as a second degree and began making interactive documentaries alongside my work as a digital media producer. As the researcher, artist and activist, the integration of these roles, or rather their mutual friction, reinforces the value of the EAR research method and introduces that extra dimension of auto-ethnography. My experience as an activist before the Internet and as an activist now ensures I am well placed to compare online activism to the previous forms of activism. As a new media artist, by embedding myself in the experience, I was able to self-reflect and engage with the multicultural question using a combination of social media and interactive storytelling. In addition, being an immigrant autoethnographer documenting my interactive art experience can serve to create a distinctive contact zone that is unique in its perspective and thus able to create new forms of knowledge in relation to the contact zone and it's role in establishing intercultural dialogue. Catherine Manathunga in her valuation of research as an intercultural 'Contact Zone' argues that:

> These forms of intercultural dialogue are highly productive because of the new kinds of cultural and intellectual identities that become possible. It is therefore likely that rigorous but respectful dialogue about cultural, disciplinary and other differences has the potential to create exciting new forms of knowledge construction. (Manathunga, 2009: 168)

EAR provides me with a theoretical framework that can be applied to my multimedia art within an online/offline multiplatform communicative ecology. The emphasis on my own reflections and observations, I believe, will be of especial benefit to the knowledge acquired in relation to multicultural art and it's role in participatory activism because of my unique position as a new media artist, an activist and an immigrant already embedded within the multicultural art community. Autoethnography and self-reflection are the key to this process:

> When manifested in increased self-reflection, adoption of the culturally relevant pedagogy, desire to learn about "others of difference," development of an inclusive community, or self-healing, the self-transformative potential of autoethnography is universally beneficial to those who work with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. (Chang, 2007: 11)

What makes autoethnography a perfect fit is its relevance to engagement with an art project where the artist is an integral part of the artwork, as in the case of an interactive documentary: 'living/lived cyberethnography relates to auto and critical ethnographic engagements. First, the cyberethnographer becomes a part of the setting, living and providing the framework for the interpretation of experiences' (Rybas and Gajjala, 2014: 4).

As I explored what had been written about activism in the digital age I discovered that there exists a clear gap in the research, which evidently was in need of articulation, further defining the nature of the bridges between 'old-style' activism and the new Twitter-revolution age of activism (Mcquillan 2011; Postmes et al 2002; Fuchs 2012). While recently extensive research has been pursued into the role of social media in activism (with opposing views as outlined above), it seems to lack a greater understanding of how this role contributes to activism on a civic level. It asks to what degree the public can be engaged at higher levels of activism that move freely from the online to the streets and back online. Empirical data shows that the role social media played in the Egyptian revolution may have been somewhat exaggerated at the time (Wilson and Dunn 2011), yet the same data shows that social media did in fact play an important role. The focus on this space of interaction tightens. Can social media ever be the sole enabler? I'm passionate about finding ways to use technology as an enabling tool for social change, but I find Shirky's statement about linking technology with the freedom of the world problematic. He writes, 'social tools create what economists would call a positive supply-side shock to the amount of freedom in the world' (Shirky 2008: 172). This – I argue – is an incomplete view in so far as it operates independently of other factors that affect this ecosystem. I agree with Christian Fuchs' response to Castells' *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age* when he points out that Castells 'assumes a linear connection between the technical availability of political information and the change of collective consciousness and the rise of political protests' (Castells 2012: 237; Fuchs 2012: 781). Fuchs also points out that 'society's reality is more complex than this simple behaviouristic model (Internet as stimulus, critical consciousness and political action as response) suggests' (ibid.).

This creative project's campaigns do not operate in a vacuum. They are part of a larger context, related to the advances of technology, the changing habit of the actors, the consumption of that technology and more importantly, the cultural context in which these campaigns are enacted – in this case the multicultural debate in Australia. To focus on the question of engagement, and because the measurement of value can be subjective, it was conjectured that leaving the nature of engagement as open as possible would enable me to be open to observe and respond to unexpected types of engagements. This helped to frame the research in terms of the stimuli and responses that were encountered during interactions with the public both online and on the streets.

The question of the level of engagement and what constitutes activism remains hotly debated, because of the implications of the role of technology in participatory politics:

While clearly a cause for concern for those optimists wishing that more of their fellow citizens would join them in political discussions online, should we conclude that the everyday use of social media has limited potential for democratic innovation? In part, the answer to the question depends upon what we regard as democratic activity. If we move beyond the traditional engagement with mainstream politics, such as voting, party membership, petitioning representatives and the like, and adopt a more open conception of democratic citizenship, a different focus and set of questions emerge. (Loader 2011: 761)

The use of online and offline campaigns has provided a great opportunity for me as an immigrant, an artist and researcher to engage with the community on many levels of social media and on the streets of Sydney. It has put me in a unique position to be able to observe the various campaigns as they interact with the community and the various responses to this interaction. One of the advantages of using social media and street campaigns is to ensure full exposure and maximum reach for topics that in the past (using early internet communication tools) largely favoured 'white wealthy males' (Loader 2011: 758). In that sense seeking the wider community becomes an integral part of the question of civic engagement, because 'a persistent question in the research on political participation is whether it may be extended beyond a narrow constituency of politically active and informed citizens' (Loader 2011:764). Using street art and online creative campaigns is my way to engage this wider community. Thus, from an artist's perspective, this research is positioned as a creative experiment that reflects on community engagement in participatory political activism both online and offline.

1.4 Introducing Talking Cultures

Talking Cultures is the creative component of this doctorate of creative arts. It is a multi-phased campaign-based art project that leads to a final interactive documentary piece. The project is set in the streets of Sydney and online on social media. Spanning two years of video interviews and one year of follow up online actions and concluding with *The Contact Zone* Interactive Documentary; the aim of the campaigns and the documentary is to use art to generate an intercultural conversation that examines the future of multicultural Australia.

1.4.1 Questioning Culture Campaign

Questioning Culture is an iterative campaign-based social media documentary that involved shooting street interviews in various forms, then uploading them to YouTube to test the effectiveness of the questions and the interviewing technique. The campaign progressed through 5 iterations across 2 years of shooting in various suburbs of Sydney. The final result was more than 100 videos of questions and answers around the multicultural debate. The conversations start on the streets in the form *vox pop* street interviews, in which Australians ask questions on camera. In turn, these are answered by others interviewed on the streets.

The collection of the Q&A street interviews are put online so that the conversation can continue online via social media text and video responses.

1.4.2 Culture Salon Campaign

Exploring the various aspects of multiculturalism in Australia, the Cultural Salon campaign seeks to balance the street interviews with interviews with key Australian experts. The interviews, usually 30 minutes to one hour in length, were set in a casual environment in the office of the interviewee. These interviews include key questions about the future of multicultural Australia and the role of the interviewee and their institution in this future and their own response to the street interview questions.

1.4.3 Culture Mob Campaign

Culture Mob is a new concept that uses social media to generate online virtual flash mobs run by volunteers. They plan coordinated (legal) activity using humour and subtle confrontation to make a social statement aimed at the promotion of intercultural dialogue. This campaign resulted in two virtual mobs; one on Facebook and Twitter (*Breaking the Stereotype*) and the second was a Twitter only virtual flash mob (*People Like Us*).

1.4.4 Talking Cultures and Social Media

The key to this project is that social media was heavily relied upon for its promotion. All the content was posted on YouTube and promoted on Twitter and Facebook, also using a Facebook event for the virtual flash mob. In addition, Talking Cultures had its own Wordpress blog that served as an anchor for all content, a place to volunteer and to register events and as a portal to connect users with the social media platforms.

1.4.5 The Contact Zone Interactive Documentary

The Contact Zone is an interactive web documentary of 36 videos shot on the streets of Sydney and Twitter hash tags that were used to generate more conversations and connect the offline campaigns with the online social media platforms. This interactive documentary uses the latest HTML5 video capabilities to display the videos, taking the form of a street conversation on a park bench. In addition, by accessing the Twitter API and extracting tweets that have a specific hash tag, these tweets were then embedded in the visual interface of the interactive documentary – thus connecting street art with social media. *The Contact Zone* – www.thecontactzone.com – is hosted on a video-enabled server that allows for a responsive environment to interact with the video elements of the project in an experiential manner. The process of implementing the *Talking Cultures* campaigns and the technical aspects of the coding and designing of the *Contact Zone Documentary* are discussed in Chapter 3, while the next chapter relates the creative project to my theoretical research.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT

This chapter highlights some vital literature concerned with the rise of participatory online civic engagement and the sociological contexts within which these engagements occur. There are four distinctive areas of study and literature that directly relate to the question proposed in the previous chapter. Those areas are:

1. Participatory action research methods, specifically ethnographic action research (EAR) and its focus on communicative ecology methodologies.

2. The literature around the nature of activism and specifically that, which is concerned with civic engagement and with the involvement of the public in participatory politics.

3. The increased innovation within and consumption of new digital technologies, that encourages usage and in some cases are the catalyst for online civic engagement.

4. The sociological context in which these technologies operate, particularly in relation to the contact theory.

2.1 Research as an Art Form

As an artist and a practitioner I have found that the most effective way for me to research my question is to follow a path that is both action based and reflective: 'When art practice is theorized as research, it is argued that human understanding arises from a process of inquiry that involves creative action and critical reflection' (Sullivan 2006: 28). I looked at various research methods including David Silverman's grounded theory (Silverman, 1993), participatory action research (Heron, 1995; Sherman, 2000), and quantitative research (verses qualitative research), and Rogers' (2010; 2013) Digital Methods initiative. I found Rogers' approach problematical in-so-far that Rogers argues that, in relation to Internet research, instead of digitizing existing methods we should be looking at repurposing methods embedded in the devices. The problem with relying on the digital method is that it is situated primarily within the online scope and is platform specific, which is problematic for a multiplatform online/offline action-based project. During this extensive reading on action research, I encountered Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) (Tacchi et al. 2003), with its application to practice-led research involving existing social media tools.
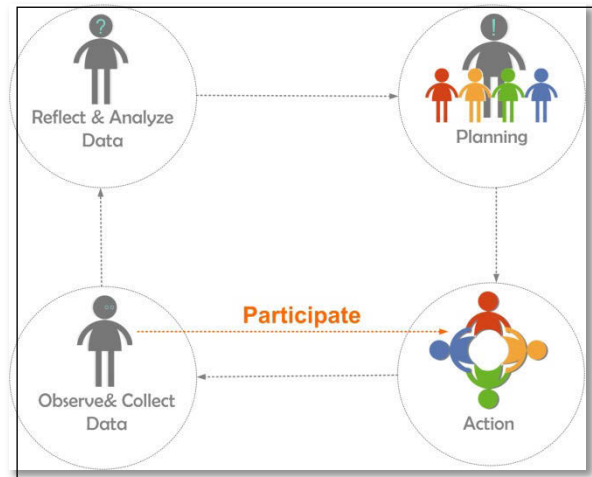
Figure 2.1 – EAR Methodology

A key factor in choosing EAR was its heavy reliance on a dynamic iterative creative process, which closely aligns with my creative work and research question. Figure 2.1 (EAR Methodology) is my own visualisations of the EAR iterative concept, based on a diagram included in the *Ethnographic Action Research* hand book (Tacchi et al. 2003: 2). However, speaking specifically of the creative work (being reflective in nature), it became necessary to modify EAR from a mainly outwardly focused approach that relies heavily on observation to a more introspective approach, focused on the artist's journey, the act of the creation, any issues encountered and their relationship to the phases of observation and reflection. This is in essence an auto-ethnographic approach to EAR.

One of the key premises of EAR is that it is concerned with understanding the issue being researched and created from within the culture itself. Furthermore EAR looks at a problem in a holistic way, combining various research methods into one process, that enables an immersive and inclusive creative environment. What was most interesting in EAR was that there was room for the artist to embed the creative work within a reflective and flexible environment. In a report for UNESCO in 2003, Salter and Tacchi explain the EAR:

> Ethnographic Action Research is based on a combining of two research approaches: ethnography and action research. Ethnography is a research approach that has traditionally been used to understand different cultures through largely qualitative methods such as participant observation and wide range of interviews. Action research is used to bring about new activities in an intervention through new and better understandings of situations. (Salter and Tacchi et al. 2003: 1)

EAR looks at the creative project and the research output from the perspective of a holistic communicative ecology. This enables the exploration of two fundamental parts of the question: the engagement nature and the level of that engagement. EAR helped draw on two fields of research, one concerned with engagement as a social behaviour and the application

of the contact theory in order to create dialogue in a public sphere. The other, involving communicative ecology, which lies within the field of communication studies research and looks at media, actors and actions that result from these media as part of a total ecosystem. In the handbook for Ethnographic Action Research, Tacchi, Salter and Hearn explain the relationship between the idea of an ecology and communication:

> If you are studying the ecology of a forest or desert, you do not look at one or two animals or plants in isolation. You study how animals, plants, soil, climate and so on are interrelated, and may have impacts on many things simultaneously. The same applies to communications and information: there are many different people, media, activities, and relationships involved. (Tacchi et al. 2003: 15)

The concept of Communicative Ecology fits with the desire to examine social media in the context of the modern world, not only as tools of communication but as part of the changes in society that resulted both from the technological advances and usage and where the technology becomes part of these changes:

> If a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all of our senses will occur in that particular culture. It is comparable to what happens when a new note is added to a melody. And when the sense ratios alter in any culture then what had appeared lucid before may suddenly become opaque, and what had been vague or opaque will become translucent. (McLuhan 1962: 41)

What communication ecology does is build on McLuhan's media ecology theories, adding the element of interaction to the relationship between the medium, the actor and audience

> Diary note taken on June 18, 2013 @08:37pm
> One of the best examples if media ecology is how the Turkish demonstrations used social media because of the discourse that social media has acquired as a tool for activism rather than the other way around.

(Altheide 1995: 58), thus blurring the boundaries between actors and audience while preserving the importance of the context and the events. It emphasises the cultural context, giving it more relevance by virtue of the interaction facilitated by new technologies. Altheide points out that 'our understanding of political communication has been hampered by an overemphasis on the content of what is communicated rather than an analysis of the process and context' (Altheide 1995: 60). In a communicative ecology, all actors play a role in the outcomes of that environment. This means that, in the context of this action research it is not only the users and the artist who are essential parts of it but also the technology. Its application and implications play a key role in the results of such action research:

> Both hardware and software have a bearing on how platforms are understood and, indeed, function within the ensemble of research methods. There are specific attributes, less at the level of hardware and software, and more in terms of the relation between online and offline activities. (Kanngieser, 2014: 308)

In the case of the contact zone interactive documentary the software issues played a major

role in deciding what level of embedded interactivity I was able to include in the project and to what degree does this process affect the results in the number of interactions created. Additionally, it affected the results in-so-far as the length of time that was required due to the complexity of the coding, time that could have been spent making more street videos.

In addition, communicative ecology draws heavily on symbolic interaction theories (Blunter 1994), where more emphasis is placed on the type of interaction and the actions derived from the use of these new technologies.

> Diary note taken on November 28, 2012 @ 9:04am
> In communicative ecology the technology is part of social change in an organic implicit way as part of the social context. But I also think key to that is the occasional major shift resulting from deliberate explicit moulding and utilising of the technology to affect change an informed actor and hence the auto ethnography aspect of PAR is vital to this research.

This relationship means that the tools and technologies are also important in this dynamic. Each new tool and the way it is used introduces a whole new set of cultural contexts that will – in turn – provide different sets of social changes and different types of engagement. For example, recent advances in social media enable new applications – like *Facebook* and *CheckIn* – to frame actions in terms of location, time and relationships. This is important because it allows for 1) personal connections, 2) location based activism and 3) immediate action which can lead us to the principles for establishing a personal connection as advocated by Alinsky (Horwitt 1989). Alinsky was adamant that in order to effect change you need to be in the middle of the action and more importantly employ any techniques available at the time (Pearson 1967), projecting this personal mobilization to the online environment translates directly to an interaction based on civic participation starting from the individual and extending to the community.

Castells' research about networked societies also looks into the role of technology within the context of a society's formation and actions. He feels no need to reference previous research and makes an attempt at starting afresh from a strongly techno-optimistic point of view. If we dig deep, we find that Castells refers to communicative ecology, albeit indirectly:

> The process of constructing meaning operates in a cultural context that is simultaneously global and local, and is characterized by a great deal of diversity. There is, however, one feature common to all processes of symbolic construction: They are largely dependent on the messages and frames created, formatted, and diffused in multimedia communication networks. (Castells 2011: 780)

Castells' work on networked societies is a good starting point for the understanding of how communication tools, applied correctly, can result in the creation of loosely structured networks. However, his work falls short of an explanation of the strength and real-world effect that these interactions can (and do) create. A lot of the new research around this topic

leaves an important gap in our understanding of the nature of participatory engagement in the real world that results from an online interaction, as if the two were not directly entwined. In my research, I was particularly interested in the exploration of this online/offline movement of participation. It is important to note that my decision to explore both online and offline aspects is because I believe, in order to truly investigate online civic participation, we also need to combine it with offline activities. 'This should then account for the different effects that the online produces as opposed to the offline – even though they are complimentary to each other' (Valenzuela et al., 2011: 403). As a result, I decided to create a multi-phased campaign-based art project, in which the campaigns alternate between the online and offline environments. The EAR method was perfectly suited to this type of research as it allows for the study of the two types of engagement by observing each campaign and then reflecting and fine-tuning before starting the second campaign.

This meant that based on the reaction received from each phase, the campaigns were constantly changing. This iterative process was encouraged by the capacity of EAR to integrate different methods while still provide a structured approach:

> Ethnography is an approach to research. It is not one specific method (like participant observation, or interviews, or surveys). In fact, it is a multi-method approach: we use whatever mixture of methods is appropriate to our situation; and we adapt each method to our situation. Moreover, ethnography tries to integrate different methods into one holistic study. (Tacchi et al. 2003: 12)

Having multiple campaigns that shift their message based on the results of each campaign proved to be invaluable. Each phase of the one campaign fed into the understanding of the research question, constantly reflecting and changing the campaigns based on the nature (and level) of engagement. Being able to adjust the creative project at each milestone, gave a better understanding of online vs. offline engagement and the movement of actors across platforms in direct response to the campaigns. It is important to note that the project was situated in a communicative ecology, where social media is already used to engage Australians in the multicultural debate. My choice of topic also provided valuable information on how each campaign could be compared to other campaigns running at the same time.

This form of engagement, which uses art to rally a community around a cultural goal, helps in the creation of a virtual third culture space by multicultural groups that specifically use social media with clear ethnographic data (McEwan and Sobre-Denton 2011). In Australia there have been numerous attempts to apply art to create actions that enable greater civic

engagement. One initiative comparable to the *Talking Cultures* campaigns is the anti-racism campaign run by *All Together Now* (All Together Now 2013). This operation uses multiple platforms to engage the community in the fight against racism. However, it is mainly run online via the *All Together Now* website and direct email (see figure 2.2 – All Together Anti-racism Campaign). *Talking Cultures* adds one extra element by including street-based campaigns in addition to the online version. This helped to make a good comparison between online and offline and to measure the effect of social media on events moving from the online to the offline platforms and vice versa. In essence, the street campaigns are my attempt to include an element of face-to-face contact so that the social media campaigns can feed into the street actions: 'CMC can supplement face-to-face contact and encourage organizing around common agendas for action' (Calhoun 1998: 381).
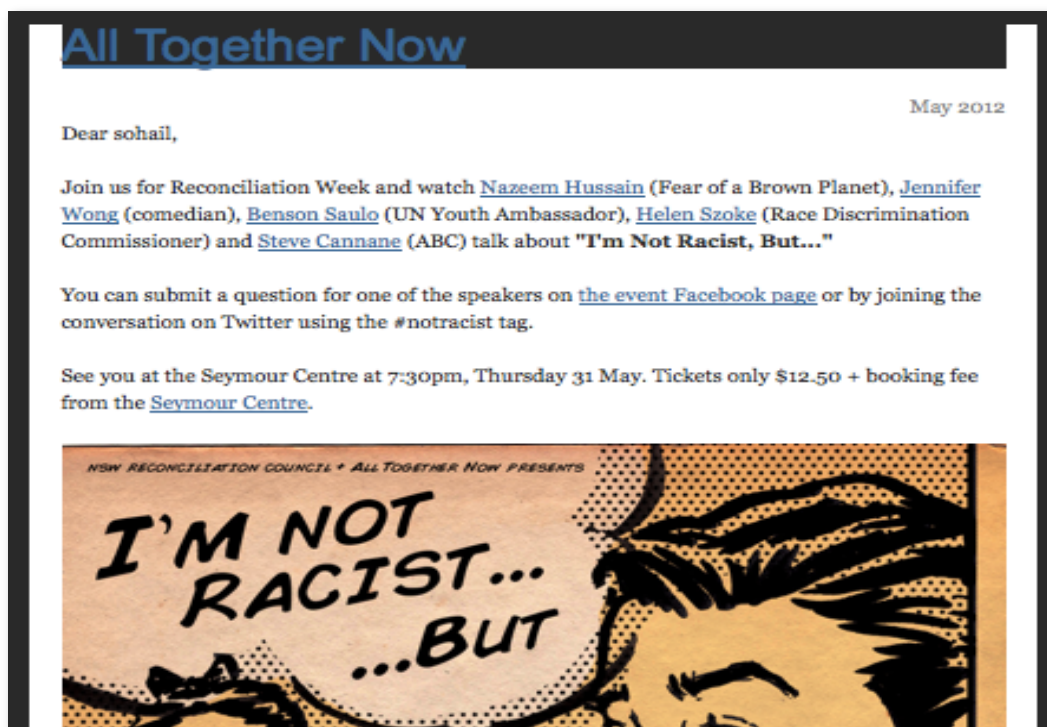

Figure 2.2 – All Together Now Anti-racism Campaign

2.2 The Nature of Activism

The concept of civic engagement and participatory politics gained momentum in the mid 60s especially with the emergence of the movement against the war in Vietnam (Small 2002). While the use of the word activism is relatively contemporary, the role of the public in promoting political and social change is not new and was often referred to in literature in terms of rebellion against the government of the time. Marx argued that revolutions and the need for change are a direct effect of economic factors that will drive the masses to revolt. His account does not put faith in intellectual revolutions and rather argues that revolutions can only be conducted from the ground up. Nothing embodies this more that his famous statement: 'the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways: the point, however, is to change it' (Marx 1845: 8). There were also various interpretations of Marxist theory including a branch of Marxism that advocates cultural revolutions instigated by the masses (Gramsci 1971). This brand of activism (seeking cultural and social change) has heavily influenced the events of the mid to late 60s in the USA and was famously articulated and championed by the American writer and community organiser Saul Alinsky. From the beginning I had wanted to frame my campaigns to align with his school of thought – or rather actions.

Alinsky's brand of activism works on the principle of engaging communities at a local level, to enable a wider national or even global level, thus working from the micro to the macro. What is interesting about this type of activism is that it can be directly relevant to the issue of global online participation vs. offline engagement. Alinsky in *Rules for Radicals,* talks about the advantage of directly relating actions to one's own personal experience and the importance of being able to package that experience as coming from within the circle of friends or from within one's own immediate community (Alinsky 1971). Alinsky's work with communities using personal relationships is exactly the type of activism with which this research engages, for many reasons including:

1. It focuses on civic engagement, which fits well with this campaign's message of involving ethnic communities in the multicultural debate.

