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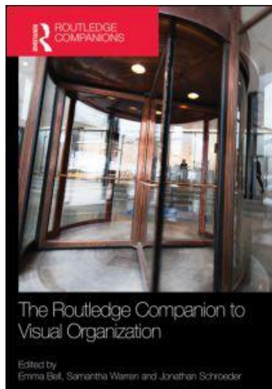

The Routledge Companion to Visual Organization

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Social media and organizations

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Social media and organizations

Pauline Leonard

Introduction

This chapter explores the use of social media and the Web in the making of organizational visual identities and practices. I draw on ongoing empirical research[1] to focus on the ways in which social media are stretching understandings of the visual in organizations and extending paradigms of identity construction and meaning-making. In particular, I focus on a case study of the use of YouTube to argue that social media are influencing an organizational rethink on visual practices, as well as relationships with clients. Increasingly, as contemporary organizations are reshaping into '*org/borgs*' (Haraway 1991; Consalvo 2003), their use of social media is contributing to a blurring of, and even a challenge to, previously established boundaries in organizational practices, positions and identities. Yet, while on the one hand, the democratic nature of these digital tools can be read as opening up directions of communicative flow and power and, as such, flattening relations; on the other hand, I argue that social media may, in fact, be additional forms of social and cultural capital by which organizations compete for relative advantage within organizational fields (Bourdieu 1984; Bennett *et al.* 2009).

Background

The rapid development of digital information and communication technologies and the affordances of the World Wide Web are enabling some significant transformations in, and challenges to, organizational practices and relations, not least in terms of their ownership and control of their visual identities (V. Miller 2011). A defining feature of contemporary Internet activity, particularly in its Web 2.0 and social media forms, is its 'for the people' democratic and participatory culture, whereby ordinary people are linked together in social and collective conversational and interactive webs (Fournier and Avery 2011: 193). This foundation underlines the fact that Web 2.0 was not in any way initially created as an instrument for organizations, or to boost corporate power. Rather, through interactive websites such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, new relationships between producers and consumers, organizations and clients are emerging, which are unsettling understandings of influence and form (Jensen 1998). Indeed, the bottom-up nature of digital culture means that corporate presence is not always welcome,

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but, rather, that organizations are often suspiciously regarded as 'uninvited crashers of the Web 2.0 party' (Fournier and Avery 2011: 193). On the other hand, as Elliott and Robinson also note in Chapter 17, the participatory nature of Web 2.0 means that any user (albeit with skills in this direction) can interact with the technology to reinterpret and re-present images and content in ways that may actually be counter to organizational purposes or ambitions (Burgess and Green 2009), and powerful multinational corporations are often seen by social media users as particularly enjoyable targets for extra-textual parody. At the same time, however, the economic potential of the Web for organizations is enormous: brand building, marketing and consumer engagement can all be enhanced, unrestricted by time and space, through the creation of (global) social networks and an organizational 'community'. It is thus becoming increasingly evident to organizations across the private, public and voluntary sectors that they must, somehow, find a way to join Web 2.0 activity as legitimate, or even honoured, guests and embrace social media as an integral part of their organizational digital strategy (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Conceptualizing social media as organizational visual practice

In 1991, the feminist academic Donna Haraway proposed the metaphorical model of the 'cyborg' in order to disrupt the artificial dualisms in human thinking (Haraway 1991; Consalvo 2003). The cyborg is neither all machine nor all human, and as such challenges the purity of both categories as well as the binary and oppositional nature of knowledge based on dualisms. Haraway argued that technology, and its role in our futures, should be embraced, 'as to do otherwise is to cede control of that potentially destructive force to dominant, conservative forces already in charge' (Consalvo 2003: 70). Stone (1996) also argued that our increasing reliance on digital communication in our lives has turned us all into cyborgs and, certainly, now over 15 years on from his original book, we can agree that digital culture has significantly and irrevocably influenced methods of visual as well as oral and textual communication at the full range of scales: personally, organizationally, nationally and globally. Our increasing reliance on these systems thus turns us all into cyborgs, and the more that these are used and integrated into daily practice, the more they become essential to what we do. Organizations are certainly no exception here: as new technologies increasingly influence working lives and organizational practices, organizations too can be conceptualized as cyborgs or '*org/borgs*'. Further, the increasingly pervasive use of social media by organizational members from the bottom to the top of organizational hierarchies is contributing to the boundary-blurring that is marking contemporary working life more generally; and as the dichotomies of organization/client, professionalism/amateurism, work identity/personal identity and work-time/leisure-time are gradually becoming less distinct, organizational identities – who can do what, when and how – are being reconfigured.

