FCJ-030 Flash! Mobs in the Age of Mobile Connectivity *

Judith A. Nicholson, Communication Studies, Concordia University, Montréal..

2 The first flash mobbing is legendary now, though not uncontested. It happened in Manhattan, New York, between 7:27 pm and 7:37 pm on June 17,
2003. Summoned by text messages, emails and blog banter, a crowd of approximately 100 people gathered in the home furnishing section of Macy's department store. The crowd surrounded a rug with a $10,000 price tag. Participants, soon to be known as 'flash mobbers', were instructed beforehand by 'moberators' to tell the salespeople that they all lived together in a free-love commune and that they wanted to purchase a 'love rug' (Bedell, 2003; Cotroneo, 2003; Shmueli 2003; van Rijn, 2003). According to several accounts, the mob dispersed rapidly after spending ten minutes discussing the rug among themselves and with salespeople. Other flash mobbings followed in quick succession in cities around the world. In Rome, over 300 flash mobbers invaded a music and bookstore on July 24. Flash mobbers spent several minutes asking employees for nonexistent books before applauding and dispersing (Shmueli,2003; van Rijn,2003). In Vancouver, Canada, 35 people met up in late August 2003 at a major intersection and 'did the twist, to shouts and countershouts of 'Chubby!' and 'Checker!'' (Griffin, 2003). Several minutes later, the dancing halted and flash mobbers dispersed into the crowd of spectators that had gathered.

3 True to its moniker, flash mobbing shone briefly and brilliantly. Though flash mobbings are still generated occasionally, the trend was officially declared passé following the eighth Manhattan flash mobbing on September 10, 2003 (Delio, 2003), just one day shy of the second anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks by religious extremists in that city. While the trend was popular, numerous disparaging and complimentary characterisations of it were proffered by journalists, police, bloggers, flash mobbers and others. Flash mobbing was described as 'self organized entertainment' (Rheingold, 2003b), hailed as 'a startling intervention in the life of the city' (Young, 2003), likened to 'speed dating' (Nold, 2003) and labeled 'an incipient form of social protest' (Shnayerson and Goldstein, 2003: 20). Backlash against the trend located it in the 'prank tradition of phone-booth stuffing, streaking, flagpole sitting and goldfish swallowing' (Harmon, 2003).

4 Why was a trend often described as 'silly fun' (Morrison, 2003) so hotly contested? The reason, this paper argues, was the unprecedented conjuncture in flash mobbing of three types of mobile communicating: mobile texting, targeted mobbing and public performing. This paper argues that the conjuncture of these practices—and the popularization of flash mobbing in urban public spaces at this juncture in history—made the trend a significant moment in the history of mobile communication.

Mobile Communicating

5 Announcements for early flash mobbings were circulated like chain letters via email and text messages over the span of several days and even weeks to desktop computers, laptops, pagers and mobile phones. Though the popularity of flash mobbing was short-lived and its style was deliberately ephemeral, its popularization was well documented by blogs and mainstream media primarily because of the use of mobile communication technologies. As flash mobbing spread during the summer of 2003, it was noted on blogs that journalists with mobile phones and cameras sometimes outnumbered the people who gathered to participate in flash mobbings (Savage, 2003a). Flash mobbers occasionally used camcorders, digital cameras and camera-enabled phones to record their participation in flash mobbings—a kind of 'mobile blogging' to document the moment. These digital annotations were later posted to various blogs, most notably cheesebikini? and satanslaundromat that had begun to chronicle the trend and host discussions about it. Over the summer, postings also appeared on blogs from people seeking to participate in flash mobbings. As a result of such requests, several new blogs were created to share information about impending and past flash mobbings in different cities. Since Fall 2003, many of them have become dead links from cheesebikini? and satanslaundromat.

6 It has been widely suggested that flash mobbing was shaped primarily by Internet use. This conclusion has been propagated, I believe, because discussions of flash mobbing were highly visible on blogs during the trend's popularization and even after its demise. In addition, links have been made, though poorly elaborated, between the decentralized communication and ambush

tactics of flash mobbers and those of anti-globalization activists who organised themselves in the late 1990s via indymedia websites and other activist websites as well as via mobile phones. Without denying that the practices of the anti-globalization activists influenced flash mobbing, it is my assertion that the trend also shaped and was shaped by mobile phone use. This oversight regarding the intersection of mobile phone use and flash mobbing has left a significant gap in the burgeoning research on mobile communication. This paper aims to fill part of that gap.

7 In some instances mobile phoning was directly incorporated into flash mobbings. For example, during a flash mobbing in Berlin on August 3, 2003 beginning at 6:01pm, flash mobbers shouted 'yes, yes!' into their mobile phones in the middle of a crowded street before applauding and dispersing (Shmueli, 2003; Thomas, 2003). Also in August 2003, instructions for a British flash mobbing directed participants to gather at a sofa store on Tottenham Court Road in London. Flash mobbers were instructed to admire the furniture and then call someone on their mobile phone to talk about it, the experience presumably or maybe the furniture, 'without using the letter 'o'' ('Smart mob storms London'). Flash mobbing was not shaped simply by the incorporation of mobile phones in these instances; which also seemed to function as parodies or commentaries on mobile phoning in public spaces. Flash mobbing shaped and was shaped by a worldwide shift in mobile phone use from private communication characterized primarily by mobile phoning in the 1980s and 90s to more collective uses dominated by mobile texting in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This shift was evident in a corresponding change in sentiments and concerns regarding direct one-to-one mobile phone use versus indirect one-to many mobile phone use.