2. It can be done within the law. Alinsky was always pushing the boundaries of the law, declaring that being a radical need not make you an outlaw.

3. It uses methods that work well within a local frame and can then be applied nationally or even globally. This can translate in the case of *Talking Cultures* to the offline campaigns

targeting the local (and personal face-to-face) level that can the be extended online to engage on a national (virtual) level using social media that can also target personal relationships (if not physically) via the friends' connections and recommendations on social media. This could help engage community members who would have not been engaged otherwise, who are not geographically local in regard to their personal contact.

4. There are proven examples of success using Alinsky's method in the online environment. One notable to mention would be the success of the Obama election campaign (Williams and Gulati 2007).

Historically mainstream media, specifically radio, has been directly engaged in an effort to create civic involvement and in particular political engagement. This has – in some cases – been an effort to elicit global connection (often as a form of Western influence on Third World countries). The BBC World Service has long been a leader in this field, with explicit polices that dictate a concerted effort to engage the public and in turn to influence events in countries outside the UK. Coincidentally, this dates back to the Second World War and continues on (Herbert and Black 2013). With new technologies this type of influence has continued and shifted in such a way that the role of social media platforms has become complementary to mainstream media. Together their impact is felt across the globe including the latest events in the Middle East. Already, much research is being conducted to try to understand how social media affected these seemingly technology-influenced revolutions (Egyptian Chronicles 2010; Harb 2001; Verdeil 2011; Lotan et al. 2011; Mcquillan 2011). In my view, this influence needs to be understood in the context of the social situation and as an extension of other existing technologies. In the book, *Social Media Goes to War*, I argue that social media are not the only things that caused or helped create the Arab spring. At the same time, the role of social media must not be marginalised to merely that of a tool – in fact it is an integral part of that social context (Dahdal 2013). The effect of social media is at a cultural level and part of the larger ecology of what had been happening in the Arab world long before the start of the 2010 events (Howard 2011). It is important to note however that in this case social media was also a tipping point that made the ecology ripe for that major shift. It was also a key factor for a cultural shift due to new information made abundantly available on social media networks:

> This new generation of youth, educated, unemployed, and frustrated with the status quo, was ready to act but lacked organizational skills. What they had instead was a lot of free time, which meant they spent more time in Internet cafés chatting online, creating online communities and accessing social media, and consuming content that otherwise would not have been available. (Dahdal 2013: 68)

20

This creative project and research bases its activities on primary concerns with participatory political activism. It engages the wider section of community with real actions that go beyond pressing the 'like' button. So how does this community behave in terms of tangible coordinated action? McAdam suggests that size matters and reaching a critical mass could be a key in the formation of community: 'Change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claim and identities' (McAdam et al. 2001: 331-333).

The issue of the definition of a community is at the heart of this process. Do we target a community or create one? For example *GetUp* refers to its members as a subset of a community rather than a community in itself (GetUp 2013) while an organisation such as AVAAZ (AVAAZ 2013) refers to its members as a community. Here in lie two important factors for consideration. One, is the word 'community' used loosely online and therefore open to interpretation. Two, what is the difference between the formation of a community – with all the implications and commitments that come with it – and just a group with members who subscribe to the same goals?

The word 'community' seems to suggest that the members of the community are in for the long haul. Their connection might have been formed based on a shared ethos and set of goals that serve to bind them together. In other words – the bond is strong and lasting – whereas a group that is based on a more specific interest and an immediate goal or campaign – that might require simple actions or just moral support – is more likely to be short term. Online it's possible to join a group from the top down, while a community is built from the bottom up and is formed more organically.

In my view, until the online environment can build better mechanisms for the formation of real communities (emphasis here on the long term goals) the bonds generated by group affiliations are not as strong nor as lasting as the bond generated by offline communities that form by virtue of geographic or demographic proximity. It is important to note here that group ideology translates to collective behaviour by the creation of an interest and a salience for the in-group (Truner 1987).

2.3 The Rise of Social Media

The idea of social media as an enabler of communication and online community forming is not new. Initially and in essence, the Internet was invented as a communication tool with the first email sent in 1979. In addition, online communities have been part of the Internet since its first days. As early as 1978 there was the formation of online bulletin boards and groups via Usenet (boyd 2008). The idea of having collections of people communicating online and forming online communities is as old as the Internet moreover – what might be surprising to some – is that the first social media sites *geocities* and *theglobe.com* go as far back as the mid 90s. It took another ten years for social media to reach a critical mass with websites such as *MySpace* (2003), *Facebook* (2004) and then further refined with *Twitter* (2006). Social media is now an essential part of the Internet, is embedded in everyday life and not just as a tool for media consumption, but also as part of our popular culture and day-to-day social interaction (boyd, 2008). The basic definition of social media platforms is that:

> [They are] essentially web based software which connect people and help them stay in touch with friends. Those who open accounts in social network systems establish and maintain friendships, hook up with dates, meet new friends, find jobs, and exchange recommendations and news. (Rybas and Gajjala, 2014: 1.)

It is important to note that social media as a platform, is part of a bigger picture that involves other online platforms and the various technologies and infrastructures that they are built upon. In addition, there are other factors that influence participatory culture, like governments' policies and even sometimes the policies of large social media companies with both corporate and personal interests (Burgess et al., 2009).

So what makes social media so different? Social media began coming into prominence at the same time that browser technology was advanced enough to allow for more media to be uploaded (and consumed) easily (ibid.). The emphasis here is on the word *easily*. One factor that contributed to the success of social media is the ease with which a user is able to register, view and interact with content posted by others. That user is allowed to respond easily by posting content or indicating their likes/dislikes. Another key factor for the success of social media is that it has combined the three key elements of communication, community and content into one platform that is easily accessed, manipulated and shared. Before social media the Internet was a place full of segregated communities. A vast amount of content and communication was constantly passed around via emails and news groups, but there was no one place where you could access the three Cs (content, community, communication) in one easy step. *YouTube* and *Facebook* changed this equation forever, by creating a platform that

had enough members to make it reach a meaningful useable critical mass of users sharing content socially. This ease of use as well as the ability to share on social media has not only ensured its phenomenal rise in the uptake of new members, but also that the Internet was suddenly full of user-generated content. This content has continued to be uploaded at an astonishing rate (Burgess et al. 2009). What makes this content important is not necessarily the quality of its production nor the strength of its message but more important is its raw form, its immediacy, its ability to be shared and its ability to connect personally to help in the formation of instant groups and communities. Even before the rise of *Facebook* and *Twitter*, scholars had already understood the power of the Internet to form groups:

> The most important role of the Internet in structuring social relationships is its contribution to the new pattern of sociability based on individualism…it is not that the Internet creates a pattern of networked individualism, but the development of the Internet provides an appropriate material support for the diffusion of networked individualism as the dominant form of sociability. (Castells 2002: 131)

What social media adds to this, is the ability and the tools that allow for these groups to organise and form campaign-based activities that sometimes were/are able to extend from online to the street. The success of *MeetUp* is a good example of how a social media platform that is specifically geared towards actions that start online and continue with a physical meeting, has the potential to generate a following that translates into offline actions (MeetUp 2013). *Facebook* was also instrumental in shifting the concept of communities from the old *AOL* and news groups of niche communities, into a more mainstream large community that is able to engage with issues via the introduction of *Facebook Groups*, *Pages* and *Events*. These in turn allow for causes and campaigns to be conducted entirely online and reach a large pool of actors (Holzner 2009). It is also worth noting that the social media does not merely consist of *Facebook* and *Twitter* but of thousands of platforms, some country specific. This landscape is vast and constantly changing so that by the time you read this, new platforms will have emerged, while some current ones will have disappeared or become redundant. Such is the speed at which these new technologies are evolving.

Understanding the rise of social media is all about the content and the actors' interactions with that content: so the space in which social media plays is best understood as diverse and dynamic; it works within an ever-changing ecology where the technology is as important as the users with which it is engaged (Tacchi 2006).

In order to understand the rise of social media networks, we need to look back to some of the early examples that used technology to build online communities. For example, 1998

marked the establishment of *MoveOn,* a new social movement concerned with the creation of a civic and political movement that used the online environment to create a two-way conversation between politicians and the public. *MoveOn* was one of the first social movements to use the Internet to create a two-way conversation, and at the same time use its platform to disseminate content and information to its membership base. In addition, *MoveOn* was able to utilise its platform as a communication tool to organise online and offline campaigns, thus creating an activists' social network and marking the beginning of a real effort to take political participatory activism to debate online and to the masses. After *MoveOn*'s success, many similar organisations around the world began to surface. For example, the Australian advocacy group *GetUp* and the Canadian movement *RightOnCanada.ca* that campaigned for human rights in Canada (Dobbin 2007). Another well-established online social movement that has recently boasted 10 million members is *AVAAZ*, which started as an online advocacy group and evolved into online/offline social movement with an ambitious global agenda. Ricken Patel, the founder of *AVAAZ*, in an interview with *The Guardian* says, 'It's important to look beyond the technology. You click when you go on iTunes or eBay, but nobody disputes that these sites have changed commerce' (Kingsley 2011: n. pag.).

2.4 Technology and Activism

The use of technology for social change and in political movements is not new. For instance, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation of Chiapas, Mexico was one of the first movements to effectively use new media for their activities (Castells 2002). In a paper written by Henry Jenkins as part of his contribution in Burgess' book about online videos and participatory culture, he proposes that – in fact – online cyber activism is an extension of the participatory culture going as far back as the 1920s (Burgess et al. 2009). Evgeny Morozov talks about the effect of the Internet revolution on the resurrection of local nationalist movements (Morozov 2011). There are notable examples of technology use in rallying the public even before the rise of social media, for example, the event around the deposing of former Philippine president Joseph Estrada in 2001. What is interesting in this case is the use of instant communication technologies to aid the revolution. The Short Messaging Services (SMS) was used effectively to mass huge numbers of activists in a specific location within a very short time (Teodoro 2005). Recently, there has been much interest in the role these technologies play in shaping our social and political futures.

A hotly debated topic is the effect of social media on participatory politics, beyond that of online engagement and its translation into real world street actions, for example, its role in

the Arab Spring and other real recent world events. There is clear empirical evidence that shows Internet users are more likely to be politically active and they often use the Internet as a tool of engagement and communication. Although – conversely – the same data indicates that Internet engagement has little or no effect when it comes to higher forms of engagement (Rainie 2011). The extent of the role that social media played in instigating and helping in the spread and success of the creation of a critical mass of protests has been extensively discussed in recent literature and in the mainstream media. It is hard to argue against the role that social media played in the Arab Spring, for example. The debate seems to centre on the extent of this role. In my view, even though social media was a key player, this role was one part of a group of many elements that ensured the critical success of what started as a small incident in Tunisia. Zahera Harb writes:

> [I]t would be wrong to suggest that broadcast media have been totally redundant in the revolutionary process. Throughout the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, Al-Jazeera became a disseminating tool for user-generated content. A call for Arab citizens to send their footage of unfolding events to the Al-Jazeera website for it to re-broadcast on its TV screens was a key factor in the dissemination of what was happening. (Harb 2001: n. pag.)

The global rise of social media had already ensured that online tools for the revolution were readily available, and not only were they regularly accessed by the largest demography in the Middle East but also the demographic that was the most in need of change: the youth. This need for change might provide the first clue to how social media became part of a bigger socio-cultural context that works both ways: as in the McLuhan media ecology ideas of how media changes the message and therefore plays a more significant role than a mere tool (McLaughlin 2003). This use of social media in the Arab world dates back to the late twentieth century with clear evidence that political movements such as the Jordanian Brotherhood were not just active online, but were actively organising demonstrations using their website (Ryan 1998). It is important to note that social media do not work in total isolation from other media. For example we can't ignore the role of *Al Jazeera Television* in the Arab Spring, although it is considered that heritage media is still as new as social media, especially in the context of the Arab world (Howard 2011).

The ease with which one can exit a social media action means – by definition – that the commitment or long-term ties are less than that of an equivalent offline action:

> While the informality of online communities may create some obstacles for bridging social capital, it can also allow individuals to move freely through multiple communities and easily terminate participation with fewer repercussions if a cultural error is made. (McEwan and Sobre-Denton 2011: 255)

While it is true that online ties are somewhat weaker for many reasons including the low entry point that lowers the value of the ties, a crucial advantage in the use of social media for activism is in being able to directly target individuals with information, in a way that relates to their own experience. This information is often relayed to users via the use of their own network of friends.

A good example of the importance of this role can be found by looking at how the youth in the Arab world saw the potential of social media, not just as a tool for organising, but also for content distribution:

> In Libya before this, there was no media, explains Shallouf. 'So if Tobruk made a revolution, [the government] would spend three to five days killing us and finish the revolution. Nobody in [larger nearby communities and cities] al-Baida or Darna or Benghazi would have heard about it. But now with Aljazeera and Facebook and the media, all of Libya hears about the revolution and is with the revolution. They know about it. They think, I am Libyan, this is my family, so I will go to the street to fight for them'. (Hauslohner 2011: n. pag.)

The Arab Spring was not the first time social media had been used in the Arab world. Activists like Ahmad Gharbeia were already active online, waiting for when the time was right. According to Ahmad, 'the role of the Internet was critical at the beginning. On the 25th, the movements of the protesting groups were arranged in real time through Twitter. Everyone knew where everyone else was walking and we could advise on the locations of blockades and skirmishes with police' (Mcquillan 2011: n. pag.). To these youth the importance of having these social media tools at hand proved not only crucial, but a matter of life or death.

We have recently witnessed how swift and effective social media can be in expanding a movement. In the case of the Occupy protests, starting with as few as 18 mentions on *Twitter* in New York on the 12th of September, growing to a huge global movement of millions of members by the 12th of October, only by using the hash tag #occupywallstreet and the generic goal of fighting greed (Perez 2011). The message was simple 'we are the 99%' and we would like our voice to be heard.'

In the case of the *UK Riots* David Cameron went on record to claim that social media was being used to plan criminal actions:

> Everyone watching these horrific actions will be struck by how they were organised via social media. Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill, and when people are using social media for violence we need to stop them. So we are working with the police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality. (Halliday 2011: n. pag.)

Cameron's statement is only the tip of the iceberg in terms of the beginning of a battle between social media-enabled activist movements and government institutions. It is important that we do not merely preach to the converted, which is what seems to be the common goal of many cases of online activism: 'What evidence we do have about social media platforms suggests that the most active political users are social movement activists, politicians, party workers and those who are already fully committed to political causes' (Loader 2011: 761). Common goals also need equal status as stated in the contact theory:

> Positive contact outcomes are achieved in conditions of equal status, cooperation, acquaintance, and supportive institutional norms. These conditions are an instance of intercultural relations characterised by open dynamics. Where open systems allow perspective taking and positive intergroup outcomes. (Sammut and Gaskell 2010: 13)

The contact theory comes from another field of study, namely social studies, but its significance in terms of wider engagement and as part of the communicative ecology, should not be ignored. In the context of community engagement, Pratt further specifies the contact theory with the use of the term 'contact *zones*', in which there exist 'social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other' (Pratt, 1991: 1). Pratt here uses the premise of contact theory to establish a dialogue and build on it by defining a distinctive place where this dialogue is conducted (Pratt, 1992). This contact zone can lead to social identification – knowing who we are and who others are – which is a prerequisite for social action (Jenkins, 2000). This important zone that generates dialogue in the ecology of social media can be a powerful tool in cementing intercultural dialogue and thus widening the participatory political sphere (Loader, 2011).

Creating a dynamic contact zone that can seemingly travel between the online and offline realm of a community is a powerful way to establish dialogue that can translate into strong ties formed around a common goal. Once this contact zone is well defined, it is possible to move actions freely from online to offline and vice versa. Digital media offers unique contexts for what Harwood (2010) refers to as 'contact spaces' that often move beyond the face-to-face and textual modes of communication. This dynamism of digital media can help to postulate its role in intercultural communication (Pfister and Soliz 2011).

In Melvin Webber's classic essay 'Community without Propinquity' he shows how communities can form from various social and demographic situations. His research – even though it took place before the Internet – clearly demonstrates that he understood the importance of forming these communities even if the relationship was distant in geographic terms (Webber 1963). Social media is unique in-so-far as it not only allows for direct

personal connections and the formation of loose non-geographic communities, but also because it allows these communities to exchange content that can vary from a simple 132 character message – as in the case of a tweet – to a complex fully interactive video message, as in the case of a annotated YouTube video (Burgess et al. 2009). Social media allows for this exchange of content and interaction on two levels, among friends – as in strong personal connections – and within a networked society (Castells 2009), as weak ties form using the community tools of social media like *Facebook Pages*, *Groups* and *Events* (Holzner 2009).

This combination of a personal and networked society creates a powerful way to disseminate content. Just the same, it might also have its drawbacks. For example, loose virtual networks can be detrimental to strong, meaningful local political engagements. This situation has been slowly rectified with the increased sophistication and the popularity of these social media networks and the addition of technologies that pinpoint one's location.

Using art to promote intercultural dialogue is a key ingredient for policy advocacy in the pursuit of an intercultural society on the

> Diary note taken on April 14, 2013 @ 11:58am
> In SMH, just read about DIY rainbow crossing on Facebook inspired by authority rejection. So in this case authority was there in a negative way double power.

domestic and international levels. In order for governments to take action, it is often artists who take the leading role in the creation of an environment where such policies are seen as necessary: 'Frequently, independent artists and arts companies introduce their own intercultural strategies irrespective of whether or not governments have formulated policies, strategies or programmes' (Cliché and Wiesand 2009). This cultural exchange if done properly, can become an effective tool for intercultural dialogue, especially if it 'attempt[s] to address local audiences more effectively, to be sensitive to the diversity of people who inhabit and move through the region, and to engage more effectively with non-traditional audiences' (Lally et al. 2011: 159).

There have been numerous attempts to engage the public around the world in the multicultural debate (Jakubowicz 2013). Art and particularly art that promotes intercultural dialogue has been an integral part of this process. For example, the British Council created *Arts for Intercultural Dialogue Toolkit (AID)* to provide 'a starting point for those who have no formal experience of using the arts to support intercultural dialogue but would like trying it out' (British Council, 2011). Another example of an art cultural project is *inSite*, a project that ran across the US/Mexico border, operating as an art institution. At the same time, it actively promoted a cultural network and an art-focused dialogue across the San Diego/Tijuana Regions. These campaigns used art as a method of engagement and dialogue,

thus they bypassed many of the issues connected with waiting for policy formulation. In addition, there are now numerous collectives that understand the need to provide support for activists with limited resources to enable them to pool resources and thus generate more effective forms of action. Groups like the tactical collective outline on their website: 'We help rights advocates use digital tools safely and effectively with films, toolkits and guides, and by hosting trainings and events' (Tactical Tech, 2014). This new wave of participatory art is not just restricted to North America and Europe but is also increasingly spreading across the globe – including here, in Australia.

2.5 The Australian Context

There are already many Australian success stories worth mentioning of which *GetUp* is one example (GetUp 2013). Additionally – and relating more specifically to multicultural Australia – advocacy online campaigns such as the *All Together Now* anti-racism campaigns (All Together Now 2013). Priscilla Brice-Weller – the founder of *All Together Now* – notes that their work in the last three years has been centred around the idea of generating a constructive conversation on the subject of racism (Brice-Weller 2013). In some cases these movements are only defined by their *Facebook Group*. One example of such project is *Diversity in Australian Media* (Diversity in Australian Media 2013), which is a Facebook group whose goal is to promote diversity in the Australian media landscape.

As we can see from the examples above, the social media landscape in Australia is ever-increasingly dotted with movements that

Diary note taken on September 18, 2012 @ 3:04pm
With the Recent events regarding the violent anti USA demo in Sydney I wonder if this will affect responses to Islam and Arab questions videos.

advocate multicultural Australia. The question that remains then is how successful these movements are in engaging the wider sections of community and what is the level of that engagement? In addition, questions remain to be asked about whether that engagement translates between the online and the offline or is static, remaining at its point of initiation. Interviews with the many activists in this field indicate that there is an online engagement, but that this engagement has not been measured in terms of following up to see if it translates into offline actions. This is due to the lack of funding and the difficulty in following up this type of observation (Brice-Weller 2013).

In Australia *GetUp* has been one of the key online activist organisations able to garner popular support and in many cases challenge the government of the time with considerable success. The *GetUp* technique was simple enough and depended upon taking on campaigns that mattered to its members (Dobbin 2007). These campaigns often revolved around key

topical political issues that were being debated in the media and/or parliament at the time, such as the issue of boat people and the refugee debate, multiculturalism and the carbon tax to name but a few. In some cases *GetUp* took on issues that were being ignored by both the government of the time and the mainstream media, such as the case of David Hicks in which *GetUp* was instrumental in forcing the Howard government to pressure the USA to release him from Guantanamo Bay. *All Together Now* makes profound use of social media to deliver its message of anti-racism, one example of which would be its recent tools for fighting racism on public transport (Brice-Weller 2013). Australian artists have also created participatory projects that have a cultural context and live on social media. For example, photographer Michel Lawrence uses *Flickr* and the website *www.allofus.com.au* to deliver his message of cultural diversity in Australia today. Organisations such as *Information and Cultural Exchange ICE* (ICE 2011) support numerous art projects that promote intercultural dialogue. For example the 'Hip Hop Who r u' project helps hip-hop artists to create a social media presence and promote cultural exchange (ibid.; Lally et al. 2011).

My campaigns relied on the openness and low entry point of the social media in the Australian context, to satisfy the contact-

> Diary note taken on September 21, 2012 @ 7:45pm
> Suddenly the whole debate is around redefining multiculturalism – to the worst I'm afraid!

theory pillars and thus create a contact zone where there can be interaction (Silva 2008) based on stimuli and response. Interactions using artistic forms of dialogue are a powerful way to elicit responses to stimuli, as part of a symbolic interaction that can manifest as identification with a goal. Thus we are connected to the actors in a contact space based on their symbolic interaction that is part of a bigger communicative ecology, which – in turn – derives from the research around media ecology, drawing on the symbolic interactions perspective (Hearn 2009). In communicative ecology the cultural context is a key to the process of social change. *Talking Cultures* attempts to use the multicultural debate in Australia to frame this question. In that sense we are saying that participants interact with the *Talking Cultures* online/offline campaigns by either agreeing to be interviewed on the streets or by engaging in text or video responses to the question being asked on the *Talking Cultures* website and on social media or – even further – by volunteering for street action.

So why did I choose the multicultural debate as the topic of this political engagement? First of all, because it was a current divisive issue facing Australians that went back to the question of the cultural context of a communicative technology. Secondly because I believed this topic would target wider sections of the community that are not often engaged in political activism, namely people from various cultural backgrounds. Thirdly, the choice of

multiculturalism is a personal one, my background as an immigrant with close ties to various ethnic communities has provided me with an opportunity to self-reflect and work from within, and so, in this case, autoethnography has become an essential part of the process: 'Autoethnography is becoming a useful and powerful tool for researchers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multicultural settings' (Chang, 2007: 14). In my documenting of this process I have attempted to relate the results of my work to my initial interest in the subject of multiculturalism. Even if it was a personal choice, it still lends relevance and knowledge to the process via the virtue of its autoethnographic nature: 'The first-person autoethnographic narratives breach the separation of researcher and subjects and establish intimacy with the reader as a co-participant of the dialogue' (Rybas and Gajjala, 2014: 4). This refers to our attempt to create an open environment that can encourage dialogue as speculated in the contact theory. In framing their engagement, in the form of intercultural dialogue and lowering the entry point to comment on a social media link, many arguments are eliminated. Furthermore, what is of greater importance is that this process is dynamic and constantly moving from the online environment to the offline and back online into social media platforms; it is – to reiterate my earlier point – *dynamic*. Overall the goal of the *Talking Cultures* campaigns was to engage the wider Australian community in reflection on and participation in debates about multiculturalism.