Central to the above, therefore, is the acknowledgement that use of digital technologies and the Internet are being thoroughly embedded in organizational and personal daily practice. As such, *practice theory* is also useful to understanding social media as a visual form (Bourdieu 1977; Ardevol *et al.* 2010). A key aspect of social media is that content produced by amateurs is displayed and distributed alongside that produced by media professionals. In other words, ordinary people's media practices, such as the regular uploading and sharing of content, mix with institutionalized practices to define cultural production (Ardevol *et al.* 2010). On the face of it, this is a move towards democratization – but to what extent, and how, are these new and multiple forms of media practice leading to any real changes in the distribution of power and inequalities within and between organizations and other users? Bourdieu's concept of '*capital*' is

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useful here, as it encourages us to move away from 'the idea of fixed advantages associated with pre-defined groups and focuses instead on "the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu 1984:122) that can be mobilized to achieve advantage and classify social distinctions' (Halford and Savage 2010: 944). This may allow us to explore how '*digital capital*', the technical skills in social media, can be converted by people/organizations into gaining advantage in competitive contexts.

The ways in which technology and organizations shape each other to *co-construct* outcomes is developed further through Actor Network Theory (ANT) (Law and Hassard 1999; Latour 2005). This focuses on the interdependency between human and non-human actors, and the ways in which these come together and combine into networks to produce outcomes. Challenging any Bourdieusian notion of fixity, however, ANT sees the nature of networks as fluid, diverse and heterogeneous, and, as such, outcomes can never be certain or ever simply be read off from actors' intentions. Using social media cannot therefore *predetermine* advantage for organizations or other users, nor achieve any predictable stability in positioning. However, in so much as their use may produce certain networks that may be enacted with some consistency, 'temporary stabilizing effects' may result from these associations (Law 2008). ANT recommends using case studies to trace such effects and outcomes of particular networks, and this is the approach of this chapter.

I have discussed above how social media can be seen both as a form of practice and as a producer of networks. In these conceptualizations, useful connections can also be made with Foucault's concept of discourse. Discourses are 'forms of knowledge or powerful sets of assumptions, expectations and explanations, governing mainstream social and cultural practices. They are systematic ways of making sense of the world by inscribing and shaping power relations within texts' (Baxter 2003: 7). Discourses are, in turn, closely associated with the social practices they produce, as well as the power relations constructed through these. Crucially, Foucault conceptualizes power not as a repressive force, held by one particular subject, but as a 'net-like organisation', which 'weaves itself through social organisations, meanings, relations … and identities' (Baxter 2003: 8). Thus while, as I will show, social media have come to be governed by a powerful set of discourses that frame the ways in which they are used, they also form a highly productive and dynamic set of networks in which individuals are simultaneously undergoing and exercising power (Foucault 1980).

These four theoretical strands interweave to offer a useful conceptual framework by which to explore the complex texture of social media. I now turn to the ways in which this may be used in organizational visual practice and identity making.