8 As mobile phoning grew over the past two decades it was often labeled as symptomatic of the 'aggressive individualism' of our mobile world (Harkin, 2003). Unlike wired telephone use, which a century earlier was imagined and deployed initially as mass communication before being made private communication (Marvin, 1988; Fischer, 1992; Flichy, 1995), mobile phoning was immediately adopted as a form of private communication. In the 1980s and early 1990s when mobile phoning was still relatively new, heated debates occurred in Canada, the U.S.A. and other countries regarding the value and appropriateness of the practice in various public and semi-public spaces such as schools, cinemas, hospitals, restaurants, cars, public transit vehicles and places of worship. Numerous researchers concluded that mobile phoning was contentious because users' voices created floating private 'phone-space' in public spaces (Townsend, 2000: 94) and, thus, isolated the user and offended onlookers and eavesdroppers.

9 Politicians at all levels in several countries responded to public complaints as well as safety concerns about mobile phoning by crafting legislation to ban or curb the practice in some public spaces and in semi-public spaces such as cars. As mobile phoning burgeoned, public and political apprehension converged with concerns about the positive and negative effects of mobile phone use on the boundaries between work and leisure. In contrast to concerns about person-to-person use, by 2003 one commentator on flash mobbing mused, 'How is it possible that a technology [the mobile phone] with such potential to empower the individual has turned into an irritating clique-machine for the hipster sheep?' (Tom, 2003). Such laments highlighted the growing prevalence of one-to-many mobile communicating in North America and its association with flash mobbing.

10 In the late 1990s, North Americans began to use their mobile phones to facilitate rapid, decentralized, one-to-many interaction in a practice that I am calling 'mobile mass communication,' for lack of a better term. Though decentralized communication using mobile phones was already widespread in some Asian and European countries, particularly among adolescents (see Katz and Aakhus, 2002), the practice became at once visible and contentious in the U.S.A. and Canada as a result of anti-globalization protests in the streets of Seattle and Quebec City during WTO meetings in those cities in 1999 and 2001. By 2001, conservative American commentator John Dean had declared that mobile phone use by protestors, particularly at anti-globalization demonstrations, had become 'a means of communications and control that is the bane of law enforcement and security personnel' (Dean 2001). In studies of the anti-globalization movement, Internet use by activists is conflated with mobile phone use, with the former garnering the most analysis. I am not seeking to rectify this oversight in this paper. Such rectifying would entail a closer consideration of the anti-globalization movement than I can provide here.[1]

11 In this paper, I simply want to note that mobile mass communication was key to the anti-globalization movement and to flash mobbing and that this overlap suggests the movement and

the trend were similar at least in terms of how participants communicated and organised themselves. I also want to note that the shift in mobile phone use in recent years from direct one-to-one communication to indirect one-to-many communication was key to both the movement and the trend because of the conjuncture of two types of mass communication: mass communication as information transfer and mass communication as transportation or corporeal movement. Unlike commercial mass communication, which is characterized by centralized production by a few producers and widespread distribution via mass electronic or print media to disparate audiences, mobile mass communication involves mobile phone users distributing messages, via phoning or texting, to their acquaintances and intimate contacts with a request that the message be forwarded to their recipients' contacts as well. While early mobile phone use was celebrated for 'liberat[ing] users from the constraints of place and time' and also reviled for 'disrupt[ing] the integrity of place and face-to-face social encounters' (Ito & Okabe, 2003), the goal of mobile mass communication has been to elicit public gatherings or 'flesh meets' (Ito & Okabe, 2003).

12 I am using mobile mass communication then to describe two forms of communication—virtual and corporeal—that each became distinct only a century ago with the invention of communication technologies like the telegraph and telephone. James Carey wrote in Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society (1989) that 'communication' was commonly used up until the nineteenth century to describe both the 'movement of goods or people and the movement of information' (Carey, 1989: 15). Carey stressed that with the advent of modern mass communication, the idea of communication as transportation was merely subsumed, not completely destroyed. Wolfgang Schivelbusch argued in The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century (1979) that the shift from industrial to modern society was signaled by the concurrent popularization of train travel and the novel—two different forms of mass communication. Schivelbusch concluded that as a consequence of having to adapt to the speed and coverage of train travel, the form and flow of the novel, and the company of different classes of travelers, people's perceptions of time, space and community were changed. Raymond Williams wrote in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976) that in '[it] was in C20, with the development of other means of passing information and maintaining social contact, that communications came also and perhaps predominantly to refer to such media as the press and broadcasting...' (Williams, 1976: 62-63).

13 The notion that communication as transportation was merely subsumed in favour of defining communication as information transfer grounds Williams' concept of 'mobile privatisation' or 'private mobilisation (Williams, 1992; 1974)). Williams coined the concept to describe a new balance he perceived in mid-century British culture between information transfer, or virtual communication and geographic or corporeal communication. Williams argued that the shift in balance between these forms of communication signaled an emerging 'structure of feeling' characterized by yearning among people for more mobility as well as more permanence and privacy. He contended that this paradoxical yearning was reconciled through cocooning in family homes for privacy, watching television, which facilitated virtual mobility and traveling increasingly by car. I am wary of using Williams' renowned yet gossamer concept to argue that the emergence of mobile mass communication signaled the dawning of new structures of feeling. I do want to suggest this possibility though, with much hesitation, in light of how activists have used mobile mass communication. While mobile mass communication began to appear in Canada or the U.S.A. in the late 1990s as a result of the anti-globalization movement, and appeared visibly and popularly in 2003 with the advent of flash mobbing, the practice had already been used to make a political impact in the Philippines in 2001, in South Korea in 2002 and in several other countries in the years preceding the creation of flash mobbing.