CHAPTER 3: THE MAKING OF TALKING CULTURES

This chapter maps the process of the implementation of the creative project. It charts the making of *Talking Cultures* multi-phased digital media project from the point view of the creative practitioner who embarks on a practice-led action research project. First, it provides a chronological account of how the creative project progressed from the early ideas to the final shape, including the major milestones, the key observations, the successes and problems encountered as part of the creative process – framed by the initial research question of participatory political engagement. Following on from this it will detail the implementation of each campaign and the development of the final interactive documentary.

I embarked on this research because I was interested in applying my experience as a multimedia filmmaker to the exploration of online political engagement – specifically using social media. I became particularly interested in how the movement between the online and offline environments could affect engagement in participatory political activism for Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds. Furthermore, it was important to examine this offline/online dynamism in relation to street-based activism and content-based activism, where action-based activism is more likely to happen offline on the streets while content-based activism is often disseminated on social media platforms.

As my research progressed the thematic focus moved from looking at identity into looking at the question of multiculturalism in Australia. This change of theme came after reading an article by Ghassan Hage about the multicultural situation in Australia in relation to diasporas, in which he asks:

> When the analysis of the diasporic condition, be it from a multicultural or a postcolonial perspective, is based on the discourse of literary people – that is, people who have both the capacity and the desire to tell stories and to do so exceptionally well – an obvious question emerges: how does this experience relate to the far more common experience of people like my research subjects? (Hage 2005: 495)

This question made me realise that it would be important to attract Australians, and not just online, but also on the streets of Sydney. In addition the street interviews provide an opportunity to relate the multicultural question to the wider Australian public. This came about in part from reading a paper written by Andrew Jakubowicz in which he writes about

how multiculturalism is still – in practice – ethnic community-focused (Jakubowicz 2011). This shift in topic allowed me to go out onto to the streets of Sydney and interview people randomly without giving them a prior screening for their ethnic background. Eventually it became a beneficial part of the creative project so-far-as it allowed the creation of a cultural matrix comprised of the cultural context of the multiculturalism conversation and framed it as a conversation between random strangers on the streets of Sydney. *Talking Cultures,* with its multi-phased campaigns approach, were born from this interest in the application of the question of community engagement to the multicultural situation in Australia.
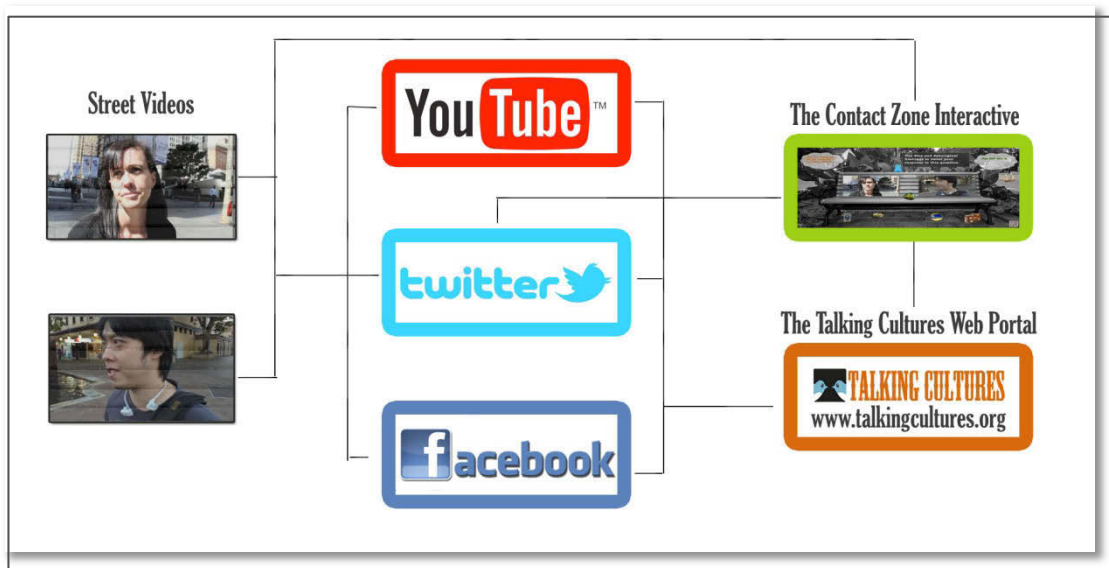

Figure 3.1 – Talking Cultures Structure

The main premise of the *Talking Cultures* multi-phased campaign (see figure 3.1 – Talking Cultures Structure) was to generate intercultural dialogue through art, thus enabling actors to participate in the multicultural debate through the street interviews and the social media channels. The first task was to construct the *Talking Cultures* Wordpress Blog, which functioned as a gateway to the social media platforms. It also served to provide functionality where necessary for the campaigns beyond what social media offers – particularly when there was a need for a registration form. For example, registering for the virtual flash mob campaigns needed a sophisticated application form that was connected to a database. Secondly, the campaigns were conducted on the streets of Sydney and then shared on social media platforms. The final component of *Talking Cultures* was *The Contact Zone* interactive online documentary that was developed after completing all online and offline campaigns. This documentary was developed using the latest HTML5 animation capabilities to ensure an experiential visual journey. Once completed the project was hosted live at www.thecontactzone.com and promoted on the *Talking Cultures* Wordpress blog.

I called the interactive documentary *The Contact Zone* because in addition to the documentary serving as the final creative piece to show the videos in a designed experiential interactive, it also served as a mechanism to connect the wider community with the street video interviews. In the course of more than a year, the questions and responses videos where shot in different locations and at different times across Sydney. It is key to note here that the *Contact Zone* interactive documentary was conceived with the premise of engaging the participants by giving them control on the streets and by allowing the interviewees to ask any question on any topic even if loosely related to multiculturalism, for example, '*Why are indigenous Australians not fully integrated in Australian society?*' In addition the choice of creating an interactive documentary also allows the users not only to engage with the content but also participate in the making of the documentary and be able to drive the conversation and generate meaningful dialogue: 'The relationship between each and every interaction holds particular significance within an expansive interactive documentary. As a system:

> 'The expansive form is driven by its users, with rules, content and potential methods for interaction emerging from the community. The many participants 'existing' within this system are part of a forum of continually updated opinion and response that transcends geographic and temporal boundaries. (Galloway et al. 2007: 335.)

The documentary was designed in such a way that it displays a collection of these videos in a visually meaningful way, to allow them to be experienced as a conversation. The offline fragmented street interviews are contextualised in an experiential online conversation that is then extended to social media. This juxtaposition of online/offline and the connection to social media to generate an open engagement helped establish a 'contact zone' that was not only open but facilitated an environment of equal grounds for actors who are social media savvy and others on the streets of Sydney who may or may not use social media.

3.1 The Iterative Process

It is important to note here, that as a practitioner, when creating an interactive documentary or a multimedia installation I am often more methodical in the approach to the creative process than others might be, who use more random or organic means to reach their creative goals. *Talking Cultures* was an exception, because I had to adjust my practice slightly to be more flexible and to leave room for iterative changes. This was necessary to work within the framework of the EAR methodology in which there is an iterative process of creation, observation, reflection, re-planning and finally readjusting and implementation of new concepts. This process was discussed in chapter 2, section 2.1.

As a way to achieve this flexibility, I decided to keep the project loosely structured in order to be able to adjust it based on the observations – and reflection at each phase of the project. This cycle of observation, reflection and re-

planning helped reach the final goal of exploring the question of engagement, while still allowing the basic premise of the multi-phased campaigns despite having to substantially adjust the theme of the creative concept to fit with certain observations and feedback obtained on the ground.

The plan had been to create a multi-screen installation that would examine the concept of multiple, ethno-cultural identities (see figure 3.2 – Cultural Matrix v1 and v2). These cultural matrixes were designed in a way to provide multiple facets of an identity. For example my Palestinian heritage is one facet, the other my Australian nationality with the third being my worldview as an immigrant. These multiple facets of an ethno-cultural identity were to be combined in a matrix with multiple types of activism – in this case art-based, radical and humour-based activism. The idea was that by exploring each element of the matrix with a unique campaign we could measure the effect on participatory engagement depending on the nature of the activist and type of campaign.

Figure 3.2 – Cultural Matrix v1 and v2

This concept of a cultural matrix quickly became unworkable because:

1. The scale of running nine separate campaigns was not possible in light of the lack of external financial support or faculty funding.

2. The multiple facets of an ethno-cultural identity were too restrictive especially for participants who would only identify themselves as Australians with no other heritage.

3. Humorous campaigns as part of the matrix were not suitable for the subject of Australian multiculturalism because of the risk of others using the humour to trivialise the issue – or even to reframe the campaigns with racist remarks.

During the time when these problems emerged with the scale of the original ideas, I was also reading, searching for literature about participatory engagement and establishing contacts I came across the contact theory and found that the prospect of the application of it to a social media context would be helpful – particularly in its ability to examine online/offline participation. The contact theory had specific requirements (discussed in more details in earlier chapters), which meant that I had to a) keep the campaigns focused on establishing contact and b) ensure that the campaigns had both online and offline elements in order to explore the virtual vs. physical contact.

This new direction was a major shift in research and meant 'going back to the drawing board' in relation to the creative project, which entirely reshaped it, changing the matrix concept into an online-offline multi-phased project arranged around the theme of multiculturalism with three campaigns:

1. *Message in the Sand* (later changed to *Questioning Cultures*), a street based video installation using an LED-illuminated sandbox to conduct street interviews exploring the topics around multiculturalism.

2. *Culture Mob*, a social media virtual flash mob that uses the power of the crowd to generate co-coordinated collective actions on one or more social media platforms.

3. *Culture Salon*, a virtual salon with in-depth interviews with key Australian experts exploring the various aspects of multiculturalism in Australia.

The three campaigns were then to come together in a final multi-screen installation in an exhibition environment (see figure 3.3 – Talking Cultures Campaigns V1).
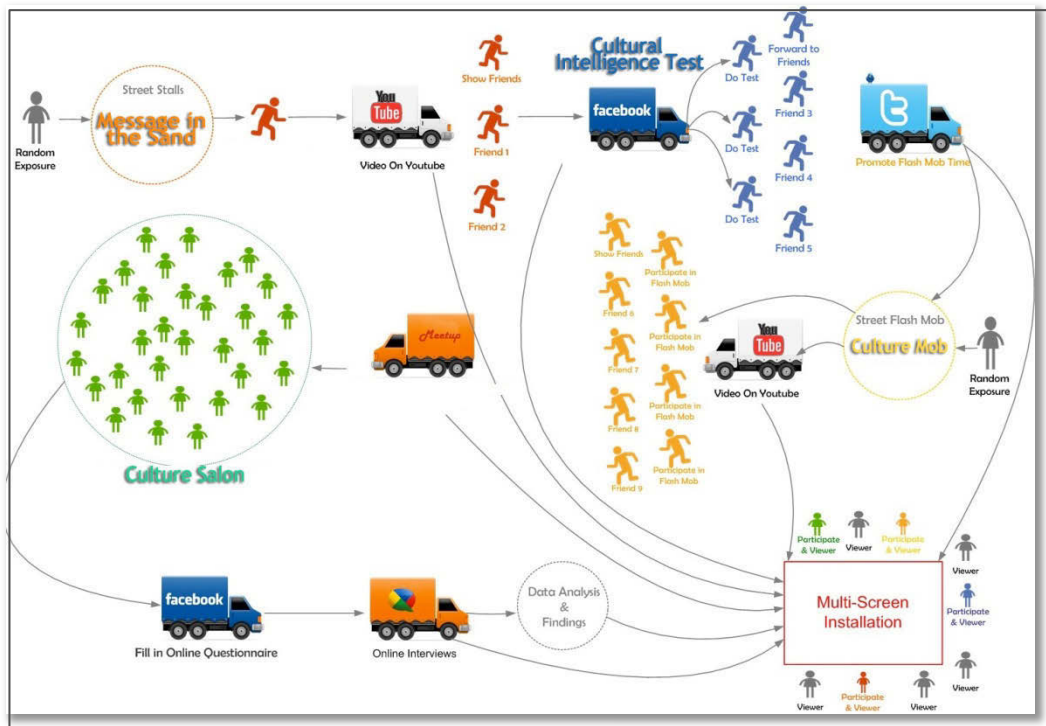
Figure 3.3 – Talking Cultures Campaigns V1

I built a custom made sandbox (see figure 3.4 – The Building of the Sandbox) that had LED stripes embedded under a glass panel with sand laid on top. The box had a battery compartment that enabled me to be mobile so I can go out onto the streets of Sydney.

Figure 3.4 – The Building of the Sandbox

The idea was to interview people in the streets by first asking them to write a message in the sand, then to comment on what they had written and its relation to a multicultural Australia.

The idea of writing a message in the sand was to be used as a metaphor for building Australia in messages that being written on the sand are then made to disappear, while being preserved on video and displayed online using social media. Also the act of writing a message in the sand was to be used as a way to draw the interviewee into the creative process, so they could respond on more than one level. In addition the sandbox was designed to be used in a small dark room as part of the final multi-screen installation.

The initial results of this project were visually striking (See Figure – 3.5 Message in the Sand Sample Video) but lacked any depth of meaning for the video interviews conducted after the writing of the message. The responses to the sandbox installation suggested that even though the project was meant to work as a way to encourage people to write messages in the sand, then to talk to camera about their message, in reality the process turned out to be too vague. As a result the messages were either too general or conversely, too specific. For example, ' Australian needs grass roots movements'; 'A fresh start'; 'Music in the streets'.

Figure 3.5 – Message in the Sand Sample Video

After three weeks of experimentation with the sandbox, it became clear that while the sandbox was indeed helping to attract interviewees, it had in fact provided more obstacles than benefits. Street interviews would have to be based on contact theory, which meant the interviews needed to be conducive to open dialogue. They also needed a specific goal that would ensure the fulfilment of the contact theory requirement. I decided to shelve the sandbox and began to experiment with other interviewing techniques that included the use of prompt cards as outline, as in the next section. It is important to note that all the while that good results were not being obtained from the 'message box' I was reading more and more about contact theory. I became interested in its implications to the context of online

participatory politics and their possible use as part of the research in exploring the importance of the creation of an open dialogue. This would be needed to generate an online/offline conversation, building on the premise that this contact can enable engagement in the multicultural political debate using both street activism and social media. This led – ultimately – to a second shift in the creative direction.

As a result of this breakthrough, the multi-screen installation was changed from a kiosk installation into an experiential interactive documentary, which could at a later date, be realised as an installation. Even if this could not be finalised for the thesis project, it would be possible to both visualise the street interviews and to listen to online virtual conversations. These could then be used to juxtapose the resulting conversations with a new overlaid dialogue. For this, social media participation in the form of Twitter hash tags, specifically designed for each conversation and then re-feed into the interactive documentary, would complete the cycle and create the intended 'contact zone' effect (see figure 3.6 – Talking Cultures Campaigns V2). This project and the interactive documentary, developed using HYPE Tumult (HYPE 2013), resulted in the need to learn technologies and tools that were not available in 2010. Thus the project presented a constant learning curve for an independent artist/activist, trying to create a fully immersive interactive experience.
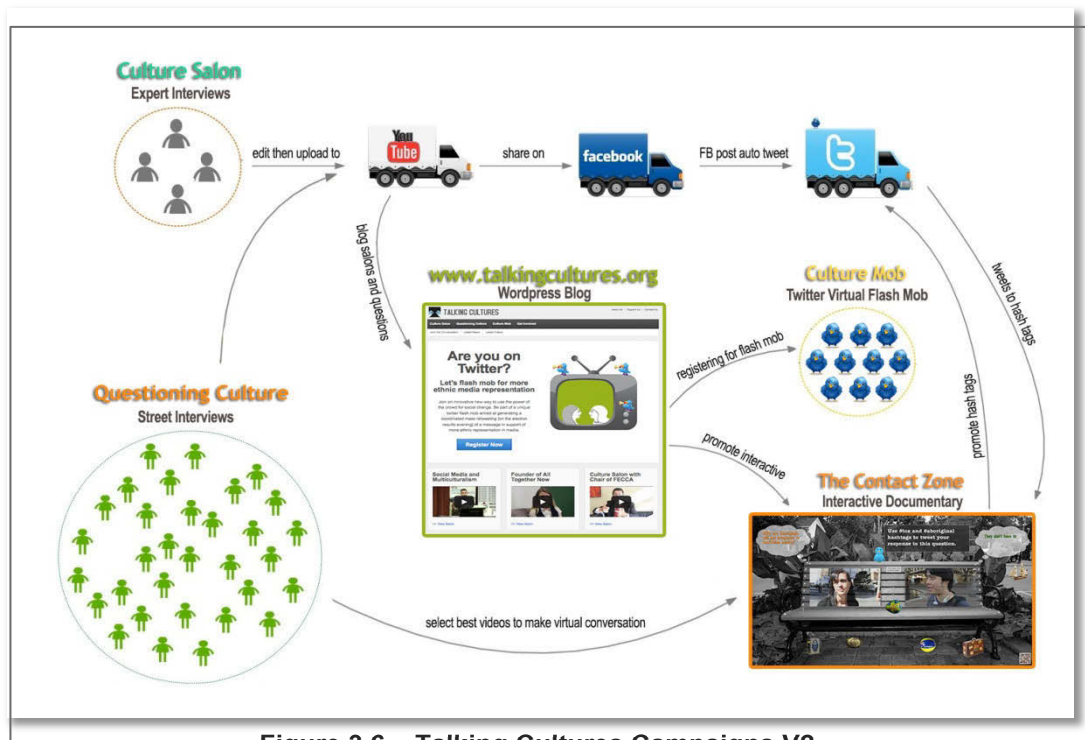
Figure 3.6 – Talking Cultures Campaigns V2

The videos of *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary were shot in the streets of Sydney with the aim of generating a conversation between the street and online social media users, thus engaging the community in participatory political activities. Noting that while the project was still focused on the multicultural debate, it was now based on random street interviews, shaped in the form of questions and answers (instead of messages in the sand). These questions and answers formed a conversation that then continued on social media. It is worth noting that the questions that were asked as part of the interactive documentary were not curated in any shape or form by me. My aim was to ensure that I remained neutral when it came to the selection of questions and maintained the documentary as a conversation between two strangers on the streets of Sydney, hence the question and answer format was arrived at as a form of intercultural dialogue. This intercultural dialogue becomes a new form of a contact zone once it's cross referenced with embedded social media interactions within the context of the interactivity documentary.

In addition to the engagement being generated on the social media channels (see figure 3.7 – The Social Media Channels), the *Talking Cultures* blog was also working as a portal to connect the three social media channels with users, thus generating even more engagement.

Figure 3.7 – The Social Media Channels

40

The *Talking Cultures* blog (see Figure 3.8 – Talking Cultures Blog Homepage) was split into three major sections to correspond to the three campaigns. Each section served as a way to define the campaigns which could then be collated into one place that included all the social media entries relative to that campaign.
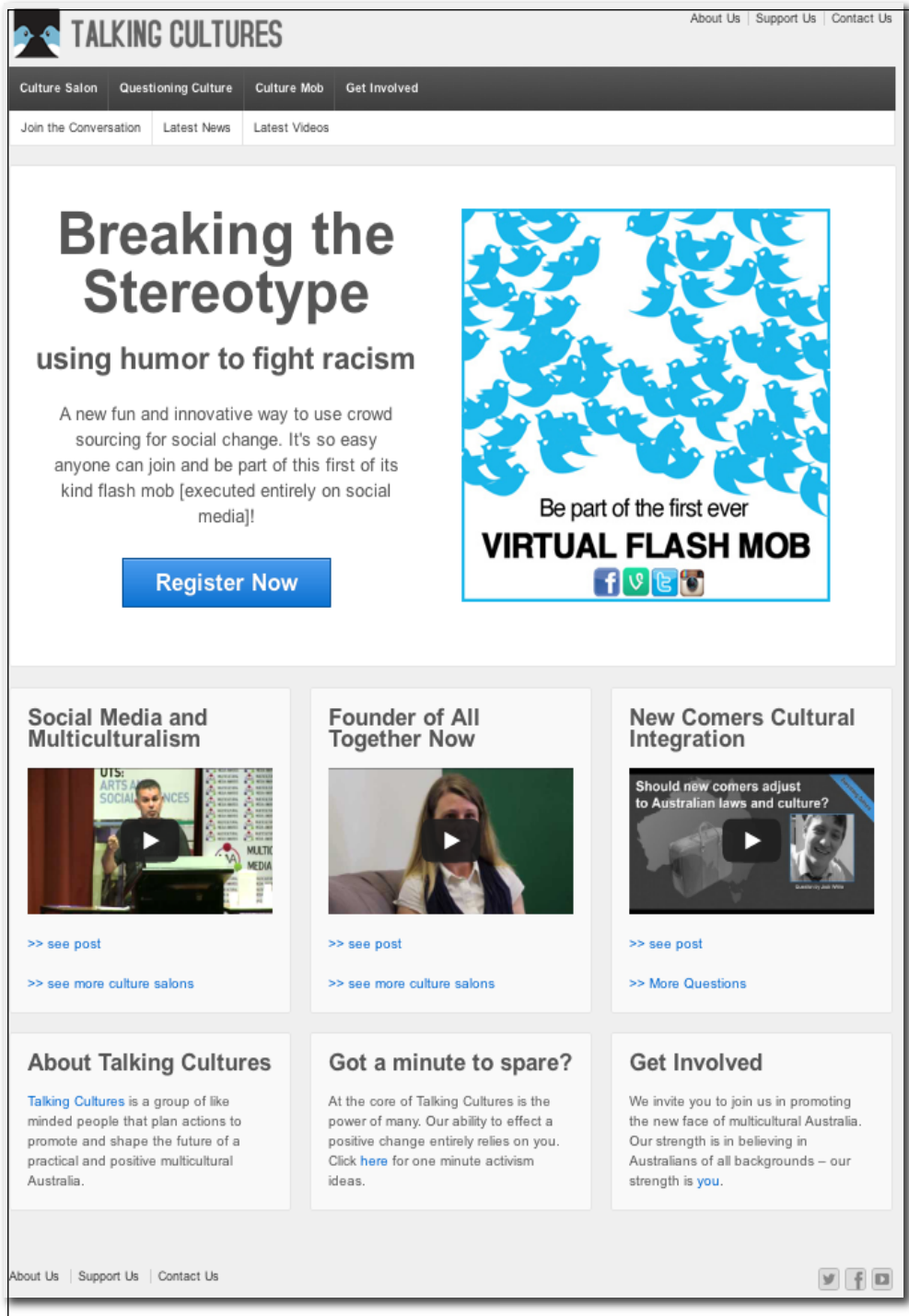
Figure 3.8 – Talking Cultures Blog Homepage

3.2 A Question of Openness

The hardest condition of the contact theory to meet was the state of openness (Altheide 1994). By definition, the more open a conversation the less in-depth it is. This posed some problems in the early days of the project. My first attempt at interviews using the sandbox concept (discussed in section 3.1) favoured artists and people who are familiar with delivering visual messages, which means it was breaking the equal status condition of the contact theory. The second attempt was to simply walk the streets videoing people's comments on multicultural Australia. Again this method proved problematic in that the conversations were too open and too loose to generate any meaningful dialogue. The best example to illustrate this was my video about the right of Saudi Women to drive cars, an entirely valid question but entirely unrelated to the process (Lulu 2013).