Organizational visual practice and social media

Existing 'visual identity' theories and models stress that corporate visual identity (CVI) is achieved through a very strategic approach, albeit one that is 'hardly noticeable to outsiders' (van den Bosch and de Jong 2005: 108). CVI itself is here seen to reflect 'the essence' of an organization: 'what it stands for, what its aims are, in what respect it differs from others' (ibid.: 109). It is only once these aspects are known that the 'design process' can start, the desired result being a 'visual identity system that fits the organisation' (ibid.). Although, within this conceptualization, a visual identity architecture is relatively easy to implement, 'CVI management is needed to ensure consistency'. Indeed, consistency is seen to be an integral dimension of a successful CVI, along with visibility, distinctiveness, transparency and authenticity (Fombrun and Van Riel 2004). These are achieved through the management of such visual techniques, such as company logos, signage of buildings and vehicles, billboards, business cards and letterheads,

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etc., the design of which is usually tightly managed by the marketing department and perhaps outsourced to an (often expensive) 'professional' public relations agency. Further, on the face of it, these are understood to be non-interactive artefacts by which to deliver a consistent and powerful message and identity.

In many ways, social media invert this approach. In contrast to this predominantly uni-directional model of CVI, social media content can be used and created by *any* Internet user, hosted as they are by a range of inexpensive and easy-to-use digital tools such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Wikipedia and blogs. The opportunity for management and control is lost, as social media sites are inherently social and participative in nature, attracting and developing 'communities' of users who engage around the content, creating and sharing comments, stories, plans, videos, photos and other visual images. The potential for activity that may be counter to the vision of identity an organization may have for itself is nicely illustrated by Elliott and Robinson in Chapter 17 in this volume, when they discuss some negative comments posted on Waitrose's website. It is through activities such as these that people connect to one another, formulating online communities or 'hubs' that influence social networks. While these networks may not be as large as is sometimes assumed (Huberman *et al.* 2008), they can make things 'go viral': that is, when vast numbers of people watch a video or read a blog (Kaplan and Haenlein 2011). In terms of their potential for organizations and their CVI, therefore, social media offer exciting new opportunities in terms of reach, but there are also challenges. Thus, on the one hand, they can open up avenues for communication: tools such as YouTube and Twitter can act as *conversation starters*; wikis and Google Groups can act as *collaboration tools*; and social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter can act as *network builders* (Kanter and Fine 2010; D. Miller 2011; Kietzmann *et al.* 2011). On the other hand, however, as any user can create content, anybody could join in the production of an organization's CVI. The aim of managing consistency, therefore, may be lost.

To date, the real experts in social media have not been organizations but 'free agents' – 'individuals working outside of organizations to organize, mobilize, raise funds and communicate with constituents' (Kanter and Fine 2010: 15). Some of these work on behalf of, in particular, voluntary and charity organizations, helping to build and develop networks, raise money and promote their causes. Increasingly, however, organizational employees are themselves developing the toolkit of free agents and simulating their methods to promote organizational aims (Java *et al.* 2007). What is interesting here is that 'hub status does not happen because of a person's position on an organization chart' (Kanter and Fine 2010: 28). Anyone within an organization, regardless of position, can become a Twitter user or blogger, and be very good at it, creating a large following and developing a lively network. In this way, boundaries between the relatively powerful and the relatively powerless in an organization can become blurred; and someone at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy may be far better networked than someone at the top. As Kanter and Fine (2010) argue, *social capital* works differently online, and, as such, an individual may be more trusted than an organization. Although their content may be more *amateurish* in quality, they are likely to be regarded as more *authentic*, and, as such, have the ability to create powerful communities of *affinity*. In turn, the hierarchical distribution of organizations' social capital may also be challenged by social media presence. In the UK, for instance, recent research has demonstrated that, when the top 25 fundraising charities are compared with the top 25 FTSE companies by market capitalization, charities are far ahead in terms of use of social media, with three times as many YouTube subscribers, eight times as many Twitter followers and ten times as many Facebook 'likes' on average (nfpSynergy 2011). As this research argues, social media are a great leveller when it comes to communications, as they offer a cheap and simple way to reach out and engage supporters. Not only is this true in the

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developed world, but also increasingly in the less developed world (D. Miller 2011). As such, the boundaries between organization and power, rich and poor can become blurred, as small charities mobilize the resources of amateurism, authenticity and affinity to compete successfully with major corporations for online presence.

