Expressive violence: the performative effects of subversive participatory media uses

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Abstract: This article discusses the communication strategies employed by 8 school shooters who used participatory media to frame their acts as well as their identity. By resorting to content analysis of 78 self-produced videos and 101 portraits, the findings show how audiovisual communication can be used to trigger the performative aspects of cultural scripts of contemporary forms of expressive violence and thus institutionalize a social movement (i.e. school shooting subculture). These proceedings produce association to a subversive movement, providing a political connotation to the act and a renewed positive identity.

Keywords: expressive violence, school shooting, participatory media, audiovisual communication, performativity

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Les effets performatifs des usages subversifs des médias participatifs dans la violence expressive

Résumé : Cet article analyse les stratégies de communication développées par huit auteurs de fusillades scolaires qui ont utilisés les médias participatifs pour médiatiser leur projet meurtrier et leur identité. Basés sur 78 vidéos et 101 autoportraits photographiques, les résultats révèlent comment ces participations audiovisuelles peuvent être déployées en exploitant les ressorts performatifs du script culturel de ces formes de violence expressive. Les auteurs de fusillade révèlent l'existence d'un

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mouvement subversif des fusillades scolaires en y associant leur projet de passage à l'acte pour lui confèrer une portée politique et travailler positivement leur identité.

Mots-clés : violence expressive, fusillade scolaire, médias participatifs, scénarisation audiovisuelle, performativité

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Introduction

In his prophetic novel, *Rage*, Stephen King puts us as early as the late 1970s in the position of a young high school student who carries out an extreme act of violence, i.e. a school shooting, by providing access to the shooters' deepest and darkest thoughts. As the Columbine shooting will later show, the clairvoyance of the science-fiction writer was however outdone by two important details. When Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris decided to execute their deadly plans on April 20, 1999, the main television channels in the United States immediately interrupted their programs to broadcast live the chaotic situation. The journalistic coverage of this shooting reached unprecedented amplitude (Muschert & Larkin, 2007) as 500 reporters and a hundred satellite trucks were on site, as early as midday, to broadcast the shock and confusion of the students, staff and local community. In order to understand the school-shooting phenomenon, this kind of exceptional mediatization must be taken into account (Burns & Crawford, 1999; Chyi & McCombs, 2004; Muschert & Carr, 2006; Simulia, 2011; Sitzer, 2013). As Muschert rightly points out, school shootings are first and foremost a mediatized phenomenon (2013). At the very least, the reasons for which youth decide to resort to this form of extreme violence can be linked to the visibility granted by the media to those who commit such an act (Serazio, 2010).

A second detail escaped Stephen King's clairvoyance. Even before Dylan and Eric went to Columbine High School with the firm intention of killing as many students as possible (12 persons were killed and another 24 were wounded), they had carefully documented the preparation of their murderous project through written (letters, diaries, blogs) and audiovisual material. A portion of those who carried out a shooting thereafter followed in their footsteps: they went to creative lengths to produce their own multimedia packages, containing various contents such as video recordings and self-portraits, to stage their identity and explain their reasoning behind their actions. Notwithstanding the fact news outlets never fail to broadcast these self-produced contents within the midst of the global disruptive media event that follows shooters' violent actions, it quickly became obvious that the role of mediatization provided through "participatory media" (Deuze 2006; Jenkins 2006) must be taken into account to grasp the structuration and propagation of this phenomenon of violence (Sumiala & Tikka, 2010; Serazio, 2010; Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011; Paton, 2012; Böckler et al., 2013; Malkki, 2014).

This article contributes to our understanding of the role of mediatization of violence by analyzing in depth, on the basis of data extracted from online ethnography, 8 school shooters' communication strategy. This implies demonstrating how shooters exploit the convergence of media as well as the expressive resources now offered by "participatory media" – i.e. smartphones, webcams, computers; video-sharing platforms on Internet, etc. – to ensure their posthumous social notoriety. If school shooters resort to participatory media when committing newsworthy events (Molotch & Lester, 1974), they exploit news agencies in order to broadcast a message of vengeance and rehabilitate their status within collective attention (Couldry, 2003; Dayan, 2009). Considering mediatization is a central part of their communication strategy, our analysis, drawing upon unpublished audiovisual material, will insist on how school shooters *produce* their affiliation to the school shooting subculture rather than *reproduce* media practices, by mastering visual culture and performative utterances. This article, while identifying a number of new audiovisual elements constitutive of the school shooting subculture, documents how lone wolves affiliate themselves to a particular trend (i.e. subculture, social movement, etc.) by adopting typical audiovisual communication strategies and their performative resources.

1.1. *The media's role in propagating the school shooting cultural script*

To better grasp the school shooting phenomenon and the way in which mediatization shapes it, it is interesting to start with the Columbine massacre. It constitutes the archetype of all school shootings (Larkin, 2009): it takes place on school grounds; the shooters are students; they aim at multiple targets and their acts lead to several victims (wounded or dead); targets are chosen randomly for what they represent (the student elite, athletes, etc.) rather than who they are as a person. Also, the school shooters are certain of dying by executing this type of shooting; either they are killed by the police (i.e. suicide by cops (Hutson et al., 1998) or commit suicide. Following Columbine, academics sought to explain the school-shooting phenomenon through a myriad of convergent causes, whether psychological, social, cultural or historical (Muschert, 2007b). The main causes invoked were the social marginalization of the killers, their psycho-social problems, insufficient surveillance in schools, easy access to guns in the states where the shootings take place and the subversive cultural scripts that make the shootings appear in a more favorable light (Newman et al., 2004).