The third attempt was to create a set of cue cards with questions and to use this card system to allow interviewees to choose one theme from four cards and then to respond in the video interview. After shooting 20 videos this way it

> Diary note taken on August 19, 2012 @ 4:43pm
> Again I shot videos this time with themed card questions, a wish or an insight… etc. My supervisor noted that the videos lacked depth and the need to make them longer. I agree with the fact that they lack depth. But my catch22 is that I do need them to be short and yet powerful enough to generate a conversation, hmmm…

became clear that the cue cards were a barrier to an open dialogue. In addition the themes were created by myself, therefore were not conducive to the generation of a free dialogue that can be considered open without the artist's intervention. This – to me – was the deal breaker as it was important to meet all of the contact theory conditions, including the condition of open dialogue (see figure 3.9 – Questioning Culture Cue Cards).

Figure 3.9 – Questioning Culture Cue Cards

I finally settled on the idea of a Q&A where the questions would come from people on the street and would then be relayed back in a random way to other people, thus creating a real conversation by proxy, using street video interviews. These videos

are then posted on social media so the conversation can continue there. After shooting 100 videos this was the closest I could get to an open and equal environment for a conversation, without losing touch with the larger theme (or the main goal) as part of the second requirement of contact theory – in this case the goal was to celebrate cultural diversity and to question the status quo in Australian in reference to the multicultural debate.

This new way to propose randomness had met the openness condition. In addition, walking around the streets of Sydney asking people to join the

conversation, by asking any question or answering, was met with positive feedback. Generally speaking, people were more than happy to respond openly even though I had initially kept the conversation vague. Some of the key observations, and my own reflection on this experience are as follows:

1. The interviewees appreciated the novelty of the idea of Q&A with random strangers and often (even for reluctant interviewees) would relax upon hearing this explanation. Knowing that strangers asked the questions randomly put responders on equal grounds and allowed for any question to be asked and opened up spaces for candid responses.

2. The openness of the dialogue meant that there was room for unexpected questions and in return unexpected answers. For example, the question of 'Indigenous integration into Australian society' evoked many interesting responses, such as the notion that there could be a reverse situation in which the question could be rephrased to ask, 'But do indigenous Australians want to integrate?'

3. The nature of street interviews means that the questions and responses are often merely touching the surface in terms of the potential depth of the discussion, risking shallow conversations that lack substance, thus lowering the level of the engagement. To avoid that, the responses were edited to make them as short and precise as possible. This in turn allowed for the shaping of a tapestry of responses that kept the freshness of street interviews with the implication of a longer conversation.

It is worth noting that a key limitation of this form of open dialogue is that in having the questions completely open made it harder for interviewers to come up with questions. Therefore, a large number of actors did not have any questions to ask. On average, one in every seven people interviewed did have a question. This was not a problem for the research because it meant there were more answers than questions. However, it is something that might be a problem in other scenarios. In the case of *Questioning Cultures*, even though there was a partial success with offline actors engaging online, the success rate was low, which could have been due to the fact that some actors were too embarrassed to share their videos with friends because of the political nature of the subject matter, or because videos were a new and confrontational experience for them, or because they thought their answers were not good enough. While the concept of an open dialogue on the streets that is then put online seemed to generate street conversations, there remained questions about the merit of these conversations concerning the value of the questions asked and the responses, for their advancement of the multicultural debate and more importantly for this research. Will this offline conversation continue online and will the offline actors engage online and therefore contribute to the expansion of the engagement for their friends? Consequently, there was success in the translation of offline to online engagement. This was achieved in three ways:

1. The interviewees shared their videos to friends and their extended social media network of contacts. For example, one of the interviewees said that he never have thought that he would engage with this type of political discussion, but once his video went online he was one of the first to subscribe to the *Talking Cultures YouTube channel*.

2. Some interviewees felt the need to respond directly to online comments posted on their video. For example, this response showed real engagement: *'I do apologise if my 'mainly white' statement came across as such. I was merely using a reference to my experiences. Just as I had answered the question of black people having a higher instance of crime I answered that without attacking the other participant. Its not about pointing fingers, its about figuring out the environment of ignorance and how we can best prevent misconceptions of all races for the future.'* The comment generated a truly multidimensional dialogue that started on the streets then moved to social media.

3. Interviewees engaged with other questions and videos online, which shows that some of the offline actors (who might have never engaged online with political issues) felt empowered to contribute to other online conversations.

3.3 Expert Interviews

The *Culture Salon* campaign presented an opportunity to juxtapose street interviews with key expert interviews. Three experts on multiculturalism in Australia were interviewed, Pino Migliorino, chairman of FECCA (Migliorino 2013), Priscilla Brice-Weller, founder of All Together Now (Brice-Weller 2013) and Ana Tiwary, creator of the Facebook group Diversity in Australian media (Tiwary 2013). Each interview included questions about each role as a multicultural expert, the role of their institutions and their take on the current and future situation of multiculturalism in Australia. In addition each interviewee was asked to answer some of the questions that had been asked on the streets as part of the *Questioning Culture* campaign. This allowed their responses to be used for questions in the final interactive documentary and provided a balanced conversation by mixing random street responses with these expert responses.

The goal of *Culture Salon* was to bring the conversation from the streets back to those key policy makers and activists who would then continue that conversation by providing

> Diary note taken on July 31, 2013 @09:31am
> Ana Tiwary tweeted and put on diversity Facebook group that she was interview by talking cultures. This both provided authority and promoted us. Great way to garner support by involving key actors.

responses in a casual interview, which would then be edited and posted on social media, to thus create a bridge between civic engagement and institutional policy advocacy. It was hoped that it would fill a void created by the lack of cultural discourse in Australian social media platforms. Another advantage of interviewing experts was that their involvement functions as a form authority for the campaigns and on *Talking Cultures* blog and thus fulfilling the requirement of authority in the contact theory.

The three one-hour interviews with three multicultural experts, each with a separate and substantially different role in the Australian multicultural landscape, provided the following:

1. Valuable information about the way some of the key actors in the multicultural debate view the role of social media in engaging communities.

2. An opportunity for cultural discourse, a response to and reflection on the questions asked by the community on the streets of Sydney.

3. An extra element of online content with which to engage, using the *Talking Cultures* website under the Cultural Salon section.

Also the interviews have helped the creative project in comparing with how other multiculturalism advocates look at the idea of online engagement in participatory political activism. Sometimes they gave valuable advice and reflection about the current status of online activism. For example, Pino Migliorino was very aware of the role of social media. He indicated that this was more on a personal level with the intention in the future to increase FECCA's social media presence.

3.4 Participatory Collective Action

Culture Mob campaigns are virtual flash mobs run by volunteers and executed entirely on social media using humour and subtle confrontation to make a social statement aimed at the promotion of intercultural dialogue. The concept of a 'culture mob' began by workshopping an idea which would take place in the Pitt Street Mall on a busy Saturday shopping time, with 15 volunteers each wearing a t-shirt saying on one side 'I'm proud of being Australian' and on the other side saying 'And I'm proud of my xxx heritage'. The idea was that this would be a spontaneous flash mob that then turns into a celebration of ethnic music and dance with each flash mobster putting on headphones (as in the iconic iPod advertisement) and dancing to their own culture's music, then tapping next participant to dance thus creating a wave of dance.

One of the volunteers, Nathan (not his real name), created a poster for it. At this point, the decision was made to 'lighten' the concept because it was thought that the idea was less humorous than what a flash mob could or necessarily needs to be. It was deemed essential to have a broader volunteer base. Nathan came back with a few emails that showed both his level of engagement, starting from his first point of contact in the reading of a small sticker in the physical world of a café to now, where it had increased significantly to the extent that he had had some productive ideas, one of them being based on the idea of the breaking of the stereotype which Nathan included in this email:

> Emailed On Apr 16, 2013 at 4:05 PM: I am aware the topic of racism is a taboo subject. I believe that Australians bury the fact we as a nation are quite racist under the guise ... we are 'multicultural' which explains the many different nationalities around on the street. As the video does well, is that it twist this rather negative stereotyping and issue and tackles the issue through a comedic situation. It not only draws attention to the issue, it makes us re-question our general assumptions, which is what makes people change. I believe that if racism is tackled with negativity that is in a sense fighting negativity against someone else's negativity. Take for example some charities coerce you and make you feel bad that your not donating which is why I think a lot struggle. I would you rather make people feel happy to donate to a good cause? Like marketing, they make you feel positive and want to buy it and not feel bad to buy it.

When I first thought about the flash mob campaign, there were a number of news items about verbal racist attacks on buses (Olding 2013).

Priscilla Brice-Weller also mentioned in her interview that her group is specifically working on a response to that (Brice-Weller 2013). The virtual flash mob theme was about breaking the stereotype based on Nathan's ideas (outlined above), which is aligned with the mainstream media's interest in racism. The rationale for opting for the Virtual Flash Mob was to test the idea of coordinated actions that are time-based – just like street actions – the only difference being that they would be conducted online. The concept was that instead of going to a physical place, members would be invited to go online to register their interest. Later they would receive a kit that instructed them about what to create. Which they would later upload to Twitter, Facebook, Vine and Instagram. By now Nathan's engagement was so high, that he even took the initiative to design the poster for the campaign (see figure 3.10 – First Virtual Flash Mob Registration and Poster). Worth noting here that the concept of a campaign based on breaking the stereotype is meant to have an element of humour.

Figure 3.10 – First Virtual Flash Mob Registration and Poster

To keep to the principles of campaigns existing both online and offline I decided to distribute the posters for this campaign offline

around the streets of Sydney. This distribution of poster and flyers generated interest even in unlikely places. For example, at a friend's house where there was a poster on the table. A friend of his looked at it and said, 'wow cool, can I join and promote'. She then took an iPhone photograph of the poster and immediately shared it with her network. This random interest in the idea of a virtual flash mob was a promising start and later when the flyers were distributed on the streets they were met with equal interest.

Figure 3.11 – First Virtual Flash Mob Action Kit

The campaign generated 89 registrations. Each of the registrants received an action kit that required considerable engagement. Once the action kits were sent it was then up to the individuals to follow through and execute the steps included in the kit (see figure 3.11 – First Virtual Flash Mob Action Kit).

The follow through results were encouraging with 30% of those who registered ending up 'going the extra mile' by taking photos in the physical world, then posting them on social media. 89 registrations with 30% follow through is a great success because the mere act of registering required a considerable amount of commitment in more than one way:

1. It meant going to a registration page and filling in information. There was also a 'spam checker' on the page, which meant more work was required of the registering actors.

2. One of the required fields of information was for a mobile number, this field was not optional and if not entered, the actor was prompted to enter it as it is needed for SMS communication on the day of the Flash Mob.

3. The event required a high level of commitment, because it was to happen at a specific time, and building a narrative via photography or video was a prerequisite.

Once the first virtual flash mob was completed, I decided to do another, this time only on Twitter. The second was designed to specifically target Twitter users working in media organisations. The aim was to generate a Twitter flood of

> Diary note taken on August 22, 2013 @02:44pm
> Just started promoting the second flash mob about ethnic media representation – easier to promote as it is targeted towards one social media platform twitter.

comments that could be measured accurately using a specific hash tag. The reason behind conducting this second virtual flash mob was:

1. To have two campaigns for comparison.

2. Because the first campaign was hard to track because Facebook did not have hash tags at the time of the launch (they have since been introduced to Facebook).

3. To decide a campaign that is more about fighting a negative problem and thus tests the negative contact theory further.

4. To have a campaign only directed towards one platform, in this case Twitter, so to examine if this would engage only Twitter users whilst restricting engagement for actors who are not on Twitter.
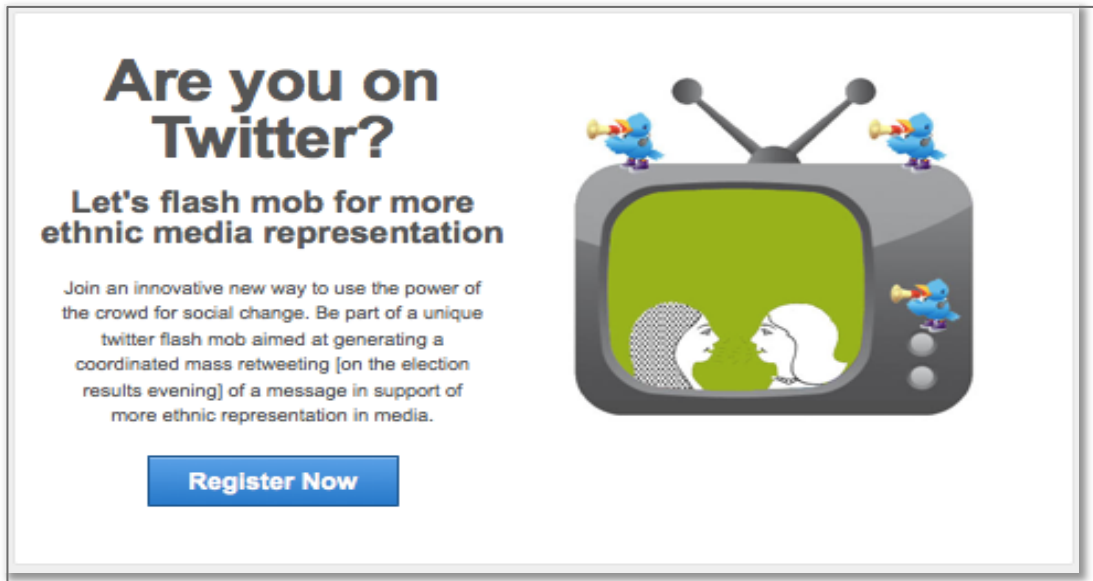
Figure 3.12 – Second Virtual Flash Mob

The campaign theme chosen was to highlight the problem of the lack of ethnic media representation, (see figure 3.12 – Second

Virtual Flash Mob) which basically connects the flash mob to the *Talking Cultures* campaigns by virtue of the topic. In addition it allowed for the use of a subject that is currently a negative problem that could activate the negative contact theory. The campaign was timed with the eve of the results for the 2013 Australian election. As became apparent the Facebook campaign had more engagements than the second campaign.

The *People Like Us* virtual flash mob ended up having a lower success rate with only 39 official registrations (compared to 89 in the first mob). This could have been due to restricting the action to Twitter, which meant there was an extra level of engagement required if you were not a Twitter user, namely the need to sign up. If a Facebook hash tag had been allowed for, there would have been more engagement. However, a Facebook hash tag had only been announced after the promotion of the second flash mob so by then it was too late for it to be included. One of the key observations about the second Virtual Flash Mob's campaign was that the engagement rate in registration to follow up ratio was lower (20% compared to 30% to the first campaign). The first campaign was run on three social media platforms while the second was a Twitter only flash mob. This was key to the higher success rate the first campaign was able to produce. Key lesson learned is that Twitter requires a key Twitter personality to engage with the project for it to generate high rate of 'retweeting'. This confirms the need for an authority condition as part of the contact theory.

3.5 The Contact Zone Interactive Documentary

The final piece of the creative project is *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary (TCZ), which explores six questions asked by ordinary Australians in the streets of Sydney, each in relation to the multicultural debate in the context of Australia. The questions were answered by 5 Australians chosen from a pool of responses collected via the street interviews. *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary served as a funnel to direct the most related street videos and present them as part of an experiential documentary. In addition – and key to the creative outcomes – it served as a virtual space that juxtaposed street participation (video conversations) and social media participation (Twitter hash tags in response to the conversations). This dual role brought the various elements of the project into one interactive visual experience, that was not only aimed at engaging users with the content but also worked as a vehicle for more user engagement via Twitter. This mix of the carefully selected street videos and viewers' responses created a 'contact zone' where the offline is displayed online, prompting online participation that is then fed back to the interactive journey creating a complete circle. Thus furthermore cementing that 'contact zone'.
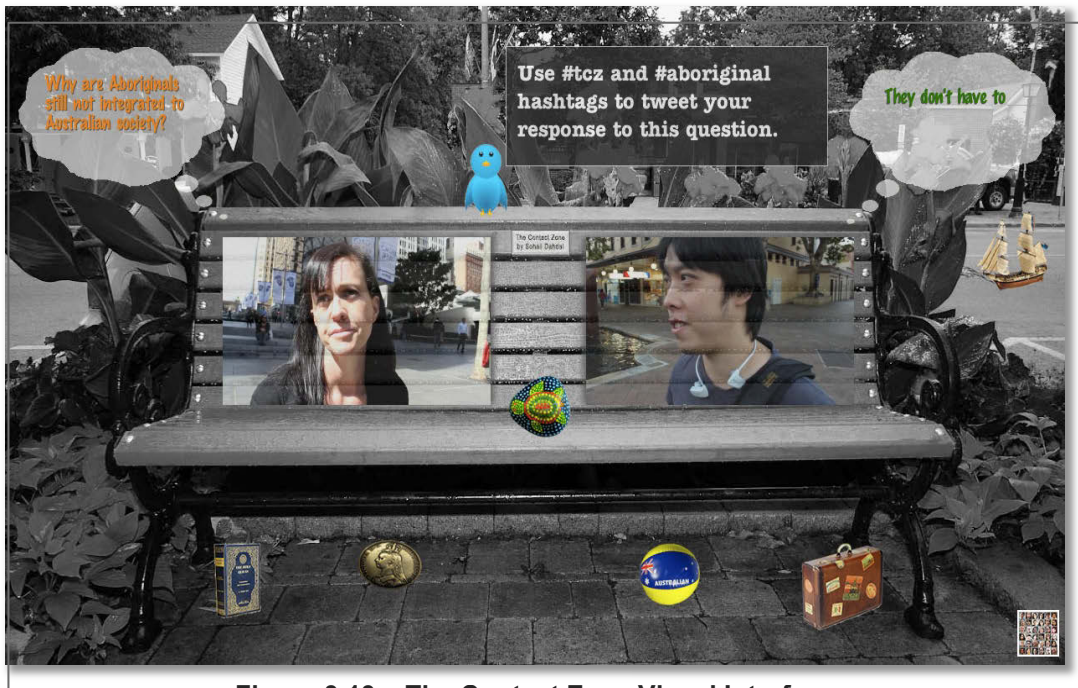
Figure 3.13 – The Contact Zone Visual Interface

These random responses were juxtaposed with the questions that were laid out using a graphical interface, such that the videos existed next to each other within the one virtual visual setting (see figure 3.13 – The Contact Zone Visual Interface). This created a virtual multicultural conversation between random strangers – a conversation that started in the physical world on the streets of Sydney. Since the original interviews were conducted on the

streets, I decided to use a street bench as a visual metaphor to tie the responses with the initial question. The user was able to choose a cultural object – one of six relating to the six questions – which they could then drag to the bench to begin the conversation. While the conversation was playing, the user was then able to contribute their response via Twitter using a unique hash tag specific to that question. As with a physical conversation the user was able to jump around between conversations by simply dragging the cultural objects on and off the bench.

The idea behind the creation of an interactive documentary as the final phase of the *Talking Cultures* project, was to tie all the various media elements of the three campaigns into an interactive experiential documentary, that would take the users on a journey that involved interaction with the content of the questioning cultures videos. All the media elements were tied with the physical cultural objects that represented the questions. This online/offline virtual/physical journey had an added layer that allowed the user to interact with the content via a Twitter hash tag that could then be projected back onto a virtual wall inside the documentary, thus creating a connection between the user, the content and the social media medium. This established a contact zone that could generate dialogue and engagement that could be measured by the number of tweets and observed in terms of the further engagement by the user when they clicked the 'get involved' button and then filled in a volunteer form.

3.5.1 The Visual Interface

What I wanted to create in a visual environment was a single space called *The Contact Zone* where the question-and-answer street videos, the cultural objects to choose these videos, the Twitter hash instructions and the tweets could all exist in one place and interact in a dynamic way. This was to create a virtual discursive space that combined the online, the offline and used social media content in existing questions, where the interactions and immediate responses of potential users would create the desired 'contact zone'.

The result of this juxtaposition of the online/offline was such that once a user responded to a question his or her response immediately became part of the experiential documentary, which created a powerful feeling of participation (see figure 3.14 – Twitter Interaction with Documentary). This integration of social media participation and the interactive documentary had been a difficult technical task that took about half of the total programming time to make Twitter function with hash tags from within HYPE. It was an essential element in establishing a contact zone.

Figure 3.14 – Twitter Interaction with Documentary

Another key interface choice was to ensure that the objects could be dragged on and off the bench, giving the user the feeling and the power to start and end a conversation and to make the virtual blend naturally with a physical or real aspect of these conversations. The only control that users were given was that of starting and ending a conversation: this was a key way to balance the interactivity with the experiential nature of carefully selected conversations that are meant to be brought together and would have not worked, if the ability to skip a response had been included.

To compensate for depriving the users of the opportunity to interrupt the conversation and interact with individual videos, a whole new section was created for the documentary that focused on the individual videos and their cultural and geographical contexts. This section was called the *cultural matrix*. The cultural matrix was visual, presented as a matrix of the 6 questions and their 5 responses each making up a total of 36 videos. Situated to the left of the videos there was the cultural context, designed with flags that once clicked, highlighted the videos of the interviewees from that cultural heritage. The geographic context was that of an approximate map of Sydney with video icons to indicate the location of each shoot, which could be clicked to highlight videos shot on that location (see figure 3.15 – The Cultural Matrix).

Figure 3.15 – The Cultural Matrix

The matrix served as a visual reference to explore videos quickly, based on where they were shot or the cultural heritage of the interviewee. Once the user clicked on a video, the video was played on a full screen (as opposed to the smaller bench videos in the conversation section). Each video was also meta-tagged with information about the name of the interviewee, his or her cultural heritage, the location and date of the video shoot and the question to which the video was a response (see figure 3.16 – Full Screen Video with Info).