As I will now go on to suggest, it is these three discourses – amateurism, authenticity and affinity – that frame the design aesthetics of social media and work to define the parameters within which the visual is constructed. In other words, the *cultural capital* of contemporary social media may also be challenging organizations and the ways in which their CVI was previously constructed, particularly in the ways in which they traditionally used the visual to achieve distinction and status (Bourdieu 1984). The design of much social media takes a different form to the high-budget/professional approaches that have dominated organizational image-making practices. The ways in which, for example, Facebook/Twitter profile pictures are increasingly personalized means that a specific, arguably even narcissistic, genre is emerging, which users must either subscribe to or resist (Marshall 2006; Hills 2009; V. Miller 2011). However, this is *not* to argue that there is one completely distinctive 'design aesthetic' that differentiates social media or digital culture from other forms of media (Lister *et al*. 2009). In contrast, in the ways in which the digital interplays intertextually with established media forms, social media draw on visual culture and extend the interactivity of their relationship with audiences. My discussion of this will focus in particular on YouTube, arguably the least text-based form of social media. Drawing on a broadly ANT approach, I will explore new case study empirical material to trace some of the visual practices and resources that may be employed by organizations, as well as some of the outcomes, both planned and unplanned, which may be produced.

YouTube

YouTube, owned by Google since 2006, is the most prominent video-sharing website in the Western, English-speaking world and is consistently in the top ten of most visited websites globally (Burgess and Green 2009). Users upload video content to the website and audiences engage around that content, through comments and often reacting with new content of their own. In relation to this, a key discourse by which the site is positioned is that of '*amateurism*'; i.e. YouTube is primarily about the sharing of the mundane and the everyday through videos of often indifferent quality, rather than the promotion of the highly professional or corporate interests. As a result, the site has a somewhat vernacular culture with much of the content having a 'home made' character, albeit often playing intertextually with other cultural forms through inference and parody (Burgess and Green 2009). However, the fact that YouTube is very successfully able to reach a wide and diverse audience in a very short time period means that many organizations, including professional media producers, are increasingly becoming interested in exploiting its potential. As such:

> the contributors are a diverse group of participants – from large media producers and rights owners such as television stations, sports companies and major advertisers, to small-to-medium enterprises looking for cheap distribution or alternatives to mainstream broadcast systems, cultural institutions, artists, media literate fans, non-professional and amateur media producers. Each of these participants approaches YouTube with their own purposes and aims and collectively shape YouTube as a dynamic cultural system: YouTube is a site of participatory culture.
>
> *(Burgess and Green 2009: vii)*

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Organizational presence, with its structural position in status hierarchies as well as its ability to produce high-quality video content, sits somewhat uneasily within this participatory culture therefore. If institutions are to be successful in exploiting the visual potential of YouTube as a means of promoting organizational aims, they may need to perform a nuanced balancing act. On the one hand, if they present too polished a video to push commercial interests, they risk transgressing the 'amateur' identity of the site and alienating many of its users. On the other hand, if they produce content which is too 'down with the kids', they risk not only tarnishing their professional image but also being positioned negatively by another of the key discourses that frame the site: that of *authenticity*. Connected with the amateurism discourse is the claim that YouTube is a vehicle for authentic and individualistic self-expression, and as such suspected violators are outed swiftly. However, as Jenkins (2009) notes, in a hybrid space such as YouTube, it is often difficult to ascertain what regimes of truth govern different genres of user-generated content in practice. For example, the emergence of what is dubbed 'Astroturf': 'fake grassroots media content produced by commercial media companies and special interest groups but passed off as coming from individual amateurs' means that the 'goals of communicators can no longer be simply read off the channels of communication' (2009: 122). Although, as Jenkins concludes, 'historically, these powerful interests could exert overt control over broadcast media but now, they often have to mask their power in order to operate within network culture' (ibid.: 122–123), it is clear that YouTube presents new challenges to organizations in the construction and negotiation of the visual. If they are to succeed, they may need to explore different techniques of self-representation that play with the vernacular and the low brow.