Over the years, this phenomenon has spread beyond the borders of the United States. Gradually, the explanations have become more circumscribed around the personality of the killers and their psychological disorders (Newman & Fox, 2009) and correlated to the local community, with intimidation and bullying being pinpointed (Larkin, 2009; Levin & Madfis, 2009). The international propagation of the phenomenon has thus led to a depletion of previous explanatory paradigms, with the weight of sociocultural variables being downplayed in favor psychological reasoning. In parallel with this trend, researchers have insisted on the need to better understand the effects of mediatization, including participatory media, in order to com-

prehend the internationalization of these acts of violence (Muschert & Sumiala et al., 2012; Böckler et al., 2013).

Researchers first examined how news is produced and how media agencies handle news events. A longitudinal analysis of press articles shows that social causes for the different school shooting cases are progressively abandoned for explanations focusing on the role of the immediate environment of these young people (Muschert & Carr, 2006). They fuel the idea of the existence of super-predators, a youth devoid of any moral sense (Muschert, 2007a). This journalistic approach is accused of spreading a culture of fear (Altheide, 2009), of introducing the notion of an inside enemy linked to this propagation of youth violence (Frymer, 2009). This critique of the effects of journalistic discourse on school shooting audiences goes so far as directly implicating it in contributing to a school shooting "cultural script". Media not only nourish a culture of fear; they are accused of glorifying those who commit this extremely violent act. School shooters are the focus of such intense media coverage that it confers social visibility and fame on them, as they become anti-heroes of modern times (Serazio, 2010). Progressively, the idea that school shooters deliberately ponder over news coverage in an attempt to instrumentalize the publicity that their act will engender (Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010) is established.

To attain fame on both a local and international level, certain school shooters sent news agencies multimedia packages in which they express themselves, notably regarding their disillusionment with the school system and student dynamics. They often state they have been victims of bullying. These multimedia packages are composed of various types of contents, from letters and written texts to pictures and video recordings, in which they plot their crime and give the reasons why they felt driven to act so violently. They all seem to reproduce the same "cultural script" (Newman et al., 2004; Henry, 2009; Larkin, 2009; Newman & Fox, 2009; Muschert & Ragnedda, 2010; Kiilakoski & Oskanen, 2011): they write letters and film themselves to show that there is a motive, a real meaning to their act, often tied to problems encountered within their schools. This contemporary form of expressive violence is thus organized around a cultural script that prescribes a scenario: to produce and broadcast a multimedia package that will transmit the message underpinning the act.

This notion of cultural script allows us to go even further in considering that the reproduction of this scenario permits the school shooter to see his acts interpreted in light of the motivations and causes usually evoked to explain school shootings. As a consequence, when news agencies categorize a massacre as a "school shooting", they decode and interpret the violent event via the explicative model conveyed by this cultural script: in taking such action, the teenager wanted to send out a "message" to the local community. He engaged in an exercise of pure violence, without any consideration whatsoever for human life, to express his desire for social revenge towards those who had harassed him physically and/or psychologically, thereby causing his "social decline". In this regard, this "expressive" form of violence is based on the performativity of the school shooting cultural script: categorizing the

facts conveys an explicative model and a converging range of culturally shared causes. This idea will be defended on the basis of data collected by the means of online ethnography. We shall demonstrate how these young killers produce multimedia packages, mainly video recordings, to trigger the performative aspects of this cultural script in order to fine-tune the expressive dimension of their act. Their aim is to acquire posthumous social notoriety, such as that granted to others who had engaged in this extreme course of "expressive" violence.

It appears that the notion of cultural script was developed to explain these contemporary forms of violence spread, and even co-produced, by mediatization, whether provided by journalists or the use of participatory media. This article contributes to the investigation by refining the understanding of this notion and the phenomenon it helps account for.

1.2. *Acquiring social visibility via a subversive use of participatory media*

The scientific works that we have just cited developed the notion of cultural script often skimming over details and overlooking the fine communication processes that allow us to realize how performative and efficient this type of script can be. These studies stem from the observation that these teenagers imitate one another to produce their own multimedia packages and send them to the press, using video-sharing platforms such as YouTube. Even if they use similar communication processes, we shall insist on how the mimetic *reproduction* of the same photographic and audiovisual processes is a way of *producing* one's singularity and posthumous social visibility, since it is the art of performing that allows these youth to reach their goal, i.e. being linked to other school shooters.

Thanks to the multimedia packages we have collected, we shall describe how the killers, through self-productions and the broadcast of media contents, work on their association with the school shooting phenomenon so that their acts are correctly categorized and decoded in light of the causes and motivations conveyed by its cultural script. They implement communication strategies to impact the way journalists will report on their acts. Otherwise, the shooting might be perceived as the desperate, impulsive and meaningless act of a crazy young loner. As we shall show here, this is all the more the case in school shootings perpetrated outside the United States as young German, Finnish or Brazilian killers intensified their efforts so that their acts were considered as a part of the American phenomenon. Audiovisual communication in particular and participatory media in general is in such instances a precious resource for them.

The detailed analysis of their participative practices will allow us to support the idea that they plot their audiovisual recordings to be associated, in a more or less strategic manner, with the school shooting subculture. By using the expression subculture, we consider the killers and their fans from the standpoint of a system of social relations that shape their respective social positions, here in terms subversion and/or opposition. This terminological use places the perpetrators of violence in asymmetric social relations composed of domination and conflict, in such a way that

violence is not a natural category but the product of a system of representations between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic movements. In our paper, we will not only document how the killers subscribe to the subculture of school shootings forged by their predecessors, we will also identify a number of elements inherent to this specific culture. We will show how they film themselves, calling upon cultural references, dressing up and exhibiting guns to document and publicize their affiliation to the previous killers' acts. By using these audiovisual montages, they sign their crime and flaunt its premeditated nature.