14 The 'People Power II' uprising began when Filipinos took to the streets in January 2001 to force the resignation of then-president Joseph Estrada, who appeared on the verge of being exonerated after a long trial on charges of corruption. Filipinos had closely followed print, radio and television coverage of Estrada's trial as they had also done during the first 'People Power' uprising in 1986 against then-president Ferdinand Marcos. Then, as in 2001, Filipinos gathered at one of Manila's major highways, Epifanio de los Santos Avenue. In 2001, unlike in 1986, mass public protest coordinated through mobile texting was credited with compelling the president to leave office. 'In

the next four days of the uprising that ended with Estrada's fall, SMS was used to coordinate the protests, keep protestors abreast of events as they unfolded and to mobilise citizens to march…' (Coronel, 2001: 110). It becomes clear why People Power II has been recounted with mythic zeal in histories of mobile communication (Rheingold, 2002; Agar, 2003) when one reads Vincente L. Rafael's vivid account of the uprising in 'The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines'. He writes:

15 > [C]ell phone users themselves became broadcasters, receiving and transmitting both news and gossip… Indeed, one could imagine each user becoming his or her own broadcasting station: a node in a wider network of communication that the state could not possibly monitor, much less control. (Rafael, 2003: 403)

16 The uprising garnered wide media attention in part because mobile phones were launched in the Philippines only three years earlier in 1999. By 2001, texting among Filipinos was being described as the 'national pastime' according to Bella Ellwood-Clayton in 'Texting and God: The Lord is My Textmate—Folk Catholicism in the Cyber Philippines' (2003). According to both Rafael and Ellwood-Clayton, the popularity of texting was 'directly related to the inadequate infrastructure, notorious unreliability of traditional landlines and the low cost of SMS' (Ellwood-Clayton, 2003: 251). When one reads Ellwood-Clayton's accounts of texting alongside Rafael's accounts, it becomes clear why the practice has been described often as a new vernacular (see Curwen, 2002, Crystal, 2003; Goggin, 2004).

17 > The constraints of an alphanumeric keypad require users to type numbers to get letters. As a result, counting and writing become closely associated. Digital communication requires the use of digits, both one's own and those on the phone keypad, as one taps away. But this tapping unfolds not to the rhythm of one's speech or in tempo with one's thoughts, but in coordination with the numbers by which one reaches letters: three taps on 2 to get C, for example, or two taps on 3 to an E. Texting seems to reduce all speech to writing and all writing to a kind of mechanical percussion, a drumming… (Rafael, 2003: 407)

18 In addition to crediting texting with introducing a new vernacular, I suggest that the practice can also be credited with introducing a new 'regime of vision' (Chesher, 2004) that could be called 'the glimpse'. Chris Chesher writes in 'Neither gaze nor glance, but glaze: relating to console game screens' (2004) that alongside the 'longing gaze' associated with cinema and the 'distracted glance' associated with television, we now must add the 'sticky glaze' or 'immersive glaze' of video gaming. He describes the 'glaze' as a kind of 'liquid adhesion holding players' eyes to the screen' and their hands to controls of the game console (Chesher, 2004). Gaze, glance and glaze are associated respectively with spectators, viewers and players.[2] Mobile phone users became authors who glimpsed at the miniature screen of their mobile phones as they composed, read and transmitted text messages in public and private spaces and in the midst of everyday activities. Ellwood-Clayton describes how Catholic Filipinos were increasingly using texting to circulate inspirational and religious messages to their family and friends at about the same time as the uprising. Rather than encouraging face-to-face gatherings, however, Ellwood-Clayton suggests that such exchanges might have replaced church attendance for some believers. This brief analogy, which is admittedly a tad precious, requires further fleshing out. My point, however, is that texting, which Rafael describes as 'drumming,' quite quickly became prevalent in the 1990s because it was being used for everyday communication as well as to call people to gather together in public in their roles as citizens in contrast to their usual roles as spectators, viewers, players or consumers.

19 People Power II is cited frequently as a significant moment in recent histories of mobile communicating because of the widespread use of mobile phones during the uprising, but it is not the only such moment. In 2002 in South Korea, for example, Roh Moo-hyun's success in the presidential election was attributed to a group of supporters, calling themselves Nosamo, who used the internet and 'an extensive mobile phone campaign' to encourage friends to vote for Roh (Kim, 2003). In Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes (2000), Catherin Dalpino recounts how members of the Thai professional classes used mobile phones to coordinate antimilitary demonstrations in 1992 with students. These activists were 'dubbed mobile phone mobs' (Dalpino, 2000: 70). It is my assertion that such moments were significant because Filipinos, South Koreans and Thais were relying on mobile mass communication at about the same time as citizens in other countries and activists in the anti-globalization movement were engaging

in this new communication practice for political purposes. In short, several political moments occurred in the late 1990s and early 2000s that signaled a creeping shift from an era of centralized communication dominated by commercial mass communication to an emergent era of decentralized communication dominated by mobile mass communication. Other moments included the November 2002 protests by Muslim Nigerians against the Miss World Beauty Pageant, the April 2002 rally by Venezuelans to protest the coup to oust President Hugo Chavez and the attacks by a mob of religious extremists who were linked virtually via mobile phone in the U.S.A. on September 11, 2001. In these instances, people used mobile phoning and texting to communicate in the moment or within the span of a few hours to target sites of significance for peaceful or violent mobbing. The role of mobile mass communicating in these instances did not go unnoticed. In the Venezuelan moment, it has been reported that:

20 > U.S. intelligence had foreseen the possibility of cellphone use by Chavez supporters... [A] U.S. navy warship stationed in waters just offshore had attempted to jam cellphone signals and pagers in Venezuela during the coup (Cizek, 2002)

21 In the Philippines, Estrada's successor Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo put a tax on mobile texting when she took power (Agar, 2003:109), possibly with the goal of deterring its use because she had witnessed the role the practice played in shaping public opinion and in sparking an uprising in the months preceding her appointment. Other responses to mobile mass communicating by crowds during these years included the jamming of signals from radios and mobile phones around the G8 summit meeting of world leaders in the forests of Kananaskis, Canada, to keep 'unwanted groups from coalescing in unexpected places' (van Rijn, 2003). Given these reactions, it was hardly surprising that at the height of flash mobbing's popularity, a commentary in The Wall Street Journal compared flash mobbers to 'anti-trade activists,' calling both 'purveyors of anarchic idiocies' (Melloan, 2003). In 2004, a year after flash mobbing had waned, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police concluded in an internal report that mobile phone use in conjunction with mobbing had become 'a phenomenon to be reckoned with...' (Moore, 2004). The report stated also that in Britain, police were 'cracking down on activists who come [to demonstrations] equipped with mobiles—and are apparently empowered to do so under provisions of anti-terrorism laws brought in after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington...' (Moore, 2004).

22 After flash mobbing's demise, other testaments to the political potential of mobile mass communication were evident in efforts to appropriate it for governmental projects. One such example occurred in Singapore in Fall 2004. Mobile texting was made integral to a social program campaign aimed at stopping bullying in schools. The government and schools urged Singaporean schoolchildren to circulate this message: 'Be cool, be bully-free' ('Bullies' 2004) in hopes that it would reach the 80 percent of Singaporeans who owned a mobile phone at that time. Another example occurred in Beslan, Russia in September 2004, following a deadly hostage-taking in a school. Nearly one hundred and thirty thousand people rallied in Moscow's Red Square to support the government's pledge to fight terrorism and avenge the deaths of over 300 hostages. Broadcasts by state-run television had urged people to participate in the gathering, as did text messages sent out en masse by Russian mobile phone companies to subscribers (Contenta, 2004). These examples of messages centrally produced by governments in 2004 for dissemination by citizens stand in contrast to the instances of mobile mass communication politically inspired from the people in the years leading up the creation of flash mobbing in 2003.

Certainly there are many more such moments and reactions to be considered. There are also many distinctions to be made between and among the moments mentioned here. Each was shaped by specific social, political and economic conditions in existence in particular places. The particular conditions that shaped each moment deserve closer analysis. They are glossed over here in order to focus on discerning whether flash mobbing was a politically-inspired trend in light of its creation amidst reoccurring associations between mobile mass communication and political uprisings and in light of increased prohibitions surrounding mobile phone use by both individuals and crowds following the September 11 attacks in the U.S.A.

23 Many who championed flash mobbing emphasized frequently that it was an apolitical trend. Some flash mobbers claimed the trend was destroyed by people hijacking it for their own political or commercial purposes. They emphasized that unlike other mobs, flash mobs had no leader, responded to no particular issue and had no specific mandate. A repeated flash mobbing credo

was 'the power of many, in the pursuit of nothing' (Tom, 2003). If political uprisings that preceded flash mobbing did not mark the trend as implicitly political, then these assertions certainly did by linking flash mobbing to historical narratives of the mob.

Targeted Mobbing

24 > Plato's account in The Republic of democracy as mob rule degenerating into tyranny prepares the way for a host of crowd images... [including] medieval crowds volatile at great festivals and fairs; crowds at public executions; peasant revolts... the crowd in the French Revolution; lynch mobs; the mobs of industrial discontent; the list is endless. Each particular crowd elicited its own theoretical response, often in the form of politically loaded historical narrative and these responses are to be seen as cumulative. (McClelland, 1989: 4)

25 Bill, instigator of the 'love rug' flash mobbing in Manhattan, called the gathering 'an inexplicable mob'. He has stated in interviews that he thought 'it would be funny to create a 'Mob Project' through a series of inexplicable mobs...' (Ryan, 2003; see also Shmueli, 2003). The 'love rug' flash mobbing was Bill's third attempt to organise an inexplicable mob. His first two attempts were unsuccessful. Sean Savage, creator of the blog cheesebikini?, is widely credited with coining the phrase 'flash mob', following the 'love rug' flash mobbing (McFedries, 2003; Merritt, 2004). Savage defined a flash mob as 'a leaderless group of like-minded people who organize using technologies such as cellphones, email and the Web' (McFedries, 2003). According to a July 2004 posting by Bill to cheesebikini?, flash mobbing is defined in the latest edition of the Oxford English Dictionary as 'a public gathering of complete strangers, organized via internet or mobile phone, who perform a pointless act and then disperse again' (Bill, 2004). Savage has said that he was inspired to coin the term 'flash mob' by the already-existing term 'smart mob' (Savage, 2003b). Howard Rheingold popularized the latter in Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution (2002). Rheingold argued that mobile communication technologies and 'peer-to-peer' sharing practices that made services like Napster popular were creating new opportunities for people to connect rapidly for collective action. The resulting smart mobs gather for social or political purposes. Rheingold recounted, for example, how in September 2000:

26 > [T]housands of citizens in Britain, outraged by a sudden rise in gasoline prices, used mobile phones, SMS, email from laptop PCs and CB radios in taxicabs to coordinate dispersed groups that blocked fuel delivery at selected service stations in a wildcat political protest. (Rheingold, 2002: 158).