"History proves it they can" [a response to Islam and democracy question]
By Nadia Shanab, an Australian of Palestinian heritage. [shot in Chippendale on the 15th of September 2012]

Figure 3.16 – Full Screen Video with Info

3.5.2 The User's Journey

As an experiential journey – as opposed to the
Talking Cultures campaigns – *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary takes the user on a journey that first introduces the content within a cultural context by assigning one cultural object for each question. The user is then prompted to select an object, which they drag to a street bench. The question related to this object then plays on the bench with responses playing in sequence on the other side (of the bench) simulating a street conversation between random strangers. This conversation is then interjected with the Twitter bird asking the user to join the conversation via tweeting to a hash tag. Once a user tweets their response, the tweets are then displayed immediately via the same Twitter bird. This immediacy of the user seeing their actions embedded as part of the experience is in essence creating a second conversation between the content and the user with the bird serving as a facilitator. In this case the bird is symbolic of social media as a whole, but representative of Twitter in actuality (see figure 3.17 – The Contact Zone User's Journey).
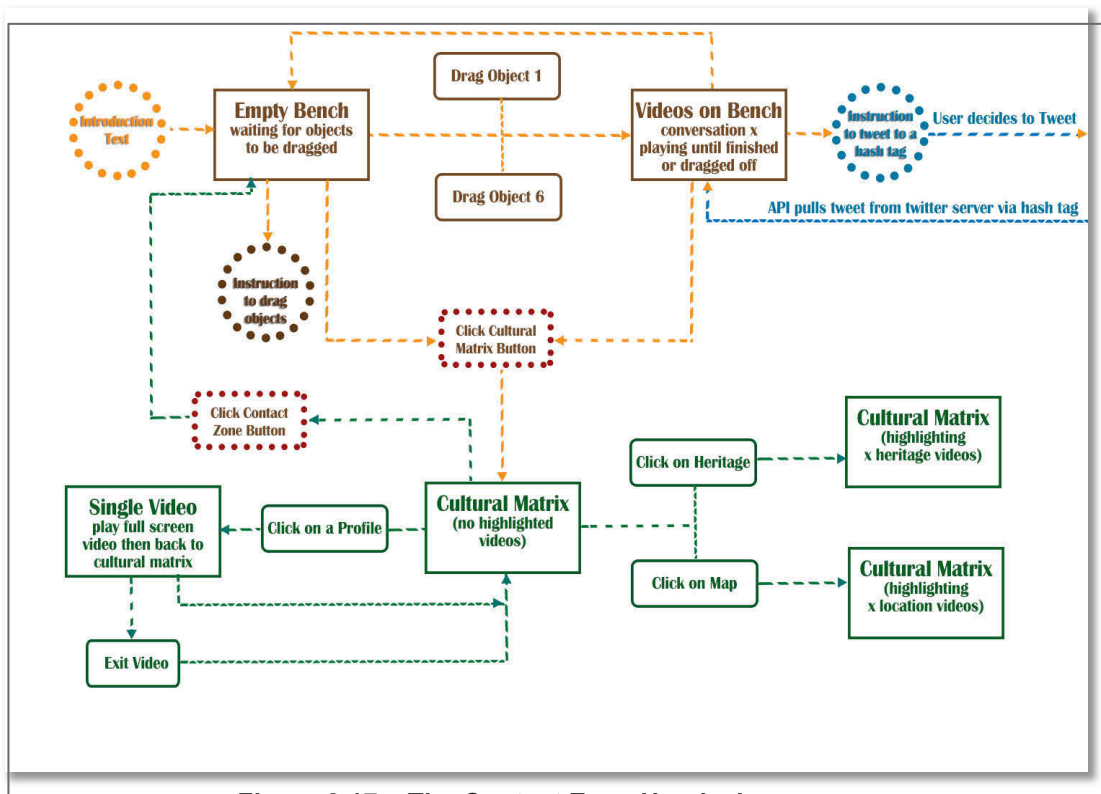
Figure 3.17 – The Contact Zone User's Journey

The questions and answers make up 36 videos (selected from a hundred videos). The six questions with their correspondent cultural object and hash tag are as follows:

1. 'Why is it that people living in the coastal areas are often more racist?' With *#racism* as the Twitter hash tag and a beach ball with an Australian flag as the cultural object.

2. 'Should newcomers adjust to Australian laws and culture?' With *#newcomers* as the Twitter hash tag and an old suitcase as the cultural object.

3. 'Can Islam and Democracy coexist?' With *#islam* as the Twitter hash tag and the Quran as the cultural object.

4. 'Is Australia still a colonial state?' With *#colonial* as the Twitter hash tag and a commonwealth coin as the cultural object.

5. 'Why should white Australia decide who should come and live here?' With *#boatpeople* as the Twitter hash tag and a boat as the cultural object.

6. 'Why are Aboriginals still not integrated in Australian society?' With *#aboriginal* as the Twitter hash tag and an aboriginal artefact as the cultural object.

The core concept of *The Contact Zone* documentary was to apply the contact theory within the parameters of a creative multi-media experience that connected the user to the conceptual ideas in the form of the devised user's journey within the interactive documentary. It specifically converted the random street engagement into a virtual conversation between strangers, which was in turn connected to an extra layer of social media engagement by using the Twitter hash tags. In doing so it satisfied the pillars of the contact theory while being experiential enough to elicit engagement in the general public via a user's simplified experience.

3.5.3 Technology

To create an experiential interactive documentary, it was clear that the experience should be immersive. It should be part of an animated landscape creating a virtual

> Diary note taken on August 22, 2013 @07:32pm
> Very surprised how after 15 years away from programming browser compatibility still an issue. Seems not all browsers behave the same in html5. I thought I was close to launch but looks like I still have lots of tweaking to do!

environment indicative of the intention to connect the stories and videos shot in the street with the idea of social media engagement: to go beyond what YouTube offers in terms of related videos, likes and comments. It needed to be a virtual place where the video and direct interaction via Twitter can coexist. This meant that it was necessary to use new technology that involves animation, full interactivity and full control of the videos. In addition I needed to access the Twitter API on an advanced level, to be able to collect tweets via a hash tag

and to display them depending on which question was playing. It quickly became clear that Wordpress would not suffice. It was necessary to find an application that would allow full control and native HTML5 coding. HYPE Tumult (Hype 2013) was the best available that had a good level of flexibility to allow for HTML5 coding. It had the advantage of strong animation tools to help animate the environment required for the virtual contact zone room.

The main content of the creative project was in part developed on the streets of Sydney by the nature of the questions asked and the responses. In addition a key part driving this project was the attempt to connect the contact theory with the creative experience. This connection was largely flexible and modified, based on observations of how the user engaged with the campaign both on the streets of Sydney and online on social media. Another major factor that contributed to the shape of the final documentary was the technical challenges faced in the creation of the web portal, first using the Wordpress and then in using HYPE Tumult to create the HTML5 interactive documentary. Using the HYPE software enabled the creative use (with relative ease) of the very advanced HTML5 code. Otherwise it would have required substantial investment in the form of hiring of a professional.

It is important to note here that while I did manage to complete the project with relative success, some technical difficulties were

> Diary note taken on September 8, 2013 @09:32am
> Finally finished my interactive documentary. I used the best technology out there but still not 100% confident it works seamlessly even though I spent considerable time on cross browser issues.

faced. For example, weeks were spent in the development of the code that enabled the Twitter bird to be able to display tweets with a specific hash tag, only to discover that Twitter had just changed their API code and made it substantially harder to pull a tweet from a Twitter stream without using their own widget. This set the project back 6 weeks and limited the Twitter functionality so that it could not update instantly when a tweet is triggered. The multi browser issues that HTML5 still encountered, also created many difficulties and forced a degree of aesthetic compromise necessary to ensure cross browser compatibilities. Despite the above mentioned technical difficulties, I conclude that HYPE presents multimedia artists and creative storytellers with a powerful tool that allows them to create engaging experiences with minimal coding. In the case of this project, after spending months with HYPE, it was possible to use it to its maximum potential. Because of previous experience as a developer many years ago, the researcher was able to quickly learn JavaScript and then use this new found skill to gain access to even more potential from HYPE using JavaScript to create complex functionality, such as the drag and drop of the cultural objects (see figure 3.18 – JavaScript Sample Code).

```
1   // element – DOMHTMLElement that triggered this function being called
2   // event – event that triggered this function being called
3   function showTweet(hypeDocument, element, event) {
4   // Show a random text out of 3
5       anyText=Math.floor((Math.random()*3)+1);
6       if ($tczq=='X') {
7           document.getElementById('TTEXT').style.display='block';
8           switch (anyText)
9           {
10          case 1:
11            document.getElementById('TTEXT').innerHTML='Drag an object to bench to start a conversation.';
12            break;
13          case 2:
14            document.getElementById('TTEXT').innerHTML='Responed using twitter but first drag an object to bench.';
15            break;
16          case 3:
17            document.getElementById('TTEXT').innerHTML='Each conversation has a unique twitter hashtag.';
18            break;
19          }
20      }
21  // Show instruction for hash tag every 5 – the rest show actual tweets
22      else {
23          if ($anyTweet==5)
24          {
25              document.getElementById('TTEXT').innerHTML='Use #tcz and #' + $tczTag + ' hashtags to tweet your response to this question.';
26              document.getElementById('TTEXT').style.display='block';
27              document.getElementById('TWIDGET'+$tczq).style.display='none';
28              $anyTweet=1;
29          }
30          else
31          {
32              document.getElementById('TTEXT').style.display='none';
33              document.getElementById('TWIDGET'+$tczq).style.display='block';
34              $anyTweet=$anyTweet+1;
35          }
36      }
37      document.getElementById('TwitterINF').style.display='block';
38  }
```

Figure 3.18 – JavaScript Sample Code

Fortuitously, as the project was close to completion HYPE launched a new version with a drag and drop feature which

> Diary note taken on August 27, 2013 @05:09pm
> Hype just released a major new version hope it is not too much work to migrate project to new version, as I need new full screen feature in new version.

substantially improved the experiential effect of dropping an object onto bench to start a conversation. This newer version allowed the substantial enhancement of the experience by adding a key functionality that enabled users to drag the cultural object on or off the bench to start or end a conversation. This strengthened the relationship between each cultural object and its corresponding conversation – both visually and conceptually.

As this chapter is concluded it is important to add that using the EAR method and the continually changing the creative concept based on feedback and observation, proved both difficult and time consuming yet was equally important and necessary for a practice-led research project. In addition, the implementation of an ambitious multi-phased campaign was a difficult journey. The need to balance the creative with the technical was a challenge that I have not been previously presented with in my professional career. This process was restrictive (due to my limited technical skills) but also rewarding in-so-far as it presented the opportunity to be more hands on in the creative process and allowed for the technical aspects of this project to be freely intertwined with the creative choices. To better understand the role of experiential documentaries in participatory political engagement, there is (although

outside the scope of this DCA) the possibility of engaging more users in the conversation via the use of a Twitter hash tag. By creating the interactive documentary and completing the circle of online/offline engagement, the aim was to open up a new avenue for social media engagement within the context of an experiential interactive documentary. The final step in this project was to reconnect with the initial offline participants by sending them an invitation to participate in the online conversation via Twitter and through *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary (see figure 3.19 – Invitation to Participate).

Figure 3.19 – Invitation to Participate

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter I highlighted the various iterations of the creative process and the resulting observations that informed changes undertaken at each milestone. This cycle of action, observation and adjustment is a key feature in the application of the EAR methodology in this practice-led research. This chapter revisits the research question as it relates to the final results of this process. The result is the collective sum of all observations and reflections derived from running an iterative creative project – with major adjustments and modification at each milestone. The aim of this chapter is to outline my observations as the researcher and the artist. In this case the value of the research was not so much in the quantitative data but in the unique positioning of the creative project in so far as it sought to explore the question of establishing a contact zone to elicit more participatory engagement on social media, to create a hybrid model of engagement.

This unique positioning and the flexibility to change the campaigns at each milestone allowed the observation and response to each

> Diary note taken on February 6, 2013 @ 11:42am
> Seems that highest engagement comes from the streets with two volunteers who found Talking Cultures from street poster!

situation on the ground. Thus a process was developed that began with street video interviews and was completed in an interactive documentary with a social media connection. The use of a multi-phased online/offline campaign showed the possibility of combining social media participatory campaigns with related but separate street-based campaigns.

The main contribution of this research is how the collective observations and findings relate to how the contact theory can be applied to a multi-phased campaign. This set of observations combined with my unique positioning as an activist, artist and researcher, provide a valuable contribution to knowledge. This knowledge can be used in future research, more importantly it has practical implications in regard to helping independent artists navigate their way around creating social media campaigns that can effectively elicit civic participatory engagement. The following sections discuss the five key results encountered during the creative journey, which combines (from sociology) the contact theory pillars of open, equal dialogue with a clear goal and authority, along with the communicative ecology of establishing a contact zone within an online/offline hybrid participatory environment.

4.1 A Hybrid Model of Engagement

One trap the techno-optimist might fall into is relying entirely on social media and online campaigns without the addition of an element of face-to-face interaction. While this can be possible in some types of campaign and with the right kind of authority, it is often important to run social media campaigns in tandem with other conventional campaigns:

> The Internet is the latest wave of new communications technology to bring dramatic predictions of transformation in community and political activity. Its importance is unassailable, but we misunderstand it (a) if we exaggerate its novelty rather than situate it within a continuing series of transformations in communication and transportation capacities that have shaped the whole modern era and (b) if we fail to take seriously the differences between the ways in which people are commonly linked on the electronic web and the organization of face-to-face relationships. (Calhoun 1998: 380)

As a result, one of the most hotly debated subjects in online political engagement is that it has been inherently hard to prove that online engagement can create long-term strong ties that translate into strong bonds able to produce actions that can then go beyond simple low level participation. One side of the argument strongly advocates that technology makes it possible to create connections but less likely for these connections to form strong ties, especially on social media platforms such as Facebook, which makes *liking* or *sharing* a cause, an event or a page as simple as a click of the mouse.

One key advocate for this argument is the columnist and renowned writer Malcolm Gladwell, who in his much cited article in the New Yorker wrote, 'the kind of activism associated with social media isn't like this at all. The platforms of social media are built around weak ties' (Gladwell 2010: 45). It is further argued that this form of *slacktivism* (Kingsley 2011) can be detrimental to participatory politics in that it provides an excuse for the online participants to feel guilt-free about not participating in offline actions and activism beyond their social media involvement. This argument centres around the premise that by providing a low entry point for participatory political engagement, we might be engaging more users but these users are in fact engaged on a very low ineffective level, and in some cases actors who otherwise would have engaged offline, end up not doing so.

The counter argument to this disputes the negative effect of social media participation and advocates that the low level of engagement does produce a higher number of engagements both online and offline. Furthermore, it advocates that the use of social media to engage communities in political campaigns might be – in some cases – the only possible way to engage some segments of the community, especially when it comes to younger demographics (Burgess et al. 2009).

It is also argued that online environments can indeed generate strong ties, just as do its offline counter parts. Clearly, lowering the entry point has a positive impact on the number of people engaged from a larger pool of the public who would have not otherwise engaged. However, a key question remains. Could this engagement be nurtured in a stronger online or even offline engagement?

In the case of the *Talking Cultures* campaigns, it did not rely on any outside authority to establish a strong virtual contact zone or on any authority

> Diary note taken on February 4, 2013 @ 9:21am
> A thought about engagement, offline one out of four people I interviewed choose to speak on camera. Online engagement at that level is proving to be much less!

being a pillar of the contact theory even though if it had been so it would have helped shape the campaigns. The aim was to examine the participatory process from the position of an independent artist/activist. For example, if there had been a well respected figure endorsing the campaigns or if the project had been able to gain mainstream media support that would have carried weight. Instead the sole form of authority was the researcher, which meant the project either had to resort to a network of strong friends or it had to go to the streets to establish face-to-face contact. For ethical reasons that prevent using friendship as a way to elicit participation in research, the latter was chosen.

In the street interviews anyone who agreed to be interviewed was asked if they have ever been on camera. Most have indicated that they had never been part of a video project. Furthermore, it was

> Diary note taken on September 9, 2013 @05:01pm
> At the end of the day when all is done my best result of engagement for this project was made on the streets face to face. This could be due to the lack of online authority or because online needs strong negative goals.

observed that some of the people interviewed on the street have engaged online and then went on to engage at higher levels by registering with the Virtual Flash Mob. This progress showed that engagement could move from the offline environment to the online given the right goal or message.

Some of the actors who chose to engage in the *Talking Cultures* campaigns at a higher level (by filling in the volunteer form) went on to develop strong ties that led to physical meetings or discussion at a later FtF meeting. After a bond had formed the conversation continued online with multiple exchanges of supportive emails between volunteers. These emails included suggestions of offline participation in events.

Such ties can clearly be seen in this email exchange between Nathan and Veronica (not their real names) in which the two volunteers had only met once before the exchange emails of support:

> Nathan – Emailed 13/04/2013, at 1:27 AM: I watched this great talk on TED by Charlie Todd: *ted.com/talks/charlie_todd_the_shared_experience_of_absurdity.html* and one very important point that I gleamed from these random activities was THE STORY which is the prime motivator for why you would participate in this kind of activity. For most of these were fun, the reaction of other people & THE STORY you tell others. For our motivator, I don't think it is strong enough to make people do it. I found that Flash mobs that have existed: the dancing flash mob – thats fun! you can tell your friends – pillow fight flash mob – its fun, you can tell your friends about it. I'm not sure if we should mention 'anti racism' as it has a negative conations and also flash mobs tend to be positive things so im not sure it would attract a diverse crowd.

> Veronica's Response – Emailed On 13/04/2013, at 8:02 PM: I agree with *Nathan*. Racism is a very powerful word and suggests a perpetrator and victim scenario. You might have a lot of vengeful angry victims of racism wanting to take part ;) *Nathan* – I will watch your TED video. You're on fire with your ideas. I love the poster idea on the stereotypes!!

While there is much new research that clearly shows that online engagement can translate to offline actions, 'The bond once a group identifier is established can be strong enough to lead to offline actions' (Schumann and Luong 2011: 1). In order for this to happen a really strong goal is needed and – more importantly – an authority to give it online value, so that engagement can stand out in an environment fraught with too much noise. Even meaningful campaigns can become lost without the right support: as opposed to offline engagement in which walking the streets and talking to people has by its nature more weight. This is because the actors are more involved than just putting online calls, for example, a lamppost poster is more time consuming to post that an online poster shared on Facebook. So what makes the online engagement meaningful enough to constitute real activism as opposed to slacktivism? And how can this engagement create bonds and ties that are: a) strong online and b) can lead to offline actions?

My own experience with the *Virtual Flash Mob* online campaigns and the *Questioning Culture* street campaign has shown that it is possible for engagement to move from online to offline and vice versa. For example, actors participating with the online process of the *Virtual Flash Mob* did in fact engage beyond the online registration process and went on to perform the real-world aspects of the flash mob by taking physical photos, then subsequently going back online to publish them on social media as part of the collective action. With a total of 119 registrations in the two virtual flash mobs, it is clear that the concept generated engagement. In one case this engagement was in the form of a first tweet being as a direct result of participating in the *Talking Cultures* virtual flash mob.

This could mean that either they were on Twitter as a follower only and became engaged with the virtual flash mob to a level that warranted their first ever tweet, or it could be that they didn't have Twitter to start with and the Virtual Flash Mob pushed them to engage with Twitter in order to participate (see figure 4.1 – First Tweet).

Figure 4.1 – First Tweet

Also there is the case of the cultural street interviewees who go online and comment on their own as well as other videos therefore moving their engagement beyond the act of speaking to the camera into the online interaction with the issues and goals of the campaign. There is no doubt that some online engagements can develop strong ties and there is much research that backs this up. Yet the question remains: how strong is strong enough? Is it strong enough to last past the specific goal for which it was initiated? More importantly: is this bond able to spill from the online to the offline? Is it that the conceptual boundaries of an online engagement are such that it will prevent it from forming offline bonds?

What this project has shown is that if online participation is part of a campaign that has offline activities, then this – in fact – makes it possible for the online bond to extend offline and – at the same time – reinforce the online bond. The importance of this observation is highlighted in understanding the value of a hybrid model that not only has online and offline elements but that these elements work seamlessly. It is important to genuinely understand the nature of this relationship between the online and the offline. It is not there simply as a cover-all, but more significantly to create a movement of activism that is kinetic and organic, moving freely between the online and the offline environments. Since its inception the Internet worked as a supplement to face-to-face activism (Calhoun 1998) but further

work needs to be done to understand the dynamics that can create strong bonds that move freely between the two environments. Clearly, looking at online actions as a supplement to offline actions will not be enough to generate strong engagement. In the *Talking Cultures* campaigns in order to get strong movement between the online and the offline environments I linked the street videos to the theme of the virtual flash mob. Thus I was able to attract over 100 registrations. At least 50% of them came directly from street participants or from people who had seen street poster advertisements (see figure 4.2 – Volunteer Street Posters).

Figure 4.2 – Volunteer Street Poster

As discussed in the previous chapter, the three multi-phased campaigns of *Talking Cultures* were designed to be a mix of street-based offline and online actions. With each campaign, the level of engagement required was increased to test the movement of participants across the two environments and to test their level of participation or willingness to engage further with each new campaign. The first campaign was *Questioning Culture*, which was content-driven. It began on the streets and by the end of the project it turned out to be the most successful. When the content of this campaign went online – in 103 videos and 55 interviewees – only 5 shared their video with friends. This implies that there was 9% online engagement as opposed to street participation, which was roughly amounted to 25% (or one out of four) approached on the street choosing to engage. Granted, these are two entirely different forms of engagement, my experience has shown that face-to-face interaction is more effective than online interaction, particularly when trying to elicit engagement with a serious subject such as the multicultural situation in Australia. In contrast, the results from the Virtual Flash Mob campaigns (which were conducted online only) had stronger online engagements in which out of 508 that were reached by way of the campaign post on the

Talking Cultures Facebook page 105 users chose to register, which amounts to roughly 20% participation. It is important to note here that this form participation – i.e. of filling in a registration form – required higher engagement than that of commenting on the online videos but lower than that of engagement in street interviews. Looking at the results of the online versus the offline participation rate, we can see that virtual campaigns alone can have a high level of engagement but that the combination of both online and offline stands to provide the greatest likelihood of engagement.