School shooters undeniably engage in this path of expressive violence to acquire a sort of notoriety, working on their relationship to a subcultural movement to legitimatize their course of action and give it a political dimension. It is therefore interesting to have a close look at their participative practices to concretely describe how they proceed. By analyzing their speech, we shall show how they give substance to this "revolutionary" student movement through performative statements (Part 1), thereby evoking and instituting a school shooting subculture. In reproducing this type of formulation, shooting after shooting, the school shooters reaffirm the existence of this "invisible" movement and institutionalize its values, codes and rites. When they script and film their speeches, they create cultural references and a style, in particular a dress code, shared by those initiating this "movement" (Part 2). They also determine the role guns will play (Part 3).

2. Towards an online ethnography studying the circulation of subversive self-produced content

This contribution is based on a corpus of data collected over several years, between April 2007 and January 2011 with phases of immersion lasting from a few weeks to a couple months in a row, using an online ethnographic approach (Kozinets, 2010; Boellstorff et al., 2012). This sociological method allows to study online communities created through computer-mediated social interaction. We applied this approach to highlight how bystanders and distant spectators of school shootings used the YouTube platform to publish comments or broadcast videos in order to commemorate the victims and provide support to the families of such attacks, for example in the wake of the massacre of Virginia Tech. In such contexts, this ethnographic approach reveals how media coverage prompts individuals to come together through online "cocoon communities" in which members exchange and help deal with such tragic events (Paton, 2013) and contribute to an online spontaneous shrine (Paton, Figeac 2015; Paton, Figeac *forthcoming*). Over and above the time frame of media events triggered by the attacks, our online ethnographic approach covered day-to-day exchanges related to school shootings, in particular among school shooting fans. These YouTubers, who openly acknowledge and qualify themselves as fans, express diametrically opposed opinions by comparison to the vast majority of the general public who tend to categorize school shootings as tragedies and horrific events. To understand their media practices, we framed their con-

tributions from the perspective of subcultural dynamics and stressed the deviant posture adopted, typical of a form of juvenile resistance highlighting latent social conflicts (Hebdige, 1979), understandable vis-à-vis social relationships.

The online ethnographic protocol employed collected videos, profiles, comments and material published and exchanged amongst fans. All contributors to this fan network publish anonymously by using pseudonyms because their contributions are censored and may potentially be subject to legal prosecution. From this point of view, we are connected to this online community by adopting a hidden observation mode close to the self-presentation posture of members of this subculture. This ethnographic approach does not allow us to conduct interviews. However, monitoring the fans in this manner allowed us to collect unreleased audiovisual content that will be analyzed in this article: first-hand data produced by school shooters, such as Pekka-Eric Auvinen (Jokela High School, Finland, 2007) and Matti Saari (Seinäjoki University, Finland, 2008). We succeeded in downloading their multimedia packages in the hours following the massacres – before the contents were censored – by following links towards content-sharing platforms, such as RapidShare, *via* their YouTube channels. This methodological approach also allowed us to collect dozens of videos published to honor the memory of those who perpetrated school shootings and to promote counter-interpretations of this form of violence.

If we focused a part of our findings on the subversive content exchanged by fans in order to examine their subcultural sociability, relevant empirical material excerpted from school shooters media packages can be isolated and studied separately. Thereby, the corpus used for this article corresponds partly to data exchanged by the network of fans, rather than material arbitrarily chosen by the researcher who is not necessarily aware of all the school shooting subculture codes. This approach leads us to show how Internet and ICT help to perform this subculture and this form of online sociability.

This ethnographic method first highlights the school shooting phenomenon by showing how fans usually remix school shooters' media packages with other subcultural material (e.g. sequences filmed by surveillance cameras in schools where the massacres took place, bits of televised news, class pictures of school shooters) to support their personal views and express individual creativity. By doing so, they also ensure the online presence of school shooters' multimedia packages. Yet, not all shooters resort to the web to share their multimedia packages. They can be sent to news agencies (e.g. Cho Seung-Hui, Virginia Tech University, USA, 2007) or left at home, seized by the police and eventually broadcast later on (e.g. Wellington de Oliveira, Tasso da Silveira Municipal School, Brazil, 2011). While online fans play an essential role in providing access to such material for the general public, their intermediary role is not without consequences on the material collected and exploited in this article. That is why, among the diversity of data uploaded by fans (initially transmitted by authorities or the press), we will only focus on videos and pictures produced by the school shooters and altered as little as possible.

This corpus of data is quite innovative in regards to the scientific work previously referenced. A large part of the latter is solely based on discursive data, i.e. on what the killers have written (letters and diaries in which they explain the reasons behind their acts) and material produced by institutions (transcriptions of police reports, news articles, etc.). This corpus is also unprecedented in regards to some of the cases examined, considering certain school shooters in particular are rarely (if ever) evoked in scientific work. This is namely the case for Bastian Bosse (Geschwister Scholl Emsdetten, Germany, 2006), Alvaro Castillo (Orange High School, USA, 2006) and Wellington Oliveira. Another novel aspect of this corpus lies in the fact that it was actively censored. The patient observation of the circulation of these audiovisual sequences reveals that they were systematically, or rather automatically, reported or eliminated on information-exchange platforms such YouTube[1].