27 Though there are clear overlaps, in etymology and style, between flash mobs and smart mobs, Savage and Rheingold made distinctions between the two. For example, in response to an August 2003 posting on Rheingold's blog, smartmobs, in which someone claimed that flash mobs first emerged in Japan and not New York, Savage responded with the following:

28 > I think you're completely wrong. I've read an awful lot about flash mobs and I invented the term 'flash mobs' and this is the first time I've ever heard anyone claim that flash mobs began in Tokyo... Flash mobs last less than 20 minutes and they are characterized by a quick gathering of people in a place where such gatherings don't usually happen, followed by a quick dispersal. (Savage, 2003b)

29 Rheingold responded that he defines a flash mob as 'a group of people who organize through the Net to stage a public event for the fun of it' (Rheingold, 2003b). A smart mob he defined as impromptu gatherings, like celebrity stalkings, which 'are not meant to be public events, but [are meant to] benefit the group that is in on it' (Rheingold,2003b).

30 Some people located the inspiration for flash mobs and smart mobs in various forms of protest that preceded both in the late 1990s. These included 'Critical Mass' bike rides, the 'Reclaim the Street' movement and ACT UP (see Taylor, 2003; McFedries, 2003). Infrequently mentioned sources of inspiration included the advent of the 'flash campaign', which was characterized by 'the instantaneous mobilization of support that can be generated in the flash of a mouse click' (McFedries, 2000) and the use of mobile phones by British football hooligans to coordinate skirmishes with police and supporters of opposing teams. Online and email petitions are now familiar types of flash campaigns used by various groups and individuals to rally support for numerous causes. Football hooliganism, though not a political movement, functions as political theatre for the aggressive expression of national, sectarian and club loyalties. What was missing from such comparisons, with the exception of the latter conflict that is centuries old, was the conjuncture of virtual and corporeal communication that characterizes mobile mass

communication. In other words, people exchange information with the purpose also of coordinating a face-to-face mass gathering.

31 Frequent comparisons of flash mobbing to flocking and swarming were used to mark the trend as apolitical (Rheingold, 2002: 174-182; Micah, 2003; Bedell, 2003). Flocking and swarming describe the cooperative grouping of certain fish, birds and insects. Swarming was also used to describe the activities of protestors at WTO meetings who used the Internet and mobile phones to coordinate mobs to evade police (Taghizadeh, 2003). These metaphors can be used both in political and apolitical senses. Deleuze and Guattari used swarming and flocking as metaphors to describe types of decentred and leaderless political action (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987;1980). Flash mobbers used these metaphors not to describe their actions as political but to evoke ecological narratives. In other words, these metaphors were used to propagate benign associations and obscure historical narratives of the politicized mob.

32 Proponents of flash mobbing were keen to emphasize that each occurrence was leaderless. However, it was telling that some postings to blogs lamented that a main obstacle to organizing a flash mobbing was the lack of 'a central authority who can make decisions and tell you where to show up' (Paul, 2003). It was also telling that 'Bill,' the original moberator, along with Savage and Rheingold were regarded as spokesmen and originators from the early days of the trend. In one of numerous media interviews that Bill gave, he restated that he created the idea of flash mobbing, but added, 'I write the e-mails, but I don't think of myself as leader of the mob' (van Rijn, 2003). Flash mobbing's credo of 'the power of many, in the pursuit of nothing' was shaped by these men and propagated by flash mobbers in media interviews and on blogs. Efforts to define flash mobbing as leaderless and apolitical seemed at odds with the obvious fact that the trend was closely guided from its beginnings. This is not a criticism of flash mobbing proponents, their hopes for the trend, or the pleasure that flash mobbers found through participation. I simply want to suggest that in naming flash mobbing and trying to construct its genealogy, historical narratives of the mob and its complementary propensity toward democracy and tyranny were evoked though such narratives were not made explicit.

33 Crowds, mobs and masses have existed throughout history and across nations. Each formation has been historicized in slightly different ways by historians such as George Rudé, Gustave Le Bon and Elias Canetti. For the sake of brevity, in the following section I will conflate notions of the crowd, mob and mass that these historians and others have taken great care to distinguish. I am more concerned with distinguishing the flash mob. What was unique about the flash mob was the centrality of a mobile communication technology to the mob, which itself has historically been used as a technology to 'bend' public spaces of significance (MacGregor Wise, 1997: 57) and as a medium or area of exchange for participants. It is widely acknowledged that the term 'mob' and perceptions of it have undergone great transformations since the French Revolution. Peter Hayes explains in The People and the Mob: The Ideology of Civil Conflict in Modern Europe (1992) how its meaning was changed.

34 > [A]round the time of the French Revolution, there developed the widespread idea that crowds engaged in hostile collective action could be distinguished from the population at large. The majority of society was defined not as the volatile, factious mobile vulgus, but as being stable and industrious – as the people. From such a perspective, the people could be contrasted with the shiftless, lazy, floating population of thieves and vagabonds who were said to make up demonstrating crowds. It was this latter group that gained the appellation 'mob,' although 'mob' was an abbreviation of mobile vulgus, the term increasingly came to be used to refer not to the low, unstable majority of the population, but rather to a vicious, unproductive minority, a 'dangerous class' that was distinct from the laboring classes... By the later nineteenth century, violent crowd protests, riots and rebellions were generally attributed to this latter type of mob (Hayes, 1992: 67).