One other consideration is that the nature of offline engagement lends itself to a stronger form of engagement by virtue of it being offline (an example of which are the interviews conducted) because the engagement requires physical real world actions. Another observation that validates thought about the importance of offline engagement which is pushed online, is that the highest level of engagement (in the form volunteering) was from a tiny poster in the toilet of a café (see figure 4.3 – Toilet Cubicle Sticker). In this case the two actors who responded to stickers ended up creating a meaningful offline engagement, while the five other volunteer applications that came from online promotions ended up with only one that translated into an offline engagement.
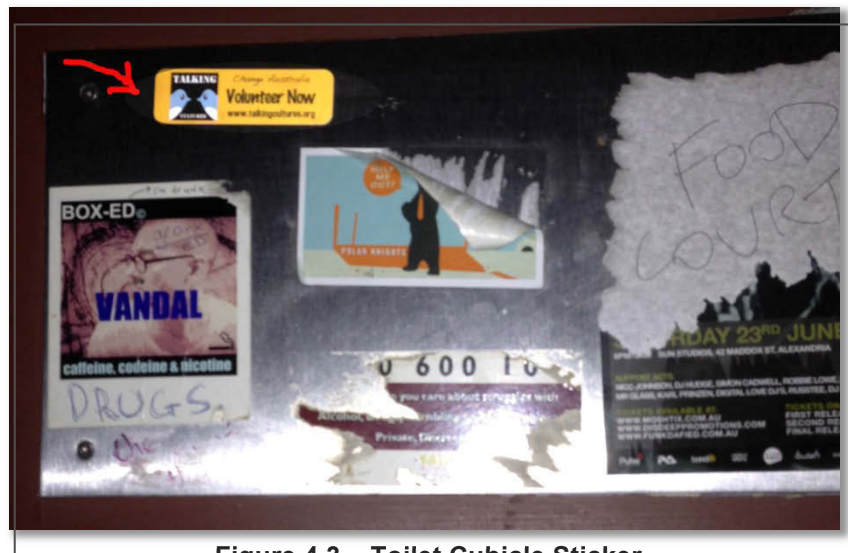
Figure 4.3 – Toilet Cubicle Sticker

In the case of the Virtual Flash Mob campaigns I was able to generate online connections that demonstrated a considerably high level of engagement in terms of the images uploaded, the texts written and in some cases, the creation of images using image-editing software. This level of engagement is a hybrid form of engagement that requires the participant to go offline to acquire the image and then, using social media, share it as part of the Virtual Flash Mob action (see figure 4.4 – Virtual Flash Mob contributions).
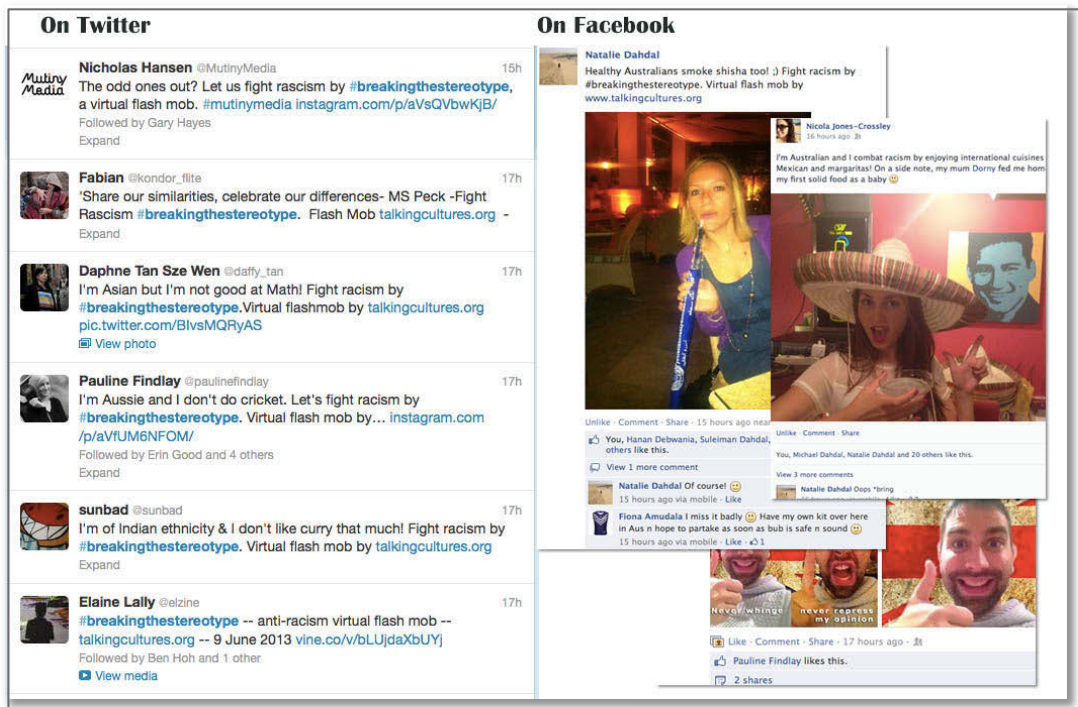
Figure 4.4 – Virtual Flash Mob Contributions

There are a few parameters specific to the *Talking Cultures* campaigns that might have affected the results and should be noted:

1. Online promotion has higher exposure but lower circulation, while offline has lower exposure but higher circulation. With this in mind online promotions were intentionally reduced so that comparative observations could be used. The use of the full power of online promotional tools might have led to a stronger online engagement without the need for the offline element.

2. The small size of the project's street advertisements for the flash mob required the recording of the email address or URL, it then being necessary to apply via an online application. This could quite likely have been the reason that this engagement was proactive from the start, simply because it had a more difficult entry point.

3. The higher response to offline engagement via street posters vs. the lower response of online promotions is a direct result of the local of advertisement in cafés known for their artist patrons.

Two volunteer applications are shown here to provide more detail about the level of engagement that the campaigns were generating. Veronica's response came from an online promotion. Nathan's came from the little sticker pictured above:

67

I am a first generation Australian born to Mauritian migrant parents. I know first hand the confusion of not having a specific cultural identity and now I have found my voice because of it. I am a filmmaker and musician. My goal is to explore culture and communities through film.

I am always lost in endless curiosity & passionately ambitious & always dreaming how I can change things, invent, imagine, heal, explore, create, inspire, change the world.

During the virtual mob campaigns, Nathan had a stronger engagement and produced more physical projects while Veronica was reluctant to become involved beyond the virtual, even though she did attend two physical meeting to which she contributed. Her main contribution to the campaigns was online, via helping to write some of the campaign's copy. What was clear was that volunteers who engaged online first, were more likely to keep their engagement online, while volunteers who engaged offline, were equally interested in online and offline participation.

4.2 Open Dialogue Equals Weak Content

One of issues faced in the conducting of the *Questioning Cultures* street interviews was in the asking of open questions from interviewees. While it made it possible to keep the interviews

> Diary note taken on September 25, 2012 @ 11:26am
> So if we leave questions open it is hard to create equal footing. Then if we give a selection of conversations we loose openness. Hence the best solution is q and a that is open yet possible to be a conversation starter.

as open as possible and therefore meet the contact theory conditions of creating an open dialogue, it had a negative effect on the received responses because of the random nature of these open questions. As a result, the conversations generated from these interviews were not controlled by the filmmaker and often resulted in weak, off the topic or even in some cases offensive questions. For example, an interviewee was asking about objectivity but the question – while valid – was framed in a way that made it ambiguous. In addition it included swear words. The question being: '*why do people think their shit don't stink?'* Another valid, yet badly framed question was asked by a person of Saudi background, the question was simple and direct, '*do Australians hate Arabs?'* The use of the word 'hate' resulted in people refusing to answer the question with some complaining that hate is a strong word. In the course of the street interviews the interviewing technique was refined in such a way that the interview would begin by placing the process in the context of a larger issue – in this case the making of a documentary about multicultural Australia. It was ensured that the interviewee was informed that the aim was to generate a conversation between strangers; that the questions were ones that were to be put to others on the streets of Sydney. In addition, any questions they asked would be done so from other random strangers, on their behalf. By framing the interview in this context an increase in participation was enabled and

it was noted that the responses were more forthcoming. In addition the questions asked in this context were more on topic. This process – involving 13 documentary shooting sessions across 11 locations around Sydney – generated many questions and responses, resulting in a high ratio of usable videos (approximately one in three).

The results of these interviews were only partial successful, because while it was possible to get videos on the topic, the content was not as strong as it should have been – in this case I

> Diary note taken on August 27, 2012 @ 10:49pm
> This whole thing of me insisting to have short videos. I know why now. Ts the only way I can engage wider sections of community. People in the streets that have little to say but important things that wouldn't be heard otherwise. I hope the Q&A format will give them depth.

used my experience as a documentary filmmaker to decided on what works and what doesn't. The problem with these earlier videos was that the questions needed to be a result of an open dialogue and not dictated by the questioner. At the same time the questions needed to be on topic and strong enough to be generate a conversation. In order to achieve both objectives it was decided to shoot a large number of questions and select the ones that offered the clearest responses to the questions asked. To create the content for *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary, the 173 videos shot (which included 12 questions of which 104 videos of 7 questions and their responses were uploaded) were then further filtered down to 36 videos that included 6 questions with 5 responses each. It is the conclusion of this research that this filtering process helped create stronger conversations.

To gain even more mileage from such an open process of interviewing and as a result of the creative experience the following is suggested:

1. The theme should be stronger. The theme of multicultural Australia was too broad and perhaps a more effective theme could have been something like 'racism on buses' or 'the representation of ethnic groups in the media.'

2. Even more videos should be made. Given the resources, the ratio should be 1 to 10. It follows that for 10 useable questions with 10 responses each we would need 1000 interviews – not an easily achievable feat.

3. The question should frame the conversation whilst keeping it open (within predefined parameters). Even though this could be problematic if we truly want the dialogue to be open and not dictated by the filmmakers, there might be a way to frame the theme while keeping the process of street interviewees asking questions entirely open for their own interpretation within that framework.

4.3 Low Engagement and Positive Contact

The question of engagement in participatory political activism can be simplified to three levels: no engagement at all, a low level of engagement and a high level of engagement.

> Diary note taken on November 21, 2012 @ 3:23pm
> Not one person liked the page or forwarded the email. But there are views 1,200 views on YouTube, note that comments are all negative. Subjects viewed most are negative questions.

The key measurement of engagement here the amount of time spent on the action, does it require offline tasks, and is it creating longer term engagement. It is important to note that there are many factors that affect this level of engagement and in this project the observation of the question of engagement is narrowed down to:

1. The interaction with content uploaded to social media.

2. The direct responses to approaching people in the streets of Sydney to be interviewed for the questioning culture campaign.

3. The direct responses to the calling for participation to volunteer both online and offline and the calling for the two Virtual Flash Mob campaigns.

4. The interaction with *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary via views and tweets with the six conversations' hash tags.

It is important to note here that in the case of the videos interacting with possible participants, I initially refrained from the promotion of the videos to friends or the use of any other marketing tools. The only form of exposure was organic or via the *Talking Cultures* Facebook page or directly emailed to the street participants. The process that followed after uploading the videos to YouTube was only to promote them on the Facebook page and Twitter channel using organic methods, without resorting to paid promotions. Without using paid advertisements, it was possible to gather between 30 to 100 views in the first few days. These views came mainly from YouTube subscribers and the Facebook page. After more than 4,000 unique views and after examining the statistics for each video uploaded as part the *Talking Cultures* campaigns, it was becoming clear that the more positive the campaign, the lower the engagement.

To illustrate this, one need only take two video questions that were shot on the streets of Sydney then uploaded to YouTube and Facebook. One had a positive message, the second also had a positive message but one which was framed in terms of fighting a negative phenomenon and therefore had negative connotations. One of the most positive videos on

the channel 'People should live however they like', generated 36 views, 0 likes, 0 comments. While – alternatively – a video more likely to be perceived as negative (about the lack of the integration of indigenous Australians) had 270 views, 2 likes, 14 dislikes and 13 comments. Of these 13 comments, the comments that elicited most likes were the negative ones with some comments receiving as many as 17 likes: *'They're not integrated because the average_ Aborigine IQ is around 60.'* While a positive comment like *'Cultural integration is supposed to be the highest form of tolerance; we value these beliefs so much we can bring them into our beliefs, but its definition has really changed in recent years, to: these are our beliefs. Believe the same, or face countrywide hatred. They don't need looking after. They just need equal opportunity, and the respect that every reasonable human being deserves. What they do with those freedoms is up to them; and the consequences are theirs to deal with'* received zero. In order to show that it is the perceived negativity and not the provocation that had the second video generate more engagement, we can look at the video viewed by the most people.

For example, a positive one titled *'I love Arabs'* had the most views (over 600). Looking at its positive message, it is possible to see that while it had the most views and considerable engagement, this engagement was relatively much lower in its intensity – in terms of the number of comments-to-views ratio – than the negative message video. As a result, we can see that responses to content regardless of whether that content was negative or framing a response to negative comment, is more likely to evoke engagement and that that engagement is more likely to be stronger in terms of longer comments or more effort being put into the response. In other words the engagement with videos advocating a positive message had more engagement with actors on Facebook and YouTube utilizing the *like* feature, but a lower level of engagement because the participants opted not to comment on or not be involved further. This was the opposite in the case of the video that fought the negative message. Fewer actors were engaged but the intensity of engagement was higher. More comments imply a greater effort and commitment in the form of written text, as opposed to the mere press of a button. Sometimes even the writing of lengthy comments required a greater level of engagement with the content. This issue of the lower intensity of engagement in positive messages has been referred to in relation to the contact theory as *positive contact vs. negative contact*:

> The frequency of positive contact experiences may outnumber the frequency of negative contact experiences. However, the influence of negative contact on prejudice appears to outweigh the influence of positive contact. Consequently, the beneficial effects of numerous positive intergroup encounters may be counteracted by the relatively infrequent but powerful effects of negative intergroup encounters. (Barlow et al. 20012: 1640)

However a persistent issue in the understanding of the effect of negative contact vs. positive contact is that there have been very few studies to measure it in relation to engagement in participatory actions. The best reference found is a study in the field of experimental social psychology, that seems to point to a clear distinction between the preferences and motives of the actors who engage with positive messages, as opposed to those actors who engage with negative messages. The study was about the effect of avoidance vs. approach in the reduction of prejudice and demonstrated that participants who are more likely to engage with positive stimuli are more focused on promotion, while participants who are interested in negative stimuli are more likely to be prevention-focused and thus have higher levels of engagement (Phills et al. 2011). This could support the argument that negative contact enlists participants who are more likely to have higher levels of engagement but there could also be other reasons why we find ourselves acting strongly to repute something with which we disagree, as opposed to recommending something of which we approve, it could – for instance – be at a more innate level of 'fight or flight', in this case fight.

4.4 The Medium is the Message

The bar for the entry point in participatory content has been lowered significantly in the last few years with the new advances in technology and specifically with the increasing ease of participation on social media and the ever increasing number of new competitive tools that introduce innovative ways to share content via online interaction. So much so that nowadays – with little or no technical skill – a person with access to the Internet is able participate actively in commenting and sharing content with a wide network, a process that was once reserved for a select few. The advances in smart phone technologies have introduced a factor of immediacy and a blurring of the boundaries between online and offline participation. Therefore having mobile Internet functionality linked to GPS and increasingly more integration with social media platforms, creates new opportunities for engagement and citizen participatory contribution that is proving transformational. Combine this with an increased uptake of social media consumption across various levels of society and we have a major shift in terms of the narrowing of the digital divide, particularly in accessibility to tools that allow interaction, an essential requirement for participatory political activism.

In the research and creative work through the *Talking Cultures* campaigns and specifically when talking to people in the streets, it was clear that even though social media tools are a part of everyday life and the part of our cultural fabric, the idea of participating politically in social media has not yet been taken up. Further more the people interviewed still seemed to think of social media as a means of low level social interaction where important messages

that require action are still more likely to be broadcast on television rather than on social media. Almost every interviewee assumed that the project was for TV and when told it was a social media documentary, they would immediately ask: *'and when will it be on TV?'*

On the other side of this participatory creative project are the observations derived from running the online virtual flash mobs. Comparing the latter with the offline questioning cultures street interviews leads one to think that by engaging on a low level online, we are increasing the chance (but not guaranteeing) of a higher level of activism online and maybe even offline, if the trigger factors of changing that salient participation, presents itself. There is little research that specifically addresses this issue and the research in this project highlights the need to understand the issue of this shift and the transformation of modes of political activism, that is transforming someone's activism from low online engagement to high offline engagement. The engagements with the *Talking Cultures* campaigns has provided a glimpse of this transformation by tracking people engaging online with the first two campaigns and then finally engaging at a higher level with direct registration to volunteer in the Virtual Flash Mob campaign. Looking at the results of these campaigns, we can see that the strongest Facebook engagements with posts were the ones that called for specific action. (See figure 4.5 – Talking Cultures Facebook Page Stats) These were often translated to higher engagements in the form of online registrations on a website and then offline actions as part of the Flash Mob activities that involved taking a photo in the real world and using image-editing software to add text. More research needs to be done in this field but ultimately the onus is on content creators to push this online/offline transformation by using new technologies that construct stronger online engagements that in turn translate to offline street activism.
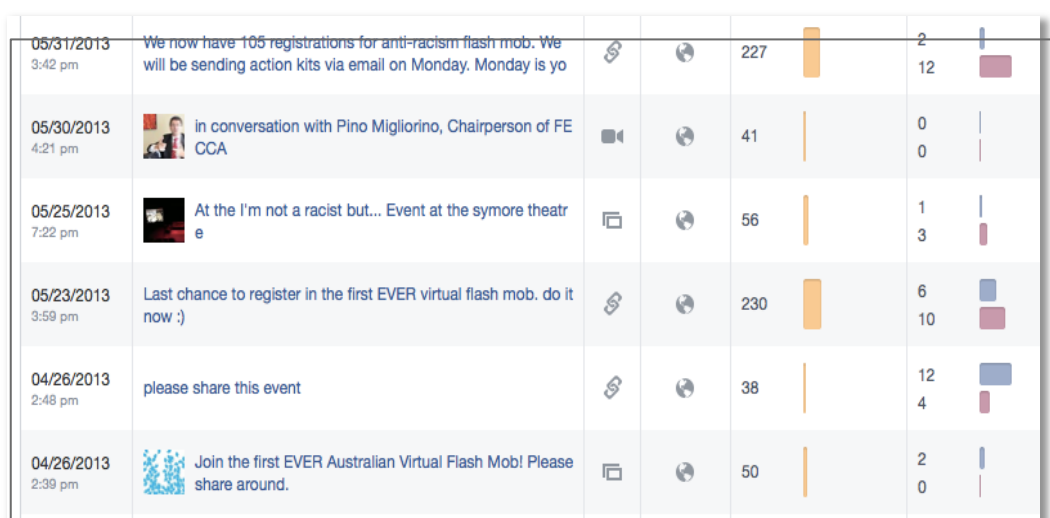
Figure 4.5 – Talking Cultures Facebook Page Stats

To balance the discussion of the role of the medium in the way the message is delivered, consumed and significantly, in the nature of this message, it is worth noting that technology can play a negative role in participatory activism especially when the nature of that activism is outside that of the mainstream narrative. The popularity of large social media platforms can give corporations (often US based) a huge amount of power in controlling the content and its distribution. At the same time they have the means to monopolise the Internet audience in a way that makes it hard for small organisations or individuals to use these technologies for their own advantage and to deliver their participatory messages. This power will also translate to governmental power once governments gain access to the data of those corporations as in the case of the NSA in the US or the censorship of Twitter in China (Tierney 2013: 15).

During the creation of this project, technology was a major hindrance for the user experience. For example, the technical difficulties faced

Diary note taken on November 30, 2012 @ 4:39pm
Do I need to highlight the technical hardship to give value to an artwork?

early on using Wordpress were big factors in the delay of the release of content online. In retrospect Wordpress should not have been used to create the web portal but the fact that such a platform was already in existence made it difficult for it not to be used, for some of the following reasons:

1. It was noted that the programming skills of the researcher were too outdated to meet new technological demands, when the intention was to create an online experience that would allow for as much engagement and ability to share, comment and interact with the content in as low an entry point as possible, in order to meet the contact theory demand of equal grounds – Wordpress provided all of that.

2. Wordpress was chosen because it allowed the user to concentrate on the concept not the technical implementation, with many widgets and plug-in engagement tools.

3. Wordpress is considered to be a social media platform so the researcher was naturally drawn to that notion because of a strong belief that technology is an important part of the creative process.

What was to be an easy process of implementation for the website and the creation of place holders for the three campaigns (Questioning Culture, Culture Salon, Culture Mob) and the addition of events, news, videos whilst also allowing users to comment, share and link,

turned out to be a technological nightmare. While it is true that Wordpress is a good tool for straightforward blogs and projects that do not require heavy video content, it turned out that the technical limitation of integrating YouTube videos with Wordpress was such that the time spent in the pursuit of success was more than nine months and six iterations of the www.talkingcultures.org website. The first website achieved had to be abandoned because it had too many features that made it too slow to be functional and so a complete redesign – to make the website simpler and faster – was deemed necessary. (See Figure 4.6 – Talking Cultures Wordpress Blog V1 and V2).
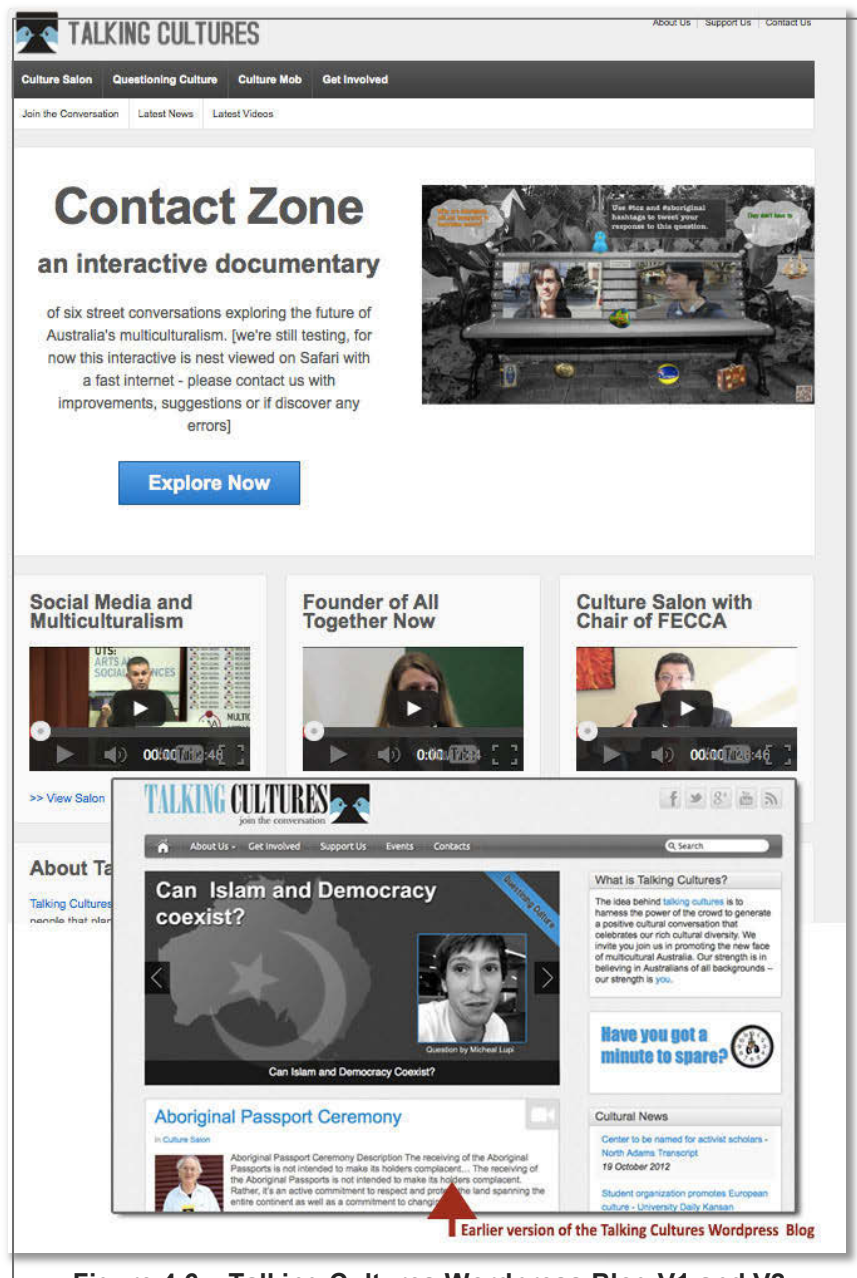
Figure 4.6 – Talking Cultures Wordpress Blog V1 and V2

While the result was satisfactory it's worth noting that the technology used affected the creative project – in this case negatively – and as a result there are a number of important observations to consider:

1. Another two months was spent on fine tuning the technology used, with a total of eleven months invested in the building of the site. This meant that more time was spent on implementing the technology and less time on content. As mentioned above 170 videos were shot whereas – with more time – 1000 could have been.

2. The new site was less detailed because it had less room to comment, share and add events. This – in a way – worked to the advantage of the content as the site became more content focussed. As a result the final Wordpress website was less immersive, which was one of the factors that forced the decision to create *The Contact Zone* documentary to compensate by creating a more experiential journey.

3. The simplicity of the site meant that the user experience was such that it was more functional than experiential – more superficial than immersive – thus making it difficult to truly connect to the concept, content and the various social media platforms in an ideal way. It is safe to assume that this was due to the technical limitations in working as an individual and not as part of a large corporation.