Table 1 below lists the data we have used to document the school shooters' media participation; the corpus is composed of 78 videos and 101 pictures. In this article, we target 7 school shootings for 8 school shooters, starting with Columbine in 1999 since, as previously mentioned, it is at this time that school shooters began producing their own audiovisual recordings to "pre-mediatize" their act. These shootings were selected because the perpetrators distinctly stated the fact their multimedia packages were meant to reach the general public, either through television channels or the Internet, contrarily to a large amount of media content produced by school shooters that is in circulation.

[1] In return, fans have become more and more creative, continually making sure that these sequences are recovered and made available to their peers by storing them on servers dedicated to content-sharing. We also felt it necessary to keep a trace of these videos on a dedicated Internet site, similar to YouTomb created by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to save videos censored by exchange platforms. Yet from an ethical point of view, we could not take the risk of making available audiovisual material whose contents could be interpreted literally and remixed to promote this form of violence to Internet users who might be fascinated by school shootings. Although we deemed it important to create this website, especially to allow researchers to view the audiovisual sequences analyzed in our work, it is our responsibility to ensure that it is password-protected. Access to the website may be granted to scientific researchers only upon request to the authors of this article, once their application has been accepted and a disclaimer has been signed.

This corpus of audiovisual data, referenced on our site, currently contains 440 recordings. The site is organized into three sections dedicated to three main audiovisual formats of participation related to school shootings 1. The participation of fans fascinated by this type of extreme violence who produce videos to publicize school shooters' acts (this corpus contains 104 videos); 2. Self-produced audiovisual material posted by Internet users to express grief or in commemoration of the victims (we have inventoried 185 videos to date); 3. School shooters' productions that will be analyzed here (the corpus is composed of 78 videos).

Table 1: *School shooters' multimedia packages*

School shooters	Multimedia package contents			Means used to distribute multimedia packages
	Videos	Photos	Written texts	
Eric Harris & Dylan Klebold 1999 - USA	2	12	X	Blogs created. "Basement tapes": videos left in Harris' home.
Bastian Bosse 2006 - Germany	2	15	X	Videos broadcast via his blog. E-mails sent the night before to his friends.
Alvaro Castillo 2006 - USA	4	0	X	Multimedia package sent by postal package to a local newspaper.
Seung-Hui Cho 2007 - USA	1	43	X	Multimedia package sent by postal package to NBC.
Pekka-Eric Auvinen 2007 - Finland	60	12	X	Videos broadcast via YouTube and Rapidshare.
Matti Saari 2008 - Finland	5	11	O	Videos broadcast via YouTube, IRC-Galleria and Rapidshare.
Wellington Oliveira 2011 - Brazil	4	8	X	Multimedia packages found in his backpack. Videos broadcast by "O Globo" TN channel.
Total	78	101		

This table shows that, among the different components of the multimedia packages, the most common scenario consists in developing the expressive dimension of the shooting project using written support and photos to create self-portraits. Recourse to video recordings is equally common and seems to be a growing trend if we take into account the number of recordings produced over the years. This tendency is particularly apparent with Pekka-Eric Auvinen. He stands out from his predecessors in that he used YouTube intensively and was used to publishing videos well before premeditating his crime. The large number of sequences we collected can be accounted for by the fact that he simultaneously produced videos revealing his intention to carry out a school shooting. They include various edited videos modeled after those produced by fans from audiovisual contents characteristic of this subculture. As the article focuses on the (audio)visual culture that has developed over the years to support communication strategies of school shooters, we have left aside the written material collected online, given its specific properties.

As we shall now illustrate, the corpus of 78 video recordings and 101 pictures have several things in common: the youth face the camera to reveal their intention to commit a school shooting (Part 1), they create a scenario in which similar dress and cultural references are exhibited during the premeditation phase (Part 2) and they film themselves with guns (Part 3). In this analysis of their audiovisual productions, we will support the theory that they ostensibly develop their association with previous school shootings, using means of expression made available by the media and current technology, by resorting to performative utterances and visual materialization of their intentions and subversive identity.

3. Association with the school shooting subculture via performative utterances

Analysis of the videos produced by school shooters first reveals the pertinence of singling out a mode of participation labeled "explanatory narrative". This first format of media participation refers more precisely to four protagonists in our sampling: Bastian Bosse (cf. video T044; Figure 1), Alvaro Castillo (cf. videos T005 to T008; Figure 2), Seung-Hui Cho (cf. video T104) and Wellington de Oliveira (cf. videos T057 to T060; Figure 3). They film themselves as if they want to provide contents for their vlogs: the young men face the camera to retrace the events of their lives and reveal personal experiences, relating the suffering and injustice they were victim to (cf. Figures 1 to 3).



Figure 1. *Bastian Bosse takes the stage by facing the camera to express himself*



Figure 2. *Alvaro Castillo expresses himself speaking directly at the camera and potential spectators*



Figure 3. *Wellington de Oliveira reads a written public statement facing the camera*

Here again, the Columbine school shooters are precursors since the framing adopted to produce the "Basement Tapes" (the video recordings made and stored in the basement of Harry's house) will be copied. Like them, these teenagers adopted a realistic background for shooting their video and chose to focus on their role as narrator in making a public declaration. To film this declaration, they most often frame their shot with a close-up of their head or bust (cf. Figures 1 to 3). Whether they are seated or standing, in their home or a place rented specifically for this purpose, the sobriety of the audiovisual production mirrors their utterances revealing the reasons for their act.

If we take a closer look at their speeches, it would seem that the motivations and causes they evoke cannot easily be overlapped with the variables in the school shooting explicative model. They film themselves primarily to talk about their personal experiences, their suffering, and their rejection of the school system, student dynamics and their parents, etc.