However, there is a third aspect of YouTube, which offers more opportunity for organizations: its potential for *affiliation* (Lange 2009). Lange defines affiliation as both 'feelings of membership in a social network, and feelings of attraction to people, things or ideas' (2009: 71). Videos of affinity try to establish communicative connections between people, and, as such, can facilitate large business-oriented networks alongside small personal ones (Lange 2009). This is a powerful way in which organizations can use the visual in order to build and maintain a community to which it can continuously promote its image and message. However, as Lange goes on to argue, this takes work, as, in order to maintain connections and relationships, attention has to be both captured and kept. Ideally, 'viewers to whom the video is addressed may respond and help maintain a field of connection between creator and viewer' (ibid.: 73). In this way, if organizations are successful in moving in this direction, the relationship between organization and user can become flattened, and even participatory. Users also enter the creative space, commenting positively or negatively on content, suggesting ideas, posting clips or even engaging in 'redaction': editing existing content to produce new content (Hartley 2008: 112; Burgess and Green 2009). This is the achievement of the organizations in the research case study to which I now turn.

Case study: Free Range Studios and The Story of Stuff

An organization that has very successfully drawn upon all three discourses of amateurism, authenticity and affinity is Free Range Studios, a 'value-centred organization' based in the US, which produces films and videos, principally via YouTube, for a range of environmental and ethical not-for-profit organizations. Over the last couple of years, Emma Bell and I have conducted a range of interviews with key personnel at both Free Range Studios and one of its key clients The Story of Stuff, predominantly via Skype. In these, we have explored the highly networked relationships between the two organizations and the ways YouTube and

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other forms of social media have been exploited to promote the identity and ethos of each organization as well as an environmental agenda. Our methodology of 'virtual ethnography' (Hine 2000) has also included regularly monitoring the website, the organizations' Facebook pages, blogs and Twitter feeds, as well as analysing the YouTube videos and comments themselves. While Emma and McArthur, a partner at Free Range Studios, explore the concept of 'authenticity' more broadly in Chapter 23 in this volume, here I will discuss the ways in which the three concepts interplay in their films and videos.

Free Range Studios has had phenomenal success with its YouTube postings, many of which have 'gone viral' overnight. Co-founder and CEO Jonah Sachs explains that this is because they have been extremely careful with both the messages that they have agreed to promote, as well as the choices they have made in terms of the visual style and text to convey these. By making intertextual connections with mainstream cult movies, such as *The Matrix* and *Star Wars*, yet retaining a simple and almost amateurish range of cinematic techniques, the videos produced by Free Range Studios have appealed to a wide and diverse film-buff audience as well as to an already networked (green) community, which is passionate about its cause. The participatory nature of the YouTube audience and existing social/environmental networks have thus been successfully garnered to help propagate the product, and, in the process, the status and identity of Free Range Studios. This now has its own loyal networked community with which the organization maintains contact through social media such as Twitter and blogs as part of its regular practice (Bourdieu 1977). Jonah Sachs explains how creating videos of affinity, which worked on their behalf by commenting on videos and retweeting, have been central to their success:

> If people were going to be choosing what they broadcast to their communities instead of just being broadcast to, then potentially messages of passion as opposed to messages of just straight marketing would have kind of a natural advantage that they never had before. Usually cause-based messages had been shut out of the marketplace because of money basically and also because gatekeepers were sensitive to controversial messages. Now we thought people could try building social capital and more passionately sharing things that they cared about rather than just kind of professional messages that were blasted to them and demanded that they passed them along. So we just started experimenting and playing with different ways that we could realize that dream for social change clients and non-profits and socially responsible businesses and that led us pretty quickly to … what our passion had been to begin with, which was creating movies and considering what the audience's passions were and how that fit in with what our clients were trying to achieve and then creating a whole range of different storytelling devices to break the traditional expectations of what you can do with limited budget.