This is an interesting notion considering that once upon a time the researcher worked as a professional programmer and so was technically

> Diary note taken on October 9, 2012 @ 6:52pm
> This technology work is been time consuming. Andrew says it has value because of the social cause it's working toward.

savvy. However, in spite of claims of ease of implementation using current blogging tools, knowledge was only earned the hard way. Once it was decided to apply advanced new technologies, new technical difficulties (such as bugs) had to be faced, especially because of the use of free open source software, something most activists will resort to only due to lack of funding. It is important to add that the actual technologies not only influenced the research in terms of practical progress but are also entwined with the participatory culture that is an essential aspect of how users interact with the project. Furthermore, the companies behind the technologies – especially large companies like Google, Facebook, and Apple – exert a huge influence on the shaping of not only the consumption habits of users, but also in setting up policies and terms of conditions that might directly effect the nature of the participatory actions engaged in by these users (Burgess et al. 2009).

There is no doubt that new technologies and the extreme levels of prestige that certain social media platforms have acquired are factors that have changed our cultural fabric, having a direct and important role in many political events around the world. It is important to note that even though the medium has changed from broadcast to social media, it is still dominated by large corporations that have a direct influence on how to implement and run online political campaigns. These corporations are able to influence users' choices in various ways – for example, by using various algorithms to decide on what becomes popular and what doesn't. In the process of running social media campaigns it was difficult to bypass the power of these tools and the way Facebook and Twitter were designed and run affected the nature of the campaigns, the participation of users in these campaigns and ultimately the message itself. Nowadays, more so with the new technologies, more power is given to users but at the same time even larger power is given to corporations that create and own these tools, so not only is the medium the message but also the messenger

4.5 Can Social Media Act Alone?

In order to understand the effect of social media tools on the lowering of the entry point of engagement, we need to look at these tools more closely. For example, Facebook with one easy click allows direct posting of status or checking into a location (*CheckIn* feature) directly from any smart phone (assuming you have a Facebook account and you've downloaded the Facebook app). The same function is available with Twitter. All that is needed is a smart phone and the Twitter app. Note that just recently with the release of the OS6 operating system for the IPhone 4 and 5 and the latest Android OS, this process has been made even easier by the integration of Facebook and Twitter in the operation systems of these devices. Thus the requirement for downloading the App has been eliminated. Now the user can simply take a photo and with one click share it on a Facebook or Twitter account. The same applies to text that can be directly tweeted from any smart phone without the need for the Twitter app.

This ever-increasing accessibility constantly works to lower the entry point for participation. The ease of use and advances in social media tools, are not just restricted to the smart phone market. Tablets such as the iPad2 and the Samsung Galaxy also have social media integration. There are also development efforts from browsers on personal computers to integrate the social media experience and to make it even more seamless. Having noted all these advantages in technology it still cannot be denied that traditional media continues to play a significant part (Jakubowicz 2009).

Added to current technologies are many more future advances to which we should be aware of. They will indubitably provide more speed for the integration of social media with every day objects. This process of technology/real life integration will allow for even more ways to interact and participate using more than the current platforms. New terms like the *internet of things* (Kelly 2007) will become an established part of our everyday vocabularies and new ways to consume content and participate online will ensure that not only will more people access social media but – more significantly – more people will use its interactive and participatory tools: this is a given. The question remains whether part of this participation will be political in nature.

The core of this question asks: what do we mean by political? What level of engagement in the political discussion can be constituted as activism? In other words, by lowering the entry point of engagement are we indeed getting more participatory political engagement by people who otherwise would never have engaged? Once (and if) they engaged, will they then becoming street activists? Pertinent to this, is a process of transformation that needs to be witnessed in the sense of gradually transforming engagements from the online environment to the offline, thus raising the level of engagement. Or, on the other hand, are we creating a new breed of activist who only participates online and only at a low level of engagement?

One of the key observations of this research is the effect of the ease of access to social media tools on the number of people engaging in participatory political activism, the level of engagement, and the transformational nature of this engagement, which was found to vary depending on the platform, the message (or goal) and the authority of the person owning that message.

Likewise the final interactive documentary has its advantages and disadvantages. As mentioned before *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary is a stand-alone project, which meant skill and time had to be invested in building the platform and a considerable amount invested in marketing. Conversely, the advantage is in being able to customise the experience and to organise the content in such a way that the user's journey can help further the goal by creating an experiential journey that presents the content in the manner intended by the artist.

As a case in point, *The Contact Zone* documentary allowed the reshaping of the street video interviews in the form of a conversation played on a street bench. In addition the creation of

a cultural matrix provided another dimension to these videos by filtering them by location and the heritage of the interviewee.

The key here is that by choosing to use both social media and an interactive documentary it was possible to combine the power of social media with the power of a custom made journey. These two distinctive online experiences combined with the offline street campaigns, collectively provided the maximum number of engagements with highest possible level of engagement (see figure 4.7 – The Engagement Matrix).

	Talking Cultures **Social media Campaigns**	The Contact Zone **Interactive Documentary**	Questioning Cultures **Street Interviews**
Engagement	Lower engagement because of low entry point but can be compensated with a strong goal – i.e. Breaking the Stereotype Virtual Flash Mob.	An experiential journey requires time investment with no guarantees of high engagement – will need to embed calls for action to elicit engagement.	Requires physical interactive so by nature it has high level of engagement – being videoed needs time and emotional investment.
Participation	Large community means higher participation but weak messages can easily be lost in the noise – so will need viral content.	Low participation because of the nature of a creative stand-alone art piece – connect to social media for higher engagement.	The physical nature of offline participation means lower numbers of participants than online.

Figure 4.7 – The Engagement Matrix

The process of creating an online/offline multi-phased campaign can be complex and as such is fraught with risks. However it is essential to be able to engage the maximum number of participants while at the same time achieving the high level of engagement needed to run a successful participatory campaign.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

In conclusion, there are two key outcomes that independent artists can utilise in the context of social media participatory art that has an element of activism and/or might call for participatory political civic engagement. These two main outcomes are:

1. In order to achieve the maximum level of engagement there needs to be a hybrid process where the call to action and the artistic content exist online and offline in a multi-phased iterative process that alternates between the online and the offline.

2. Furthermore for social media to be effective there needs to be an authority attached to it so it can fulfil the key condition of authority as per the contact theory. Particularly in relation to campaigns run solely on social media where there is a huge amount of content, this condition of authority becomes a necessary component for eliciting engagement. Authority in this case can be achieved by the endorsement of a social media celebrity, or a well known online group like *GetUp*.

In the following sections, I will expand more on the two key outcomes mentioned above: the need for hybrid online/offline action and the need for authority. I will summarize the

> Diary note taken on February 27, 2013 @ 2:14pm
> Need for authority for contact zone meant that I had to go on the streets because I lacked a source of online authority. Had I had authority I would have run entirely online campaign with strong contact zone success.

lessons learned from my attempt to combine new media art, with social media participatory campaigns, street art and activism to generate intercultural dialogue. The resulting autoethnographic observations can serve as valuable recommendations for activists and artists who work within this new social media participatory civic engagement ecology and help them in the most effective way, so as to elicit the maximum engagement with limited resources, translate this engagement into tangible action. Of key value to this process and the auto-ethnographic nature of the research are the practical results that present actual experience that is both reflected on and dictated by the principles of contact theory, which are then modified to work within the online/offline current world context. It is worth noting here that the concept of establishing a contact zone was not initially part of the research question but became an important part of the conclusion of this thesis, its importance is demonstrated in the value of dialogue generated within the frame of the study's creative project - the contact zone interactive documentary.

5.1 Obstacles Facing Independent Artists

Resulting from the processes of the creative work and the auto-ethnographic research, I conclude that as an independent media artist – while now having more tools to use, including powerful easily accessible social media tools – not having financial and/or institutional support makes these tools less advantageous. Key to this is that these tools are still in the hands of big corporations that own and control these platforms – not unlike traditional mainstream media. Also similar to traditional mainstream media, the government still has some form of control over censorship and resources that can give them an edge over a single artist/activist. However, social media platforms differ in one key factor. The ability of crowd sourcing can become a powerful platform for change, especially if the artist is successful in the creation of online support and social media presence. Certainly it's preferable for artists to partner with the right organizations to lend financial support, resources and an authority to the project. From my experience with *Talking Cultures* I found it harder as an individual artist to establish a contact zone for a number of reasons outlined below.

1. Platform owner influence: Working with a well-established platform like Facebook meant that the researcher was at the mercy of their algorithms and also had to conform to their

> Diary note taken on July 25, 2013 @06:49am
> So many rules to accessing twitter API, it's taking too much time and driving me crazy. Even someone like me with good programming skills find it so hard. I guess twitter is not very integration friendly and opts to be more central.

design. This was problematic especially with a creative project where the aesthetics matter in setting up the brand. Also even though the platform allowed for the easy creation of a Facebook page, the pages are very limited in functionality. When there was the need to create a registration page for the Virtual Flash Mob, it was not possible to do so within Facebook without serious external help from a programmer. Another way had to be found. In this case another social media platform was used – Wordpress, which also proved to be problematic in that the platform relies on external third party plug-ins that are often 'buggy'. Much time was wasted in the effort needed to make them work. In addition and key to this experience, these platforms are geared towards content that can be promoted to a network of friends or by paying for sponsored promotions. This could be problematic for an independent artist with limited resources. Another platform used is the Twitter API. First, Twitter changed their API to version 1.1 that made all previous widgets that pull tweets from Twitter unviable and hence the need for complete reprogramming. In this case, the researcher/artist had to hire a programmer to modify the code. In addition, it was necessary to collect hash tag responses from the users of the online documentary and it was only

possible to trace back one week, due to an inbuilt restriction in the Twitter API, yet another platform for the control and restriction of how the program could be used.

2. Social media platforms are noise saturated: The nature of social media is that there is so much information distributed and consumed randomly in a way that promotes image-heavy content. In effect this makes it hard for serious messages to standout and in the case of *Talking Cultures*, the message had to be shifted slightly to be noticed. Promoting cultural diversity was too positive as a message, so that it was not noticed until it was shifted to an anti-racism message. This is not ideal when one considers the fact that the artwork was aimed at emphasising an intercultural dialogue. The only way an artist can stand out from the crowd is through the development of provocative art works that can 'go viral' or by paying for sponsored advertisements. Both are not always suitable for many art projects. One other way is for the artist to utilise already existing and established channels, and thus receive support from an authority that can lend credibility to both the artist and the artwork with a direct link to an existing community. Thus in comparison with street art, the creative experience of an independent artist might, in fact, be hindered by the noise of a social media platform.

3. Restrictions due to the conformity to the user interface (UI) of social media platforms: In the case of this creative project, the artist/researcher began uploading videos to YouTube, creating a channel and playlists for each of the street conversations. This experience was found to be restrictive and as a result the project was invented as an HTML5 animated interactive documentary – *The Contact Zone*. This move was essential to provide an experiential journey through the content and shape the users interactions to suit the researcher's intentions. If only YouTube and Facebook had been used to tell the story it would not have been possible to juxtapose the questions and answers in a visual and temporal manner that could generate dialogue. While it is true that social media lowers the entry level for content distribution, at the same time it results in very few options to customise and control that experience – specifically within the framework of a creative art project. One other side effect to this was that because these social media tools are user-friendly and utilise the latest technology, users are now accustomed to the easy consumption of content and will not therefore be less likely to engage with an interactive documentary outside the above-mentioned platforms – unless it is well designed and programmed to be as user friendly as these. This process requires a very high level of technical skill and huge resources that might not be available to independent artists.

4. Slacktivism lowers the level of engagement: This slacktivism can be clearly seen if the content on social media requires the user to take actions outside the realm of the social media platform. For example in the Virtual Flash Mob, 135 registrations were received – this meant that 135 people went from Facebook to the Wordpress blog and spent at least 5 minutes to register. This level of participation showed clear interest in the goals of the campaign, but on the actual day of the Flash Mob, the follow up was only 20% due to the fact that once users are engaged, they are given more tasks that require offline actions. It could be that this level of response was due to having asked participants to follow up with physical actions outside the social platform.

As the result of the experience of the artist, the activist and the researcher, it could be concluded that indeed social media tools, while they are important for the delivery of a message, building a community around that message and promoting engagement on participatory politics is problematic and there remain some obstacles to their usage by activist/artists who work alone or who have minimal organisational support. That is not to say that these tools are negatively impacting on the process but more that the process within a world context that has social media tools readily available, will provide extra opportunities for engagement. At the same time it will require extra knowledge and authority to generate new forms of engagement. Not having the know-how will make social media tools more of a hindrance to the artistic process rather than an effective tool. However, once the right methods are applied and all the right factors are aligned, the power of combining art and social media to create strong meaningful interaction and actions can be seen.

5.2 The Success of a Hybrid Approach

A key decision I took early on in the creative process was to utilise the power of social media but not entirely rely on it. Important to my creative process was that the campaigns alternate between the online and offline environments. Also key to my project was to create an experiential interactive documentary that works as a standalone creative project but is able (and does) connect to social media platforms. This process led to establishing a contact zone where users were able to experience and interact in one space.

Here are some of the factors that helped establish an active contact zone as part of the various *Talking Cultures* campaigns:

1. Using the power of negative contact. The creative problem faced initially was the lack of participation because the message of the celebration of cultural diversity was too positive

to elicit a strong engagement. As a result the focus was shifted by reframing the same message from the celebration of cultural diversity to *fighting mono cultural narratives, breaking the stereotypes and fighting racism*. This shift appeared to be a catalyst in eliciting more engagement – but not necessarily stronger engagement. The adjustment from positive message to a positive message framed as fighting the negative can provide both requirements of high participation and strong engagement.

2. Use of a combination of face-to-face and online. While not claiming that online-only participatory activism is not able to provide tangible actions, the combination of the online/offline campaigns in *Talking Cultures* resulted in stronger participation in the multicultural conversation. It was more effective than just running the same number of campaigns only online – or only offline for that matter. This was clear because of the set of people who engaged offline included some who indicated that they would never have engaged with the issue online and so having street campaigns was the only way to reach them, in relation to this particular subject. At the same time, some of the online participants would not have contributed with strong action in the physical world had the offline campaign not been introduced. The offline followed up on the online participation (as was so in the Virtual Flash Mob) requiring users to take a photo in the real world then take action by posting it online on social media platforms.

3. Use of a combination of social media campaigns and the customised interactive project. For a solo artist with little organisational support and where the project is not backed by a strong authority, it becomes important that the artwork itself conveys its own authority that makes it stand out from the noise of a social media platform. This authority can be established by the creation of a self-contained interactive experiential project that can both show the power of the artist and the substantial technical investment in the art work: thus lending it value that surpasses the low entry point that social media campaigns can imply. In the case of these *Talking Cultures* campaigns it was necessary to create an experimental interactive documentary that utilised the capability of the latest HTML5 dynamic animations. It must combine that with social media elements that are able to both engage with the artwork and the users on these social media platforms. *The Contact Zone* interactive documentary was the signature piece and thus was able to lend authority to the project as a whole as is evident from the number of users of the documentary and the amount of time they spent on it – averaging 25 minutes.

It is very important to understand and appreciate the limitations and complexity that online engagement brings to participatory civic engagements. Clearly this understanding must go beyond the notional Facebook *like* or the low entry level of a user joining a group without taking further action as part of that group. Therefore, what is there beyond the joining of a group? In the case of social media participation, the physical actions and interactions that can result from social media engagements can be a good indicator of the depth of this engagement.

Key questions that need to be understood are:

1. Is this engagement a result of existing offline engagements?

2. Is this engagement part of broader media ecology, for example, the Arab Spring?

3. Can this engagement go beyond a one-off action that was facilitated by impulse and the ease of use of the technology involved?

4. Can this higher level of engagement: a) create meaningful engagement equal to offline engagements, b) build strong online ties and c) transfer this online engagement (and ties) to offline engagement and ties?

5. Are we preaching to the converted or does online engagement reach wider sections of the community? It is important to know who is engaging.

Through the various phases of *Talking Cultures* and at each milestone for reflection, these questions were looked at in an attempt to relate the experience within the ecology of social media. I grew increasingly aware that it would not be possible to separate the project's power from the power of more traditional media. For this project there was no access to any mainstream media outlets. It is important to note here that the lack of traditional media to use as another phase of the campaigns had a major impact on the number of participants with whom it was possible to engage. However, in the long run it did not restrict the engagement of participants across a spectrum of ethnicities – totalling 20 different ethnicities. Key to the success of the creative project was the ability to move the engagement of participant from the offline environment to social media and vice versa. This success indicated that it is indeed possible to engage actors in participatory politics online. This audience can potentially form strong bonds that then translate into tangible actions involving a degree of investment of time and resources that in some cases extended to online actions. However the relatively low success rate in the online campaigns as opposed to the offline

campaigns, demonstrated a result opposed to the common perception; it is in fact harder to form these strong bonds online than it would be to form them offline because the online environment presents a low entry point and therefore is perceived as having less authority than the face-to-face method. Further more, online bonds tend to be less in possession of community traits, resembling group dynamics more and are therefore less likely to help form long term engagements that in turn transform into strong bonds. To compensate for this, online actions need to make use of other pillars of the contact theory. They need to provide stronger goals with an open and equal platform so all actors can feel ownership and an authority that can constitute stronger face-to-face communication. This authority can be comprised of a well-respected member of the public or a partnership with a mainstream media outlet or can include a publicity stunt that can generate a viral word-of-mouth process that would increase the rate of referral and – ultimately – a critical mass, which by its own merits would be a form of authority.

In addition to the authority of a strong goal, how we frame our goals is important. For example – as discussed above – if the action is framed as a fight against a negative problem then by virtue of the strength of negative contact, this goal will have stronger engagement than if it was framed as solidarity with a positive issue. This would then be perceived as a positive contact making it less likely to engage actors. It is important to remember however that this research presents early findings a number of which still have unanswered questions. For example, it might be true that negative issues attract stronger engagement than positive ones, but the question remains of the long term effect of this engagement and how it translates into bonds. Early indications are that while the negative contact attracts stronger engagements, the positive contacts can have a more lasting effect at a subliminal level. Even though it has a less tangible impact, it should not be disregarded. Each has its own purpose and advantages, so combing both would be strongly favourable.

5.3 Words for Activists

A large number of campaigns run *by* activists are primarily aimed *at* activists. The recommendations in this project, are aimed at those campaigns that are targeted to engage wider sections of the community that otherwise would not have been engaged. If we are interested in reaching new audiences we must look at ways to engage the non-activist and to push this engagement from the online to the offline. At best, to create tangible online engagements that go beyond the clicking of the *like* button.

The main problem facing activists is the creation of meaningful engagements that can reach a critical mass. This is partly due to the following:

1. Lack of funding is a common problem that most activists face because it is almost impossible to attract institutional support for their cause. Clearly, the effective use of social media tools can provide a partial solution to this problem. Partial because even the use of social media requires some resources and – more recently – actual financial investment, especially with the increased drive by social media platforms to monetize and capitalise on their investment; it is becoming increasingly difficult to promote a cause on these platforms without paying for it. To counter this, activism needs to employ considerable resources of time, to spread the word online. And by carefully designed campaigns that can utilise the crowd. Perhaps in the long term activists can unite to promote each other's campaigns or run a non-profit social media platform such as the Diaspora Project (Diaspora Project 2013).

2. Lack of a strong goal, deemed necessary to generate a strong viral share-ability for a project. Actors should feel strongly about sharing that goal, by either relating to the stories through their personalisation of them or by showing a clear path of effective returns for their investment. In this case by sharing the content (risking no doubt the annoyance of their friends). Users these days are careful not to share everything, which makes them very selective. The tactic is to provide actors with the motive to put the campaign on the list of 'I-must-share' and not on the list of 'maybe-I-should-share' because that list is extremely expansive and will – in most cases – eventually be disregarded.

3. Lack of authority is a very big problem facing most activists and even some small NGOs. This lack of authority or credibility means that users feel unsure about the value of the message and so they might not even begin to engage with the content. This is often problematical because even if a project has good goals and good content, not having the authority to compel people to engage, might mean high exposure with a low click-through rate. The solution is to either use a more personal approach by writing to each actor individually therefore elevating the authority, or to try to reach a few key actors and who will in turn provide the authority.

4. Openness is a double-edged sword. If the message is too open, it is lost. If it is too narrow it might not engage the wider community. A solution is to start with an open message and then as actors are captured, become more specific, or start with a narrow premise from early on but create multi-narrow messages to target various segments of a community.

Regardless of the message and the social media tools used, it is important to remember that campaigns are situated in a dynamic communicative ecology that has many variables that change with time and space. The technology changes so often that even while the design of the campaigns is in progress, new trends and tools appear and old ones disappear. The world context changes and actors change with it. More significantly, social habits are constantly changing, which in turn affects media consumption habits. So the key here is to be flexible in action, observation and adaptation, always aiming to maintain engagement long after the first action is taken.

5.4 Future Action Research

In the last few years – in particularly since the events of 2011, such as the Arab Spring – there has been a huge increase in research and academic studies of social media and participatory political engagement. The stance taken against this research by this researcher is that it is mainly concerned with the effect that social media has on particular events, rather than looking at the issues surrounding online participatory engagement as part of a wider social context that is part of a world context. Including not only social media and mainstream media, but also many other communication technologies, that together are shaping our media consumption within a very dynamic communicative ecology. The dynamic aspect of this ecology quickly outdates any study of the specific events. It clearly shows a gap in the research that requires social theory researchers to interject and try to understand engagement in terms of online vs. offline and the political vs. the apolitical. This research cannot hope to touch more than the tip of the iceberg; more research is needed to follow up on these findings, especially on how messages can be framed in such a way as to take advantage of negative contact to generate positive engagement, more is needed to understand how authority can be established online. Finally, how can this online authority create higher levels of engagement and – more significantly – how can the transient properties of such engagements be understood and how can this knowledge be utilised to transfer actions from online to offline?

The ethnographic action research of this thesis is qualitative in methodology and auto-ethnographic in method. Future research that is larger in scope (quantitative or ethnographic) will be able to measure larger data sets, thus casting a wider net that can build on these findings. Such research needs time, money and authority. There is a place for qualitative research about engagement, but equally a quantitative study would provide valuable data to validate any qualitative observations.

The last few years have witnessed rapid changes in the ecology of online participatory politics, so much so that by the time the writing of this exegesis is finished, new technologies will have emerged while others will have quietly disappeared. Regardless of the rapid changes in technology (especially in mobile social media tools) the key factor behind these changes – the subtext – is that the changes in the society and the consumption of these technologies is keeping pace with the technological advance – if not surpassing it. This rapid change in social habits – the ways in which we communicate, interact, and share content – is providing an opportunity for social-innovators to jump on the bandwagon and explore the new opportunities presented by the technologies. It is more important to include the new attitude of readiness to engage online beyond that of conservative comment and/or the sharing of content.

In order to be effective in the engagement of actors in online participatory politics, we need to better understand the tools available. How have the actors concerned used them in the past? In what context can they become attractive enough to establish contact zones where real bonds are formed, where real participation is occurring and where tangible actions are performed? The power of the Internet in aiding social movement is well documented, but the question remains, how successful are these movements in engaging the wider sections of the community? On what level does this engagement occur? Is this engagement transitional between social media and the streets?