They punctuate or prolong these accounts of their experiences by exposing the reasons motivating them to take action. First and foremost, there is the usual school bullying, as evidenced by the words of Brazilian Wellington Oliveira, for example (cf. video T068).

In many occasions, I would be assaulted by a group while the people around would make fun of me and would be amused by the humiliations that I would suffer without even caring about my feelings.

School shooters express their motivations while working on their relationship to potential spectators. They try to get them on their side, to explain and justify their descent into extreme violence, as the German Bastian Bosse seeks to do in this passage describing his experience of bullying (cf. video T044):

I was a loser. I wanted to have friends. I wanted to have clothes with the brand name on it in big letters. (…) Since 1st grade, people picked on me. (…) You are alone and you want to have friends. (…) They punched me, they spit on me, they knocked me down, they laughed on me, and I'm going to shoot them. (…) One time, some dude out of my class, he heated a key, he take a lighter and heated it. And then the fucking moron just come to me and just pressed it on my hand. What the fuck?

In general, school shooters conclude the presentation of their motivations by sending a final goodbye to their loved ones. When designating the receivers of these video-recordings or voicing their apologies, they exacerbate even further the features of this mode of audiovisual confession:

Dylan Klebold: Hey mom. Gotta go. It's about a half an hour before our little judgment day. I just wanted to apologize to you guys for any crap this might instigate as far as (inaudible) or something. Just know I'm going to a better place. I didn't like life too much and I know I'll be happy wherever the fuck I go. So I'm gone. Good-bye. Reb...

Eric Harris: Yea... Everyone I love, I'm really sorry about all this. I know my mom and dad will be just like… just fucking shocked beyond belief. I'm sorry, all right. I can't help it.

Dylan Klebold: (interrupts) We did what we had to do.

Thanks to their audiovisual recordings, they create a privileged relationship with their audience and share their innermost reasons for committing this irreparable act. Yet, the analysis of their videos reveals a wider political dimension, as when Dylan interrupts Harris to conclude: "*We did what we had to do*". It seems that since Columbine, school shooters have encompassed their murderous project in a wider political spectrum (Larkin, 2009). Previously, in the 90's, these young killers cited mostly personal reasons, such as revenge towards those who had bullied them at school. When Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold filmed themselves in the "*Basement Tapes*", they expressed their desire to act in defense of all harassed and bullied students. Fans today still insert the words that started the school shooting revolution: "*Kick-start a revolution*" in their videos (Larkin, 2009).

We believe that this slogan played a fundamental role in structuring and propagating this phenomenon, in particular due to its performative nature. Through this slogan, they not only initiated this movement but also outlined a favorable context for it. Once declared, filmed, pre-mediatized and carried out in the form of a school shooting, this slogan formed the core of what certain would call the "school shooting subculture" (Larkin, 2009). We would now like to illustrate and emphasize the role of audiovisual and IT techniques in the structuring process of this subversive movement. We shall do so by attempting to trace the distribution of these videos and demonstrate the performative role of these types of audiovisual and discursive processes.

Each time a school shooter uses the term "revolution" in his videos, or refers to the student movement started by Eric and Dylan in 1999, he updates and reactivates the performative nature of this declaration, reaffirming the existence of a subcultural movement. This is what Seung-Hui Cho does in 2007 when he refers to Harris and Klebold in his suicide letter:

Generation after generation, we martyrs, like Eric and Dylan, will sacrifice our lives to fuck you thousand folks for what you Apostles of Sin have done to us.[2]

In his filmed public declaration, he dedicates his crime to various people: innocent children, "brothers and sisters", the weak and defenseless, whom he hopes to inspire in showing the path to follow (cf. video: T104):

I didn't have to do this. I could have left. I could have fled. But no, I will no longer run. It's not for me. For my children, for my brothers and sisters that you fucked. I did it for them… When the time came, I did it. I had to… Thanks to you, I die like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and defenseless people.

Cho perfectly illustrates a trend that is perpetuated and found in the shooting perpetrated by Wellington de Oliveira in Brazil in 2011. He also explicitly refers to the fact that he is pursuing the revolution for which his brothers-in-arms have already sacrificed their lives (cf. video T070):

The struggle for which many brothers died in the past and I'll not only die, by what is known as bullying. Our fight is against cruel, cowards, who take advantage of goodness, innocence, weakness of people unable to defend themselves.

He states that he entered this movement to continue charting the course indicated by his "brothers" and to become, thanks to his act, a source of inspiration (cf. video T068):

I died to inspire you, brothers, to defend and fortify yourselves. My wish is to establish a union between you so that the stronger and more courageous brothers pay attention and protect brothers who are weak. Together you'll be much stronger. I want you to fight for justice.

As reflected in Bastian Bosse's words in 2006, it seems that since the Columbine massacre, school shooters produce multimedia packages to publicize the personal motivations compelling them to act, while conferring a political dimension to their undertaking (cf. video T044):

There are two main reasons for that massacre. First reason, school. Teachers, students, everything in that fucking building. Second, the politics. I want anarchy. It is the only thing where you are really, really free. (…)

These extracts reveal the performative dimension of their audiovisual confessions and declarations. Thanks to these videos, they unveil and thereby confirm the existence of a school shooting cultural movement. They identify the brothers-in-arms who have shown them the direction and try to find ways to be associated with them. The audiovisual affiliation to this subversive movement is even more crucial for school shooters residing outside the United States. Nothing guaranteed, for ex-

[2] See extracts of Seung-Hui Cho's manifesto, p. 3:
http://www.schoolshooters.info/PL/Subject-Cho_files/Cho%20manifesto.pdf .

ample, that Bastien Bosse's acts would be classified by the German press as anything other than the desperate act of a mentally unbalanced youth. Producing and broadcasting a multimedia package allowed him to erase this uncertainty and have an impact on the news coverage in publicizing the massacre's premeditated nature. He confronts his fellow citizens with the political stakes behind his act in stating: "*You are in the war. This is war.*" (T044). Via this audiovisual performance, he works on his affiliation to this movement so that his acts will be classified as a school shooting and interpreted within the cultural script of this phenomenon. It is an extreme act that aims at making a statement, in this case, regarding oppression to which certain students are victims.