35 J. S. McClelland contends in The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti (1989) that the mob claimed 'more of the attention of rulers at the same time as it [pushed] its way into the centre of theoretical concern...' (McClelland, 1989: 3). Social Darwinism responded to this prominence by attributing inherent degenerate morals to the mob and aligning these with racial characteristics to classify the mob as 'dangerous and criminal' (Hayes, 1992: 6). Crowd theorists skimmed from this classification to argue that 'certain types of people were more than likely to join the group mind and become part of the crowd, factory workers, for example, or peasants, or women, but nobody

was in principle excluded' (McClelland, 1989: 11). The work of crowd theorist Gustave Le Bon in particular is credited with propagating the notion that instead of individual minds mingling together, 'the crowd had a mind of its own, 'mob mind' or 'group mind', which, being unconscious, could be understood as the opposite of all that was rational, civilized, advanced and progressive' (McClelland, 1989: 31). In addition, as McClelland notes, if the crowd was 'characterized as a mentality, then the limiting condition of the physical existence of a crowd was no longer necessary before crowd thinking could be said to be going on' (McClelland, 1989: 14). By the twentieth century, it was generally agreed 'the crowd [had] ceased to be limited to the face-to-face gathering, but [had] expanded to include an invisible audience that is addressed, through the mediated demonstration' (Nold, 2003: 17). In Keywords, Williams wrote similarly that by the early to mid twentieth century, the term 'mass' was already understood as being directed no longer at 'masses (people assembled) but at numerically large yet in individual homes relatively isolated members of audiences' (Williams, 1976: 162).

I suggest that these narratives of the mob implicitly shaped 'insiders' and 'outsiders' interpretations of flash mobbing's purposes and goals, though none were stated explicitly. While flash mobbing was popular there was no reported violence related to it. Regardless, as McClelland argues, officials have,

> ...always tried to prove the existence of some form of criminal conspiracy in the heart of the mob, to show that something important enough to justify their fears was going on. These were fears of a very generalized kind, fears of order, or for 'the world as we know it,' threatened by subversion'. (McClelland,1989: 30)

As flash mobbing grew in popularity, it came under increased police surveillance (Taylor, 2003). In some places, law enforcement officials tried to squash the trend. Following the first flash mobbing in India in October 2003, police introduced stricter security measures to discourage others out of fear that it might provide cover for sectarian violence of the sort that rocked Mumbai in August 2003 when bombs killed over 200 people ('Flash Mobs in Bombay', 2003).

Geoff Cox argues in 'the digital crowd: some questions on globalisation and agency' (1999) that crowds,

> ... need to be seen as part of a long history of attempts to regulate the right to public assembly. In this way, the crowd can be seen as firmly located in the foundations of political discourse and the fear of the crowd can be taken as a fear of sociality and open democracy. (Cox, 1999: 5)

While this claim might be relevant to each place where flash mobbing occurred, it seems particularly relevant to flash mobbing in the U.S.A. Consider a flash mobbing, called 'The Grand Central Station Mob Ballet,' that was scheduled to take place in New York City in July 2003. It was cancelled by organizers because 'three vague terrorist threats' were received by law enforcement officials on the same day and 'police seemed on edge about any gathering inside the famed train depot' (Bedell, 2003). 'The National Guardsmen with machine guns had something to do with it [the cancellation]', according to an email sent from The Mob Project to cheesebikini? (The Mob Project, 2003). In contrast to this policing, Nold notes, 'when it suits the state [like in the Singaporean and Russian examples of state-organized crowds] the visibility of the crowd, is used to reinforce its authority and yet when the crowd is perceived as threatening, it is denounced as the vocal minority'. (Nold, 2003: 18)

Other historical narratives of the mob that recount its institutionalization were echoed in concerns that flash mobbing would be appropriated for commercial purposes. Foucault recounts in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977) how up until the nineteenth century, courts encouraged mobs to gather and participate in the 'ceremony of punishment' (Foucault, 1977: 49) that surrounded the public torture or execution of convicted individuals. Paul A. Gilje identifies Anglo-American examples of officially sanctioned carnivals in which mobs were permitted and expected to be rowdy in The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834 (1987). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, drawing on the work of Bahktin, describe in The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (1986) how similarly sanctioned European carnivals incited mobs to participate in 'a world of topsy-turvy, of heteroglot exuberance, of ceaseless overrunning and excess where all [was] mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded and defiled' (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 8).

While flash mobbing was being popularized, a fear that someone would appoint himself leader of the mob or that the trend would be appropriated for specific political or commercial purposes was expressed frequently on blogs and in comments flash mobbers made to journalists. A particularly heated debate was sparked among flash mobbers about the purpose of flash mobbing when Doonesbury cartoonist Gary Trudeau tried to organise a flash mobbing via his comic strip in September 2003 to support U.S. presidential candidate Howard Dean (Merritt, 2004). On blogs, some postings derided Trudeau for trying to organise a flash mobbing with a political goal. Others applauded his efforts (Michael D., 2003). Photographer Spencer Tunik, who is known for posing and photographing groups of nude volunteers in public spaces, also raised the ire of flash mobbers in November 2003 when he tried to organise a nude flash mobbing (Merritt, 2004). Fears about the appropriation of flash mobbing were heightened to fever pitch when two flash mobbings were held at a Toys 'R Us store on August 8, 2003, one in New York and one in Toronto (Merritt, 2004). On blogs, opinion varied about whether it was a coincidence or a conspiracy. I suggest it was neither coincidence nor conspiracy, merely representative. Since flash mobbings were organised primarily at sites of significance in each city where they occurred, it should not have been surprising that two flash mobbing happened at a commercial outlet on the same day in Canada and the U.S.A. Such commercial sites are plentiful in contemporary consumer societies. These sites were potentially made even more significant to Americans in light of George Bush's plea to get back to normal living following the 9/11 attacks by going shopping.