On the one hand it is the belief of this researcher that there lies within the confines and the limitations of communicative ecology a dangerous premise of the overestimation of the power of online tools to implement change whereas on the other, if an activist chooses to discard this ecology or to simply use it in parallel to that of street activism, they risk missing out on the potential (and possibilities) of extending that ecology to encompass offline actions as part of the communicative ecology itself. It is therefore the proposition of this researcher that a 'fluid ecology' that is an amalgamation of the online and offline – that uses technology in such a way that it is not a mere tool – be utilised. This form of 'fluid ecology' can play a significant and vital part of the future of communicative ecology. As an artist, communicating a message using street art and social media is a delicate process that requires a balancing act between the artist, the medium and the public. Thus, the process itself becomes entwined with the artwork in such a way that will require flexibility in the creation, and readiness to quickly responds to external factors. This dynamism, if embraced, can be a powerful way to engage the public with the artwork both online and offline.

Bibliography

Al-Kasim, F. 1999. 'Crossfire: the Arab Version', *The Harvard International Journal of Press Politics 4.3* (1999) 93-97.

Alinsky, S. D., 1971. *Rules for Radicals: a Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals*, Random House: New York.

Aljazeera 2008. 'Al-Jazeera Satire on Arab TV Freedom of Speech', February 29. www.youtube.com/watch?v=lnOKhdFH7Zw, accessed June 13, 2011.

'All Together Now'. 2013. www.alltogethernow.org.au, accessed May 30, 2013.

Allport, W., 1954. *The Nature of Prejudice*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books.

Altheide, D. L., 1994. 'An Ecology of Communication'. *The Sociological Quarterly, 35*: 665-683.

Altheide, D. L., 1995. *An Ecology of Communication: Cultural Formats of Control*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

AVAAZ. 2013. www.avaaz.org, accessed May 30, 2013.

Barlow, F. K. and Paolini, S. and Pedersen, A. and Hornsey, J. and Radke, R. M. and Harwood, J. and R., M. and Sibley, G., 2012. 'The Contact Caveat: Negative Contact Predicts Increased Prejudice More Than Positive Contact Predicts Reduced Prejudice', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin 2012 38,* 1629.

Bayat, A., 2002. 'Activism and Social Development In The Middle East', J. *Middle East Studies. 34 (2002)*, 1-28. Printed in the United States of America.

Bimber, B., 2003. *Information and American Democracy: Technology in the Evolution of Political Power*. Cambridge University Press, UK.

Blanning, T. C., 2003. *Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789*. Oxford.

Blossom, J., 2009. *Content Nation*, Wiley Publishing.

Blumer, H., 1966. 'Sociological Implications of the Thought of George Herbert Mead', *American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 71, No. 5 (Mar., 1966)*, 535-544 .

Blunter, H. 1994. 'Society as symbolic interaction'. *Symbolic Interaction: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, 263.

boyd, dana, Ellison, N. B. 2008. 'Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship'. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 13 (2008)* 210–230.

Brice-Weller, P. 2013. http://www.talkingcultures.org/salon/all-together-now, accessed May 30, 2013.

British Council 2011. 'Arts for Intercultural Dialogue Toolkit' http://interculturalnavigators.britishcouncil.org/index.php/projects/69/247, accessed November 13, 2011.

Brydon-Miller, M., Greenwood, D., and Maguire, P. 2003. 'Why action research?'. *Action Research, 1(1),* 9-28.

Burgess, J., Green, J., Jenkins, H.. Hartley, J. 2009. YouTube : online video and participatory culture. Cambridge ; Malden, MA : Polity.

Calhoun, C. 1998. 'Community without Propinquity Revisited: Communications Technology and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere'. *Sociological Inquiry, Vol. 68, No. 3, August 1998,* 373-397.

Campbell, JL 2005. 'Where do we stand?', in D. Gerald, D. McAdam, W.R. Scott & M .Zald (Eds.), *Social Movements & Organizational Theory*, Cambridge University Press, New York.

Castells, M. 2002. *The Internet galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society.* Oxford University Press, UK.

Castells, M. 2004. 'The Power of Identity', *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. II*, Blackwell Publishing, USA.

Castells, M. 2009. *The Power of Identity*, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, MA.

Castells, M. 2011. 'A Network Theory of Power'. *International Journal of Communication 5 (2011),* 773–787.

Castells, M. 2012. 'Networks of Outrage and Hope' *Social Movements in the Internet Age.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Chang, H. 2007. *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

Cliche, D., and Wiesand, A. 2009. 'Achieving Intercultural Dialogue through the Arts and Culture? Concepts, Policies, Programmes, Practices', *D'Art Topics in Arts Policy, No. 39*, International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, www.ifacca.org/topic/intercultural-dialogue-cultural-diversity.

Coser, L. A. 1957. ' Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change' *The British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Sep., 1957),* 197-207.

Crotty, M. 1998. *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*, Sage Publications, London.

Croucher, S. M. 2011. 'Social Networking and Cultural Adaptation: A Theoretical Model', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4:4*, 259-264.

Dahdal, S. 2011. 'How social media Changed Arab Resistance'. newmatilda.com/2011/03/04/perfect-storm, accessed June 13, 2011.

Dahdal, S. 2013. 'Al Jazeera, Bab Al Hara, and social media in the Resurrection of Arab Nationalism', in R. D. Berenger, *social media Go to War*, Marquette Books, Washington, 63-79.

Diaspora Project. 2013. http://diasporaproject.org, accessed May 30, 2013.

Dick, B. 1998. 'Convergent Interviewing: a Technique for Qualitative Data Collection'. Available: http://scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/iview.html, accessed November 3, 2011.

'Diversity in Australian Media'. 2013. https://www.facebook.com/groups/117260362838, accessed May 30, 2013.

Dobbin, M. 2007. 'Can social media Be a Tool for Social Change?' *Briar Patch; Jun/Jul 2007; 36, 4;* CBCA Complete, 32.

Egyptian Chronicles 2010. 'It is Biased Biased World, December 30'. http://www.globalpost.com/webblog/egypt/it-biased-biased-world, accessed June 13, 2011.

Foucault, M. 1998. *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, edited by James D. Faubion, translated by Robert Hurley and others, New Press, New York.

Freire, P. 1970. 'Cultural Action for Freedom'. *Harvard Educational Review,* Cambridge.

Fuchs, C. 2012. 'Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age.' TripleC, Vol 10, No 2.*

Galloway, Dayna, Kenneth B. McAlpine, and Paul Harris. 2007. 'From Michael Moore to JFK Reloaded: Towards a working model of interactive documentary'. *Journal of Media Practice 8.3, 2007: 325-339.*

Ganesh, S. and Holmes, P. 2011. 'Positioning Intercultural Dialogue-Theories, Pragmatics, and an Agenda', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4:2*, 81-86.

GetUp 2013. www.getup.org.au, accessed May 30, 2013.

Ginsberg, Morris. 1958. 'Social change'. *British Journal of Sociology (1958): 205-229.*

Gladwell, M. 2008. *Outliers : The Story of Success*, Camberwell, Vic.

Gladwell, M. 2010. ' Small Change: Why the Revolution Will not be Tweeted, October 4'. newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell, accessed June 13, 2011.

Gladwell, M. and Clay S. 2011. 'From Innovation to Revolution. Do social media Make Protests Possible?' *Foreign Affairs 90 (2)*: 153-154.

Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks.* New York: International Publishers.

Hage, G. 2005. 'Multicultural Situations', *Postcolonial Studies, 8:4,* 491-495.

Hage, G. and Couch, R. Eds., 1999. T*he Future of Australian Multiculturalism : Reflections on the Twentieth Anniversary of Jean Martin's The Migrant Presence.* Research Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Sydney.

Halliday, J. 2011. 'David Cameron considers banning suspected rioters from social media'. http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/aug/11/david-cameron-rioters-social-media, accessed November 3, 2011.

Harb, Z., 2011. 'The 25 January Revolution: Arab Revolutions and the social media Effect'. *M/C Journal, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2011)* – 'diaspora'.

Hauslohner, A., 2011. 'Dispatch from 'Free Libya': The Right to Laugh at Gaddafi, February 23'. time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2053198,00.html, accessed June 13, 2011.

Hearn, G. 2009, *Action Research and New Media: Concepts, Methods, and Cases,* Hampton, Cresskill, NJ.

Herbert, D and Black, T. 2013. 'What kind of 'global conversation?' in Gillespie, M. and Webb, A. *Diasporas and Diplomacy : Cosmopolitan Contact Zones at the BBC World Service (1932-2012).* Imprint Abingdon, Oxon ; New York : Routledge.

Heron, J. 1995. *Cooperative Inquiry: Research Into the Human Condition*. Sage, London.

Hofstede, G.H. 2001. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviours, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations,* Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, Calif.

Holzner, S., 2009. *Facebook Marketing : Leverage social media to Grow Your Business.* Que Biz-tech.

Horwitt, S. D., 1989. *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy*. New York: Knopf.

Howard N. P,. 2011. *The Digital Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.* Oxford University Press, UK.

Hype. 2013. http://tumult.com/hype, accessed May 30, 2013.

ICE 2011, 'Hip Hop Who r u?'. http://ice.org.au/project/hip-hop-who-r-u-recruiting, accessed November 13, 2011.

Jakubowicz, A. 1981. 'State and Ethnicity: Multiculturalism as Ideology'. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology, Vol 17, No.3.*

Jakubowicz, A. 2011. 'Playing the triangle: Cosmopolitanism, Cultural Capital and Social Capital as intersecting scholarly discourses about social inclusion and marginalisation in Australian public policy debates'. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies Journal, Vol.3, No.3.*

Jakubowicz, A. 2013. 'Comparing Australian Multiculturalism: The International Dimension' in Jakubowicz, Andrew & Ho, Christina (eds), '*For those who've come across the seas*': Australian multicultural theory, policy and practice, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, pp. 15-30.

Jakubowicz, K. 2009. 'A New Notion of Media'. *Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publications.*

Jenkins, R. 2000. Categorization: Identity, Social Process and Epistemology. Current Sociology July 2000, Vol 48, 7-25.

Jewish Council for Education and Research 2010. 'The Great Schlep, USA', http://www.thegreatschlep.com, accessed 9 July 2010.

Kanngieser, Anja., Neilson , Brett. and Rossiter, Ned. 2014. 'What is a research platform? Mapping methods, mobilities and subjectivities'. *Media Culture Society, 2014, 36: 302.*

Kavada, A, 2003. Social Movements and Current Network Research. Contemporary Anti-War Mobilizations: Agonistic Engagement Within Social Movement Networks. Corfu, Greece, 6-7 November.

Kelly, K. 2007. 'The Next 5,000 Days of the Web'.
http://www.ted.com/talks/kevin_kelly_on_the_next_5_000_days_of_the_
web.html, accessed May 30, 2013.

Khanfar, W. 2011. 'A historic moment in the Arab world'.
http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/wadah_khanfar_a_historic_moment
_in_the_arab_world.html, accessed June 13, 2011.

Kingsley P. 2011. 'Avaaz: activism or 'slacktivism'?'
http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jul/20/avaaz-activism-
slactivism-clicktivism, accessed Wednesday, 2 November 2011.

La Boétie, É. De 1548. *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude.* Rendered into English by
Harry Kurz, New York: Columbia University Press: 1942.

Lally E., Ang I. & Anderson K. 2011. *The Art of Engagement : Culture, Collaboration,
Innovation.* UWA Publishing, Crawley, Western Australia.

Leetaru, K. 2011. 'Culturomics 2.0: Forecasting large-scale human behaviour using
global news media tone in time and space' First Monday [Online], Volume
16 Number 9 (17 August 2011).

Loader, B. D. & Mercea, D. 2011. 'Networking Democracy?'. *Information,
Communication & Society, 14:6, 757-769.*

Lotan, G., Graeff E., Ananny, M., Gaffney D., Pearce, I. and boyd, d. 2011. 'The
Revolutions Were Tweeted: Information Flows During the 2011 Tunisian
and Egyptian Revolutions'. *International Journal of Communication 5 (2011),
Feature 1375-1405.*

Lulu. 2012. www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhyR056f234, accessed May 30, 2013.

Manathunga, Catherine. 2009. 'Research as an intercultural contact zone'. *Discourse:
Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 30:2, 165-177.*

Marx, K. 1845. 'Theses on Feuerbach'.
http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/index.htm,
accessed May 30, 2013.

McAdam, D., Sidney, T. & Tilly, C. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention,* Cambridge
University Press, Cambridge.

McEwan, B., Sobre-Denton, M. 2011. 'Virtual Cosmopolitanism: Constructing Third Cultures and Transmitting Social and Cultural Capital Through social media'. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4:4*, 252-258.

McLaughlin, S. 2003. 'The use of the Internet for political action by non-state dissident actors in the Middle East'. *First Monday, volume 8, number 11 (November 2003).*

McLuhan, M. 1962. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*; 1st Ed.: University of Toronto Press; reissued by Routledge & Kegan Paul.

McLuhan, M. 1969. *Counterblast, Communication; Technology and Civilization.* Harcourt, Brace & World New York.

Mcquillan, D. 2011. 'New Social Networks With Old Technology – What The Egyptian Shutdown Tells Us About social media, February.' http://www.internetartizans.co.uk/socnets_with_old_tech_egypt, accessed June 13, 2011.

Mead, G.H. 1934. *Mind, Self and Society*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

MeetUp. 2013. www.meetup.com, accessed May 30, 2013.

Migliorino, P. 2013. talkingcultures.org/salon/fecca, accessed August 30, 2013.

Miles, H 2010. 'Think Again: Al Jazeera'. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2006/06/12/think_again_al_jazeera#sthash.dYhYE9LW.dpbs, accessed June 13, 2011.

Morozov, E. 2011. 'Facebook and Twitter are Just Places Revolutionaries Go, March 7'. http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/07/facebook-twitter-revolutionaries-cyber-utopians, accessed June 13, 2011.

Morozov, E. 2011. *The Net Delusion, The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. Public Affairs, USA.

Morozov, E. 2010. *The Net Delusion. How Not to Liberate the World.* London: Allen Lane.

Moses, A. 2013. 'Slacktivists Get a Tweet New Tool'. http://www.theage.com.au/digital-life/digital-life-news/slacktivists-get-a-tweet-new-tool-20130320-2gek5.html.

MoveOn. 2013. www.moveon.org, accessed May 30, 2013.

O'Leary, T. and Falzon, C. 2010. *Foucault and Philosophy,* Wiley-Blackwell, UK.

Olding, R. 2013. 'Racist rant: 'Not the first time I've been abused,' Says Victim'. http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/racist-rant-not-the-first-time-ive-been-abused-says-victim-20130403-2h6oh.html, accessed May 30, 2013.

Pearson, Peter. 1967. 'Encounter with Saul Alinsky - Part 2: Rama Indian Reserve', https://www.nfb.ca/playlists/challenge-for-change/viewing/encounter_with_saul_alinsky, accessed June 23, 2014.

Perez, S. 2011.'#OccupyWallSt Twitter Analysis Shows Tweets Peaking On Weekends'. http://techcrunch.com/2011/10/11/occupywallst-twitter-analysis-shows-tweets-peaking-on-weekends, accessed November 3, 2011.

Pettigrew, T. F. 1998. 'Intergroup Contact Theory', *Annual. Review of Psychology. 1998*. 49:65-85.

Pfister, D. and Soliz, J. 2011. '(Re)conceptualizing Intercultural Communication in a Networked Society', *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4:4*, 246-251.

Phills, C.E., et al. 2011. 'Reducing Implicit Prejudice: Matching Approach/Avoidance Strategies to Contextual Valence and Regulatory Focus.' *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology (2011)*, doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2011.03.013.

Postmes, T. Spears, R. and Lea, M. 1998. 'Breaching or Building Social Boundaries? SIDE-effects of Computer-mediated Communication'. *Communication Research, Volume 25, number 6, 689-*715.

Postmes, T. and Brunsting, S. 2002. 'Collective Action in the Age of the Internet: Mass Communication and Online Mobilization'. *Social Science Computer Review, Volume 20, number 3,.* 290-301.

Pratt, M L. 1991. 'Arts of the Contact Zone'. *Profession 91*. New York: MLA, 1991. 33-40.

Pratt, M.L. 1992. *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation.* London: Routledge.

Rainie, L. and Purcell, K. and Smith, A.. 2011. 'The Social Side of the Internet'. pewinternet.org/Reports/2011/The−Social−Side−of−the−Internet.aspx.

Randeree, B. 2010. Tensions Flare Across Tunisia, December 28. english.aljazeera.net/news/africa/2010/12/2010122819724363553.html, accessed June 13, 2011.

Reuters 2010. 'Man Dies as Tunisian Police Open Fire in Clashes, December 24'. http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/12/24/uk-tunisia-riots-idUKTRE6BN2K920101224, accessed June 13, 2011.

Reuters 2011. 'Al Jazeera TV Makes Waves with Tunisia Coverage, January 21'. http://www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/302009, accessed June 13, 2011.

Rinnawi, K. 2006. I*nstant Nationalism: McArabism, Al-Jazeera, and Transnational Media in the Arab World*. University Press of America.

Rogers, R. 2010. 'Internet research: the question of method – a keynote address from the YouTube and the 2008 election cycle in the United States Conference'. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics 7: 241–260.*

Rogers, Richard. 2013. *Digital methods*. MIT Press.

Rotman, Dana, et al. 2011. 'From slacktivism to activism: participatory culture in the age of social media'. *Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems. ACM, 2011.*

Roy Morgan Research 2010. 'Value Segments'. roymorgan.com/products/values-segments/values-segments.cfm, accessed July 9 2010.

Ryan, C. R. 1998. 'Peace, Bread and Riots: Jordan and the International Monetary Fund'. *Middle East Policy 6:2 (October 1998)*, 54-66. Wiley-Blackwell, London.

Rybas, Natalia and GAJJALA, Radhika. 2007. 'Developing Cyberethnographic Research Methods for Understanding Digitally Mediated Identities'. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, [S.l.], v. 8, n. 3, sep. 2007.*

Safouan, M. 2007. *Why are the Arabs Not Free?: the Politics of Writing.* Blackwell, Boston, MA.

Said, E W. 1992. *The Question of Palestine*. Lowe & Brydone, London.

Salim, T 2003. 'The Vagabond Café and Jerusalem's Prince of Idleness'. *The Jerusalem Quarterly, Institute of Jerusalem Study, Issue 19.*

Sammut, G. and Gaskell, G. 2010. 'Points Of View, Social Positioning And Intercultural Relations'. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 40*: 47-64.

Schumann S, Luong F. 2011. 'The Influence of Virtual Worlds on Reality: Introducing a Framework of Explicit and Implicit Mechanisms'. *First Monday, Volume 16, Number 6 – 6 June 2011.*

Senator Online 2010. http://www.senatoronline.org.au, accessed 9 July 2010.

Sherman, F., T. and Torbert, W. 2000. *Transforming Social Inquiry, Transforming Social Action: New Paradigms for Crossing the Theory/Practice Divide in Universities and Communities.* Kluwer Academic Publishers, Boston.

Shirky, C. 2008. *Here Comes Everybody. The Power of Organizing without Organizations.* London: Allen Lane.

Shoymme 2008. Mutaz, February 4. www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0Aq_qked7Y&feature=related, accessed June 13, 2011.

Shuter, R. 2011. 'Introduction: New Media Across Cultures – Prospect and Promise'. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 4:4,* 241-245.

Silva, F. C. 2008. *Mead and Modernity. Science, Selfhood and Democratic Politics.* Lanham: Lexington Books.

Silverman M. 2010. 'How Political Campaigns Are Using social media for Real Results', mashable.com/2010/06/09/political-campaigns-social-media, accessed July 9 2010.

Silverman, D. 1993. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, Sage Publications, London, UK.

Silverman, D. & Seale, C. 2005. *Doing Qualitative Research : a Practical Handbook.* Sage Publications.

Slater, D, and Tacchi. J. A. 2004. 'Research on ICT Innovations for Poverty Reduction'. UNESCO.

Small, M. 2002. *Antiwarriors: the Vietnam War and the Battle for America's Hearts and Minds.* Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc.

Smith, A. D. 1994. *Nationalism.* Oxford University Press Oxford, New York.

Smith, T.W. 2007. 'Social Identity and Socio-Demographic Structure' *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, vol. 19*, no. 3.

Sohrabi-Haghighat M. Hadi, M. S. 2010. 'WHERE IS MY VOTE? ICT Politics in the Aftermath of Iran's Presidential Election'. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2010,* 24 – 41.

Somerville, M., & Perkins, T. 2003. 'Border work in the contact zone: Thinking indigenous/non-indigenous collaboration spatially'. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 24, 253-266.*

Spinks, P. 2013. 'Protest in the connected society, July 30, 2013'.
http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/digital-life-news/protest-in-the-
connected-society-20130726-2qoyd.html, accessed November 13, 2013.

Sullivan, Graeme. 2006. 'Research Acts in Art Practice'. *Studies in Art Education, Vol.
48, No. 1, Arts-Based Research in Art Education, Fall, 2006, 19-35.*

Tacchi, J. 2006. 'Studying Communicative Ecologies: An Ethnographic Approach to
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)'. In *Proceedings 56th
Annual Conference of the International Communication Association*, Dresden,
Germany

Tacchi, J. A., Slater, D., and Hearn, G. N. 2003. *Ethnographic Action Research: A User's
Handbook*. UNESCO, New Delhi, India.

Tactical Tech. 2014. www.tacticaltech.org, accessed May 30, 2014.

Teodoro, L. 2005. 'Freedom of Expression and the Media in the Philippines'. *Article
19 and CMFR Publication December 2005.*

Tierney, T.. 2013. *The Public Space of social media: Connected Cultures of the Network
Society.* Routledge.

Tiwary, A. 2013. talkingcultures.org/salon/anatiwary, accessed September 30, 2013.

Tufekci, Z 2011. 'Faster is Different. Brief Presentation at Theorizing the Web April
13'. http://technosociology.org/?p=424, accessed June 13, 2011.

Turner, J.C. 1987. *Rediscovering the Social Group: a Self-categorization Theory*,
Blackwell, Oxford.

Urdal, H. 2004. 'The Devil in the Demographics: The Effect of Youth Bulges on
Domestic Armed Conflict, 1950-2000'. *World bank*, Social Development Paper
No. 68.

Valenzuela, S., Kim, Y., & de Zúñiga. 2011. 'The Mediating Path to a Stronger
Citizenship: Online and Offline Networks, Weak Ties, and Civic
Engagement'. *Communication Research, June 2011, 38: 397-421.*

Van Kokswijk, J. 2007. *Digital Ego: Social and Legal Aspects of Virtual Identity.*
University of Chicago Press.

Verdeil, É. 2011. 'Arab Cities in Revolution: Some Observations, February 23'.
http://www.metropolitiques.eu/Arab-Cities-in-Revolution-Some.html,
accessed June 13, 2011.

Webber, M. M. 1963. 'Order in Diversity: Community without Propinquity.' In *Cities and Space*. Ed., L. Wirigo. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wikileaks. 2013. www.wikileaks.org, accessed May 30, 2013.

Williams, C. B. and Gulati, G.J. 2007. 'Social Networks in Political Campaigns: Facebook and the 2006 Midterm Elections', Bentley College, Department of International Studies, American Political Science Association.

Wilson, C. and Alexandra D. 2011. 'Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets'. *International Journal of Communication 5:* 1248-1272.

Zappala, G. 1999. 'The phases of the political participation of ethnic minorities in Australian politics 1'. *Journal of Intercultural Studies, 20(1): 65-79.*