Now that the analysis of the school shooters' discourse has shed light on this trend, we shall now delve deeper to see how they link themselves to this phenomenon and give their act a political dimension in producing multimedia packages using and reproducing shared visual references.

4. Affiliation to a subversive social movement through the monstration of (sub)cultural references

Scientific writings referred to in the introduction note that school shooters imitate one another in producing their multimedia packages, especially in scripting and making their audiovisual recordings. Although this imitative dimension is present in these subversive audiovisual practices, it nevertheless seems problematic to label it merely as a "copycat" phenomenon (Coleman, 2004), a simple ritualization of communication practices prescribed by the school shooting cultural script (Sumiala & Tikka, 2011). In the precedent part, we began showing how killers try and associate their murderous project with the school shooting movement by producing their own audiovisual public declarations. From this viewpoint, we can consider that they play an active role in orienting the news coverage of the shooting, despite the ritualized nature of their practices. They record their video using the imitative elements of a "copycat", working on their link to this subversive movement and thereby acquiring social notoriety within the pantheon of protagonists in this student subculture.

We shall continue to develop this idea by taking a closer look at the scripting and visual production of these videos. To carry out this analysis, we must consider our findings in light of previous studies that have examined ways in which school shooters enriched their productions with cultural contents, particularly musical extracts or cinema references. Their various recordings show that they share the same universe of references and cultural tastes (the film "Natural Born Killers" or "Matrix", songs by KFMDM or Rammstein, etc.). They re-appropriate these contents for subversive purposes, selecting those that reinforce the ideas they want to express (Kiilakoski & Oksanen, 2011). For example, as background music, they insert an extract in which the misanthropic use of guns is glorified, thus making sure they are associated with the school shooting movement.

We shall continue our study of the killers' uses of audiovisual supports by taking a closer look at how they are dressed in the videos. A particular dress code can be described and analyzed to illustrate how it is flagrantly adopted as a sign of belonging to a specific subculture. In looking at the school shooters' videos, we have the impression they imitate one another. Yet, it is interesting to note, based on the videos studied in our corpus "Tueurs" (i.e. "School shooters"), that the eclectic nature of their styles does not seem pre-established compared with other subcultural dress codes analyzed (gothic, rapper, etc.) This eclecticism reflects a complexity of styles. Despite school shooters' geographic dispersion, Internet allows youth from far-distanced places to be in contact and contribute to the subculture dynamics through certain symbols apparent in their attire, some of which are more distinctive and visible than others. Behind the diversity of their attire, they choose clothes that stand out.

Among them, we can note a long black trench coat and black cap (cf. Figure n°4). It is the two Columbine school shooters, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, who contributed to making this attire an essential part of the visual culture in this subversive movement (Ogle & Eckman, 2002). Not only were they wearing this attire when they committed their murderous act, but they also wore it on an everyday basis, for example when they attended classes. The fact that Eric and Dylan wore black trench coats may refer back to a previous shooting in which Barry Loukaitis wore a black raincoat the day he assassinated three people in February 1996. It seems that Barry was inspired by the main character in *Matrix*, Neo, when he adopted this style (Coleman, 2004).



Figure 4. *Exhibition of the Columbine school shooters in black trench coats and black caps*



Figure 5. *Self-portrait of Seung-Hui Cho with a black cap*



Figure 5. *Matti Saari takes the stage during a shooting session wearing a black cap*

When we look at the videos produced several years later by school shooters, it is obvious that this symbolic attire is flaunted. The screen shots above illustrate this trend with the black cap worn backwards by the American Seung-Hui Cho (Figure 5) and the German Bastian Bosse (Figure 6). Note that they wore the caps in a video with a shooting practice sequence, not in those publicizing the reasons behind their acts. The former marks a crucial phase in which the monstration of links to a subculture can compensate for the absence of speech due to visible signs of their affiliation to the school shooting phenomenon. That is why we consider that those who have produced these multimedia packages clearly make these references to a subculture to consolidate their association with the phenomenon. They want to make sure their act is properly interpreted as one with a political dimension, not just the desperate act of a disturbed teenager.

In the course of the second part, we shall analyze the visual processes school shooters used when preparing their multimedia packages. The study of their videos shows that they use music or film references in addition to clothing with historical signification in the school shooting cultural script. They do so in order to be associated with this phenomenon and to influence the interpretation of their act, the way in which the media covers the event. This is done to ensure the social notoriety granted to other protagonists of this subversive movement.

5. Shooting practice: a monstration process granting importance to the act

Our study continues with the analysis of sequences in which school shooters show themselves with guns and film themselves at shooting practicing. Here again, behind the ritualized nature of this practice in a subversive cultural script, these youth are seeking posthumous social visibility by carefully associating themselves with the school-shooting phenomenon. To document our analysis of this type of audiovisual participation, we shall draw on a corpus of seven videos produced in relation to four school shootings: Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold (cf. video T045), Bastian Bosse (cf. video T048), Pekka-Eric Auvinen (cf. video T071) and Matti Saari (cf. videos T031 to T034).