Key to the success of the organization has also been a desire to differentiate itself from large, profit-driven corporates and, from the start, the visual possibilities of the Internet were used to achieve this aim.

> When we put up our first website, the first thing it said was 'We only serve non-profits.' That was the first thing on the website and just the response from the community at the time and their response to our commitment was really huge. So I think that was sort of an accidental differentiator which we really needed as a start-up.

Sachs recognizes that using the Internet means other factors come into play that are equally important in determining success as the technical quality of the visual product.

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This understanding stems from the fact that they have been engaging with the visual possibilities of the Internet for well over a decade, i.e. before Web 2.0. In these early days, the amateurish simplicity of their visual images, then by necessity, was made forgivable by their novelty, leading Sachs to realize that the cultural capital and power of the Internet may be more a result of clarity of message and good timing as in a highly sophisticated technical product:

> We had some viral successes very early on, but it was very much pre-YouTube. Some of the early things I think worked not even because they were great pieces, but because they were some of the few things that actually moved and made noise on the Internet, so it kind of was a novelty at the time. And so there's always something novel that's going on, but back then, you know, Internet cartoons and videos were novel. We were even doing this before video was a viable option. We were doing it when you needed a cartoon that was less than 200 kilobytes to hope anyone would see it. So it's changed a tremendous amount and the ability to just use viral as your main strategy is now much less well placed than maybe it used to be, where if you were willing to put your video into the mix you could be one of 50 videos that were circulating at that time. And now you really can't set out to say 'Well, we're going to make something that 5 million people are going to see,' because it's expensive and throwing a dart with your eyes closed at the dartboard and just hoping it lands. So that has definitely changed, although the power of great stories and the power of bringing complex information into simplified versions is still very strong. You just can't expect that you're going to just immediately rise above the din just because you've created a story.

The dominant cultural capital of social media and the Internet may, to some extent, therefore, challenge the existing 'visual identity' theories and models, which, as I discussed above, dominate mainstream organizational studies and marketing practices; requiring organizations to rethink their visual strategies for corporate identity-making. Digital culture and social media are not in the main about a highly specified technical or aesthetically sophisticated product, but about amusing images and powerful but simple messages. For this reason, those organizations who may be the most successful users of social media are often those with less explicitly profit-oriented aims and small budgets that need to be exploited to the maximum. Indeed, voluntary and campaign organizations with clear ideologies have emerged as particularly successful users of social media, drawing on their connective properties to create and mobilize communities and increase impact (Kanter and Fine 2010). In this vein, Free Range's success is, in part, due to the fact that they have carefully built on their early positioning to maintain a location away from any identification with the profit-driven corporate sector. This is achieved visually in their videos by the clear use of signs to connote an antipathy to the excesses of capitalism (Barthes 1982 [1964]). As discussed by Davison in Chapter 2 in this volume, Barthes (1982 [1964]) shows how signs and stereotypes are used to transmit powerful ideas and messages, often in repetitive ways. This is a technique perfected by Free Range: through the use of recurring cartoon characters such as a top-hatted, fat-bellied CEO with dollar signs on his chest, and a giant iron man/robot, big business is represented as villainous and all-consuming.

One of the most successful arms of Free Range Studios' work has been for the environmental campaign organization The Story of Stuff. Together, they have produced several videos, all of which have gone viral, which are unified by the powerful visual theme of amateurish simplicity. The videos draw on a range of images that act as signs to connote the impact of big business on the environment. Childlike pictures of stick figures, line drawings of objects such as buildings and material products, and simple cartoons punch out uncompromising messages about

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the damage that many large corporations are inflicting on the planet. The Executive Producer at The Story of Stuff explains how this iconic style came about:

> A big part of the style actually arose out of necessity. I mean we wanted something that was going to be really simple and easy for people to take in because the information is so robust; and also from a production standpoint, an animation production and kind of budget, etc. – from that standpoint we had to come up with a style that we could make 20 minutes of it without it costing like a gazillion dollars and that was how we sort of reinvented the stick figure in that project.