44 While flash mobbers worried about the trend being hijacked, discussions about its appropriation for commercial purposes were occurring openly in some circles. At the height of the trend, one marketer wrote in an industry magazine that:

45 > [T]he flash **mob** concept if applied to marketing can lead to an avalanche of ideas. Our challenge as marketers then, is to figure out how to get measurable results from **flash mobs**. Ultimately, though, the bottom line is whether we're talking the same language as the **mob**: fast, adventurous and fun' (Wong, 2003: 15 original emphasis).

46 The writer asks readers to imagine the 'PR and traffic' that could be generated, for example, on Christmas eve if a flash mobbing was organised and participants were told to 'wear a red top… and dance like a turkey for a minute at noon at, of course, a client's shopping mall?' (Wong, 2003: 15).

47 Flash mobbing was a short-lived trend, inspired by contemporary conditions and shaped by historical narratives of the mob. As the trend waned, Savage declared that it had 'empower[ed] citizens in a world controlled by 'Big Government and Big Corporation' (Morrison, 2003). Bill said in interviews he believed that flash mobbing was a social activity for some people and for others it was political because 'just being out in the streets is a political act' (Shmueli, 2003). He also said, 'It's really stunning to be in the mob as it comes together… to see all these people, who up until that very moment seemed unaware of each other, suddenly converge (Ryan, 2003).

Public Performing

48 > In the early 1970s, Larry Niven, a science fiction writer, created a short story entitled Flash Crowd, in which he envisaged teleportation booths that could take people anywhere on Earth within milliseconds. He suggested that one consequence of this was that with the almost instantaneous global reporting of news events, huge crowds of people would instantly appear at the scene of disasters. Over thirty years later with the development of telecommunications technologies, his concept has essentially been realised. (Nold, 2003: 27)

49 Christian Nold writes in 'Legible Mob' (2003) that the instantaneous mass crowds Larry Niven imagined being called together by telecommunication technologies in his 70s science fiction novel were manifest in the flash mob. Nold writes in his essay on representations of the crowd in history that flash mobbing was 'a vulgar celebration of speed and its accompanying implosion of space' (Nold, 2003: 28). I do not agree with Nold's assessment. Widespread mobile communicating was certainly a key factor in the creation of flash mobbing in 2003, but timing—a punctual start and a precise ending—was of the essence at flash mobbings, not simply speed. In our contemporary mobile world 'late' increasingly means staying in contact via mobile phone while en route to a rendezvous, in a state of 'virtual co-presence' (Ito & Okabe, 2003). In other words, lateness is being made redundant by connectedness. Flash mobbing's emphasis on punctuality and a timed task was a self-reflexive engagement of this redundancy. I want to suggest in this last section of the

paper that flash mobbing be interpreted as a commentary or reflection on contemporary spaces and routines.

50 One bystander, witnessing his first flash mobbing in Vancouver, Canada, remarked to a journalist that he thought it was either 'a protest or advertising' (Young, 2003). Flash mobbing was also described as 'a cross between streaking and being in a marching ban' (Walker, 2003). At the height of flash mobbing's popularity, Bill described the trend as 'spectacle for spectacle's sake' (Hewitt, 2003). Flash mobbers perpetuated the confusion surrounding the trend by declaring that 'This is a struggle against reality and we refuse to be taken seriously' (Monty, 2003). However, flash mobbers and others also drew parallels between their activities and those of the Situationists, 'who called for art that would defy commodification' (Taghizadeh, 2003). The trend was also compared to Dadaism and surrealism (Karastamatis, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Tomkins, 2003), movements that criticised capitalist spectacles while relying on the creation of their own spectacles for such criticism. Critics of flash mobbing countered that these movements were politically and intellectually rigorous, and in contrast, called flash mobbers 'sheeple' who 'make no apologies for their lack of political mission' (Harmon, 2003).

51 Regardless of a clear or consistent mission, some flash mobbings can be read as commentaries on the absurdities of contemporary living. Consider the August 14, 2003 flash mobbing in South Africa when bystanders joined 150 flash mobbers and acted like ducks at an outdoor life show that was being held indoors at the Cape Town International Convention Centre. According to one eyewitness account, 'Bemused staff and visitors to the Outdoor Adventure Expo… smiled, laughed and even joined in as the group… quacked in circles around the cavernous foyer' (McKenzie, 2003). It is interesting to note also that the first flash mobbing in New York in June 2003 involving the 'love rug' echoed a 1963 performance, entitled 'Demonstration for Capitalist Realism,' that was staged by the performance art group Fluxus in a furniture store in Düsseldorf. This echo might not have been merely coincidence. Bill, the 'love rug' moberator, was often described by journalists as someone who was an artist or who worked in the culture industries. In other words, he was someone who might have been aware of the 1963 happening and the political intent that inspired it.