4.1 Premeditation phase: pre-mediatizing threatening self-portraits in a monstration strategy

To study this corpus, we began by taking a closer look at the pictures the school shooters took of themselves and broadcast. These portraits contribute to the visual culture of the school shooting phenomenon since the killers often included a picture in which they posed with guns in their multimedia packages (cf. Figures 7 to 9) with the intention of diffusing them via participatory media or mailing them to press agencies.



Figure 7. *Self-portrait of Alvaro Castillo with shotgun*

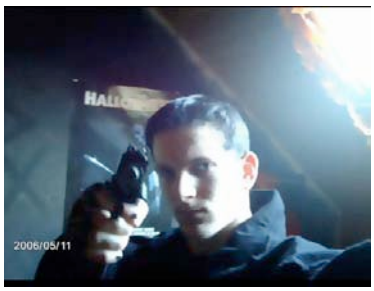


Figure 8. *Self-portrait of Bastian Bosse with a handgun aiming at the camera*



Figure 9. *Matti Saari pointing at the camera*

The Figures above are classified in chronological order: we first see a self-portrait of Castillo made before August 2006 (Figure n°7), that of Bastian Bosse produced at the latest in November 2006 (Figure n°8) and lastly, that of Saari taken around September 2008 (Figure n°9). These images reflect processes in which they pose as virile and threatening young men seeking to intimidate their audience. Frequent recourse to low-angle shots reinforces this idea, made more explicit by their affirmation of supremacy through the use of guns. The fact that the gun is pointed towards the person looking at the image, whether he is a fan of this subversive movement or not, emphasizes the threatening nature of the self-portrait. The *raison d'être* of these self-portraits is to prove *a posteriori* that they had definitely premeditated their act.

The mimicry nature of these images relates to a visual universe and a form of ritualization in the self-posing process so characteristic of this phenomenon. This interpretation is supported by later school shooting cases, as attest the two series of images produced by Seung-Hui Cho (responsible for the Virginia Tech massacre, USA, in 2007. cf. Figures 13 to 15) and Wellington De Oliveira (responsible for a school shooting in Brazil in 2011. cf. Figures 10 to 12). They undeniably relate to the same visual universe, to the same communicational and audiovisual scenario in the school shooting cultural script. These scenarios clearly find their references in movies: Figures 11 and 14 relate, for example, to situations in which an action film hero holds a gun in each hand to get rid of the enemy surrounding him.



Figure 10. *Seung-Hui Cho aiming at the camera*

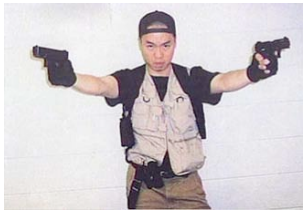


Figure 11. *Seung-Hui Cho pointing two guns*

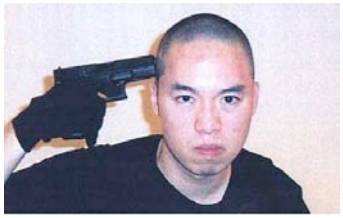


Figure 12. *Seung-Hui Cho pointing the gun at his head*



Figure 13. *Wellington de Oliveira pointing his gun towards the camera*



Figure 14. *Wellington de Oliveira pointing two guns*



Figure 15. *Wellington de Oliveira pointing the gun at his head*

The imitative nature of these audiovisual processes relates, in line with the killers' public declaration, their desire to create links with the school-shooting phenomenon. Having documented this with their self-portraits, we shall now analyze the audiovisual recordings and the way in which they were made public.

5.2 Pre-mediatizing shooting practice sessions as a monstration strategy to glorify the act

Some of the audiovisual recordings made by school shooters contain a format that could be called "Shooting practice" since they pose during shooting practice, either at the shooting range or in the woods. Compared to recordings dealt with previously in which the killers face the camera and justify their acts, these sequences are particularly short. Here again, the first ones to have produced this type of content were the two Columbine school shooters (cf. video T045; Cf. Figures 16 and 17).



Figure 16. *Columbine school shooters (Eric Harris left & Dylan Klebold right) at a shooting session in the woods*



Figure 17. *Columbine school shooters trying out their weapons and testing their ability to shoot*

If this pioneer recording by the Columbine school shooters seems more like playful shooting practice, it is not the same for the other videos in our corpus. As with self-portraits, these video sequences are the result of a constructed scenario. The video produced by Bastian Bosse is the most striking example (cf. video T048); it is an audiovisual remix whose purpose is to glorify its author through sequences filmed outside, with the Dope's song "*Die Mother Fucker Die"* as background music. This is an interesting example because this remix is filled with references to Columbine: wearing a black trench coat, Bosse poses with a friend (Figure n°18); he shares scenes from his everyday life, like listening to music while driving; he films himself with tear gas, echoing Harris and Klebold's use of homemade bombs and Molotov cocktails.



Figure 18. *Bastian Bosse in a shooting session with a mate*



Figure 19. *Bastian Bosse publicizes the pseudonym of his subcultural identity*



Figure 20. *Bastian Bosse aiming his gun at the camera*

Through his poses with guns and these references to Columbine, this young German attempts to create an approach that will link his act to American school shootings. The fact that he publicizes his pseudonym, "ResistantX", by inserting it in his video, (Figure n°19) shows that he wants to give a political slant to his act, perpetuating the revolutionary movement the Columbine killers outlined in their manifesto. They also used pseudonyms in their blogs (" Reb" and "VoDka"). With his pseudonym, Bosse reveals what is at the heart of the school shooting audiovisual. He works strategically on his association with the phenomenon, transcending his act by giving it this "political dimension". He materializes his identification with this movement buy using a red-lettered subversive signature. Not only does this video allow him to brand his act, but it also allows him to influence the media to make sure it is interpreted as a school shooting. Behind the ritualized nature of the audiovisual practices, there is undeniably a desire for the act to be singled out, for the school shooter to write his own scenario so that his violent act will posthumously award him a glorified subversive identity.