The first video, itself called *The Story of Stuff*, thus deployed a style of artwork that tapped into the amateurish culture that prevails on YouTube, which was then animated and, in a juxtaposition of the sort that Sørenson discusses in Chapter 3 in this volume, supported by a 'real' presenter. This is Annie Leonard, the co-director at The Story of Stuff, who addresses the camera with the manner of a primary-school teacher giving a geography lesson. The clarity and conjunction of image and talk thus played intertextually with childish media forms to convey the message that the story here is simple: our consumption of everyday 'stuff' – bottled water, mobile phones and jeans – is damaging the planet and ruining our lives. In fact, however, it was not Free Range Studios that came up with this design, but Annie Leonard herself. The Director of Projects at The Story of Stuff explains:

> Annie had been working on these issues for a long time, but she had always kind of communicated it in a bit kind of nerdier way. You know, talking about parts per billion and toxics in the materials flow and she did a year-long workshop with a bunch of other activists and leaders and they just gave her a lot of really authentic feedback about how she could make her kind of rap, so to speak, more accessible and she really took it to heart … she was super frustrated by her inability to communicate the information in a way that resonated with people, so, almost as a joke, when she was giving her presentation she started putting up these stick figures and these little kind of line drawings to tell her story and it immediately became apparent that that was such a better way to tell the story and she started getting invited places to go and give her talk using the stick figure drawings and everyone kept saying to her like 'You should make a film of this. You should make a film of this.'

This blurring of highly professional knowledge with amateurish style resonated with viewers to such an extent that a large online community of affinity was quickly developed. As discussed above, a key aspect of social media is its participatory culture and the interactivity of its networks, such that the whole experience of 'audiencehood' has been dramatically redefined (Burgess and Green 2009). In particular, participants of YouTube routinely engage in new forms of publishing as a way of identifying and communicating their own experiences in relation to the community's. Hartley (2009) argues that, through this process of 'redaction', 'the origin of meaning has migrated along the "value-chain" of the cultural industries, from the "author," the "producer," and the text, to the "citizen-consumer," so that "consumption" is a source of value creation, and not only its destination' (Burgess and Green 2009: 48). In the ways in which social media engage audiences as well as connect them into a network based on an affinity to a particular set of ideas, the relationship between organizations and clients is thus blurred. The latter are now more actively and directly engaged in the production of visual practices and, consequently, the identity of an organization. However, the heterogeneity of

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networks means that outcomes are often quite unpredictable, as is illustrated well by the Director of Projects at The Story of Stuff:

> We have a very engaged audience. We call them a community instead of an audience because they really do … You know, it was really interesting with this last *Story of Citizens United* film that we did. We had folks complete some survey questions for us and we had them watch a series of videos both for and against the decision and then give us some feedback around what messages were coming through … to try and get a sense from them in terms of what information would be useful as we tried to tell the story. It's [also] a very diverse audience … it's very popular with Catholic nuns in the mid-west and here in Oakland there's like a youth group of colour that has adopted *Story of Stuff* into like a hip-hop poetry dance.

The unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of networks and audience participation are thus aspects of social media that organizations have to take on board. However, redactions produced within and by the community of affinity, such as those mentioned in the above quote, may add to the authenticity of the content produced in ways which augment its visual appeal to users, as well as, by association, the appeal of the organization. The creative designer at Free Range Studios explains how these developments in the interactive possibilities of social media mean that organizations are now in a creative arena where they are only one among multiple producers of their online content:

> One of the great things about the teenagers who are talking is that actually you can YouTube their response. I think it's hysterical, smart … they got on and they said 'Hi, we're here to talk about *The Story of Stuff*. My name's Annie,' and then they had people kind of pop out from the side that said 'But Annie, what's a toxin?' and 'What about this?' and 'What about this?' It was really the fact that their minds were so interested and so engaged, but yet they had some really solid thoughtful critiquing, sometimes tough questions and that kind of ability that they could respond and ask those is a totally different dialogue than just Free Range broadcasting something out. I mean *The Meatrix* [an early film] was put out in some ways similar to a television model, where you have a source of the content and it broadcasts out to a wide stream. Obviously it can go viral in a way that TV can't, but it's still the model of one to many, versus when we started doing *The Story of Stuff* all of a sudden you're having one to many and many can come back to one, and many can go to each other and so it's a whole new game, which I think it's just really exciting from a creative standpoint.