We shall now examine more recent cases of school shootings that continue to support the notions developed above. Actually, the two Finnish school shooters stand out because, while following in the steps of their predecessors by creating similar scenarios, they used YouTube to ensure direct distribution to the public, thus diverting the customary uses of participatory media.

Matti Saari published his videos (cf. videos T031; T032; T033; T034) online by inserting on his YouTube channel a *Rapidshare* link enabling multimedia packages to be downloaded. In publishing this link, he shared his intention to carry out a school shooting ahead of time and thus clearly showed the premeditated nature of his act. Among his videos, two show him practicing at a shooting stand (cf. videos T033 and T034). The other two have involved more work (cf. videos T031 and T032). In one (cf. video T032), he films himself close up, facing the camera, from a low-angle shot. In this sequence, he shoots several times in the direction of the spectator (Cf. Figure n°22), pointing a finger (Cf. Figure n°23) and delivering the message: "*You will die next*".



Figure 22. *Matti Saari aiming at the camera with a gun*



Figure 23. *Matti Saari says to the viewer: "You will die next"*

The performative nature of the message amplifies its' illocutionary force. The recipient of the recording is clearly identified. This audiovisual storyboarding of his project therefore aims explicitly at lifting any ambiguity about the premeditated nature of his act and the object of his plans. The word "next" discloses a timeframe and suggests a continuum by comparing the recipient of the message to one of those who is about to be killed. Ultimately, this adjective places his acts in line with those that preceded him and confronts the receiver with the fact he/she will be one of those whose life has been taken in the name of the revolutionary movement of school shootings, counterweighing the humiliations and agony experienced by oppressed students. Due to this threat expressed facing the camera, the shooting carried out by Matti Saari was strongly vested by fans of this phenomenon, who remixed this sequence. The audiovisual storyboarding of this threat not only allowed this young Finnish man to weave his association with this student movement born in the United States. The performative utterances of his message actually produced, from one fan remix to another, a sort of slogan, an audiovisual reference fans share to update the statement, via their video montages, of the existence of the revolutionary movement and recall the invisible path between each act of violence.

This is how Matti Saari won social visibility in the visual world of the digital subcultural scene. This example again supports the thesis of this paper that this ritualization of audiovisual performances refers above all to the killer's desire to see his act linked to the school-shooting phenomenon, while fine-tuning the singularity of his subversive identity through various levers of expression in Web 2.0.

Conclusion

Research dealing with the dangers of Web 2.0 constitutes an invitation to fully acknowledge the active dimension of these new expressive resources by appointing responsibility to the users in their deviant appropriation of these technologies. This assumption is particularly relevant when it comes to analyzing how small groups appropriate these resources to work on and convey messages about their act of "expressive" violence, trying to instrumentalize journalists to relay them to collective attention. As we have done here, this assumption puts into perspective criminologi-

cal media "copycat" theories (Coleman, 2004), on which school shootings studies are based, insofar as it accounts for the spread of this phenomenon by the mimetic effects resulting from exposure, whether voluntary or involuntary, to violent contents and their influence on the imagination of these young people with subversive cultural scripts. If this "transmedia" analysis remains efficient and difficult to dispute, it may be supplemented by detailed descriptions of the "art of making-do" (De Certeau, 1984) of school shooters' or similar types of contemporary actors of expressive violence, in the sense that these social actors craft their act.

By completing this task on the basis of an unprecedented corpus, this paper shows that these killers' mimicry and ritualization of media-based craftsmanship form resources to ensure that their act will be categorized as a school shooting, rather than that of a desperate and isolated madman. These young people, especially those who live outside the United States, effectively mobilize the resources of participatory media to shape the expressive dimension of their murderous project and convey their message of social identity and revenge. Even if they seek to embed their acts in the footsteps of those who preceded them and thus guarantee political impact, they also mark the uniqueness of their identity. The identity issue, at the root of this extreme engagement in expressive violence, is indeed the main claim that emerges from their audiovisual "*bricolages*" (De Certeau, 1984) and the way in which they appropriate expressive means of participatory media.

This teen phenomenon thus relates to the fact that isolated actors, whose rationality is questioned by psychiatric experts, succeed in making headlines with such narrated identities, scripted and "pre-mediated" via audiovisual "tinkering" and modeled around social vengeance. More specifically, this ethnography shows that the specificity of these subversive identity claims is that the expressive dimensions remain highly visual. School shooters seek above all to publicize the planned aspect of their violent act by ostentatiously exhibiting firearms. They sometimes add a political significance to it by simply showing signs or (sub)cultural referents displayed by previous killers. This is why they refer to social movements whose existence sometimes has no other reality than the one given through the performativity of their speech and the exhibition of objects mediating a subversive message by the means of typical audiovisual communication strategies. Ultimately, "expressive" forms of violence, while based on the performativity of a preexistent cultural script, is inseparable from the singular role of participatory media and Web 2.0: they promote, due to their accessibility, the engagement in forms of expressive violence with the community of those for whom the incisive message of identity vengeance is intended.

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