Redactions may not always be produced by the community of affinity, however, but by other actors in the broader network. As mentioned above, the various videos produced by the Free Range Studios/Story of Stuff partnership have tackled a range of unsustainable corporate practices in ways that, in some cases, have clearly rattled some viewers. For example, in a critique of *The Story of Stuff*, the video is overlaid with symbols of communist regimes with a Russian army uniform superimposed on the image of Annie herself.[2] Other 'free agents' have also produced competing videos in which *The Story of Stuff* is parodied and charged with being communist and treacherous:

> There's been quite a backlash – people thinking that we're indoctrinating children, that we're socialists, which, you know, might as well be a four letter word … [some] people just

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> think Annie's a liar and then make just the most outrageous claims like Annie's making millions off of this and she's attacking big business.

However, generating publicity-starting conversations and then developing and maintaining them in whatever direction and through diverse means are fundamental functions of social media, and the Free Range Studios/Story of Stuff case studies reveal the complex and contradictory ways in which this is performed. Further, the interactivity does not stop with YouTube: it is picked up, repackaged and re-circulated through other social media tools and networks such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs. While these, in turn, have their own visual regimes, the three key discourses of authenticity, amateurism and affinity are still influential. Thus, the Free Range Studios' Facebook page conforms to the dominant design aesthetic of Facebook by consisting of low-quality, un-photoshopped photographs of its employees going about their everyday lives accompanied by a chatty, intimate and youthful style of text, as well as links to other organizations and film clips that can be seen as occupying the same ideological terrain: Amnesty International, Alliance for Climate Change Education, etc. The Twitter feed also provides a constant stream of links to various YouTube videos. The key visual feature of these forms of social media is not high-brow aesthetics but constant engagement, and to this end the boundaries between work-based issues and identities and personal/leisure-based ones are increasingly being blurred by practitioners. Facebook postings and Tweets frequently intersect comments on personal lives and habits with work-based events and links in an effort to increase the quantity of communication and, hopefully, 'followers' and 'likes'. It is perhaps most through this need for a constant drip feed of communication that social media are not only challenging organizations' visual practices but also their organizational identities across the board.

Concluding discussion

In this chapter, I have shown that social media offer organizations both opportunities and challenges to their visual practices and identities. In that social media and the Web are now thoroughly embedded into many people's daily practices, those organizations that fail to perform as *org/borgs* and establish social capital by engaging with these new media forms are losing the possibilities of creating a significant and contemporary identity for themselves as well as securing their place in the market (Bourdieu 1984; Haraway 1991). However, as ANT theorists argue, those organizations that do interact with the Web must do so on the understanding that the outcomes are far from certain or predictable. While the Web undoubtedly reproduces established forms of power and inequality, its discursive regimes and technological affordances also have the potential to produce new forms of social and political relations (Foucault 1980). Changing notions of cultural and social capital are challenging understandings of who can do what, when and how. Through these new and diverse interplays of people, organizations, digital culture and visual aesthetics, dichotomies of powerful/powerless, organization/client, professionalism/amateurism, work identity/personal identity and work-time/leisure-time are thus being reshaped. However, while some of these reconfigurations are leading to the flattening of older hierarchies, the extent to which social media are upturning more entrenched patterns of inequality is still being worked out (Halford and Savage 2010). What is clear is that organizations using social media as part of their visual practice need to embrace risk in order to exploit the Web's ability to build networks, generate debate and promote interactivity. As such, social media offer organizations a new lens from which to understand and use both the visual and themselves. It will be interesting to see which organizations decide to join the party.

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Notes

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2 These images can be seen in the accompanying online resources.

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