Kristine Stiles writes in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art (1997) that performance artists seek to 'reengage the artist and spectator by reconnecting art to the material circumstances of social and political events' (Stiles, 1997: 679). For example, Stiles contends that performance art of the 1960s and 70s 'rendered palpable the anxious corporeal, psychic and social conditions of global culture in the radically changing electronic and nuclear age' (Stiles, 1997: 679). If mobile mass communication was generated in response to social, political, economic and technological conditions of the late 1990s, can flash mobbing, which was also called 'guerilla art' (Merritt, 2004) and 'swarming art' (Morrison, 2003), be considered a response to the social and political conditions of 2003, particularly conditions that existed in New York where the trend was started?

52 Like performance art, flash mobbing straddled the boundaries between spectacle, activism, experiment and prank. Play is sometimes political. According to one commentator writing on the blog flashmob in January 2004, flash mobbing was a way of participating in 'some harmless fun, while showing defiance of the fear and paranoia that has gripped the world thanks to the dressed up chimpanzee in the American executive office' (Mateem, 2004). Another fan of the trend commented that flash mobbing in the U.S.A. was 'a way to tweak the nose of those responsible for security, since things have gotten so tense since Sept. 11′ (Ryan, 2003).

53 Stallybrass and White caution that no cultural formation is 'intrinsically radical or conservative' (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 14). However, they allow that though a formation may have 'no noticeable politically transformative effects… given the presence of a sharpened political antagonism, it may… act as a catalyst and site of actual and symbolic struggle (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 14). Nearly two years after flash mobbing was declared passé, can it now be considered a catalyst of sorts? While the trend was popular, some people openly predicted that it was the sharp edge of a new form of protest (see Morrison, 2003; Ryan, 2003; Taylor, 2003). As flash mobbing waned, Bill declared that it was not a movement; it was 'a pre-movement' (Harmon, 2003). He added that:

54 People intuitively understand that it is a powerful thing to very quickly and surprisingly transform a physical space, and one reason they keep coming back to the mobs is there is this feeling that something is being created that can't be ignored' (Harmon 2003).

55 While flash mobbing was both preceded and followed by political uprisings facilitated through mobile mass communication, a March 2004 instance in Spain stands out as an example of how widespread this form of communication has become. In March 2004 Spaniards used mobile phones to circulate political text messages following commuter train bombings that killed nearly 200 people and injured over 1500. According to mobile phone service providers in the country, the transmission of text messages increased by 20 per cent on March 13 when the political text messages began to circulate (Losowsky, 2004). One recipient of the messages commented: 'Nobody actually knows where it started. It was sort of like a wave' (Lynch, 2004). One message read 'Today at 6pm, Genova Street, to find the truth. Pass it on' (Losowsky, 2004). The conservative Partido Popular, which held power prior to the March 14 vote, had its headquarters on Genova Street. A crowd of over five thousand responded to the messages by gathering to protest what was thought to be a government cover up of the attacks and official waffling about the extent of Spain's role in the American-inspired international 'war on terror'.

56 March 13, 2004, a moment of 'digital democracy' (Lynch, 2004), in Madrid was credited with swaying Spanish voters to a Leftist government in the election that followed shortly after (Dickey, 2004). 'Some people are now calling Saturday March 13 'the night of the mobile telephone' (Losowsky, 2004) – a reference to the 1981 attempted coup in Spain that was called 'the night of the transistors' (Losowsky, 2004). In 1981, Spaniards listened to radios and watched television to hear the latest news of the coup. In 2004, mobile phones carried news flashes created by the people and disseminated via mobile mass communication.

57 While it is not possible to easily quantify the effects of mobile phone use in terms relevant to political participation, this example from Spain, like the many examples cited throughout this paper, illuminates how the conjuncture of mobile texting, targeted mobbing and public performing/protesting that made flash mobbing significant continues to be meaningful and useful in different cultural and political contexts.

Author's Biography

Judith A. Nicholson is a doctoral candidate in Communication Studies at Concordia University, Montréal. Her research focuses on social and cultural aspects of mobile communicating, particularly in Canada and the U.S.A. Currently she also works as a lecturer in the areas of popular culture, media and gender, and mass communication.

Acknowledgements

This paper has benefited from comments from two anonymous readers selected by Fibreculture. Kim Sawchuk provided constructive criticism on a draft that was presented to the Canadian Communication Association in
2004. Jonathan Sterne guided me to some relevant articles.

Notes

[1] See Anastasia Kavada's essay 'Social Movements and Current Network Research' (2003) for a comprehensive overview of research on the anti-globalization movement.

[back]

[2] Others have used these metaphors differently. Rob Drew, quoting Theresa Senft, writes: 'If the characteristic attitude of cinematic society was the gaze and that of televisual society the glimpse… the rise of hypermedia heralds a society of the grab—a bored, restless, aggressive pursuit of momentary pleasures' (Drew, 2002).

[back]

References

Agar, Jon. Constant Touch: A Global History of the Mobile Phone (Cambridge: Icon, 2003).

Bedell, Doug. 'E-mail Communication Facilitates New 'Flash Mob' Phenomenon', Knight Ridder Tribune Business News, 23 July (2003): 1.

Bill. "Flash mob' in the 'Oxford English Dictionary', posting to cheesebikini?, 9 July (2004), https://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/cat_flash_mobs.html.

'Bullies face high-tech wrath', Toronto Star, 13 September (2004): E8.

Carey, James. Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society (New York: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

Chesher, Chris. 'Neither gaze nor glance, but glaze: relating to console game screens,' Scan: Journal of Media Arts Culture 1.1 (Jan. 2004), https://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display_article.php?recordID=19.

Cizek, Katerina. 'Dial-a-protest Venezuela-style', Seeing is Believing, (2002), https://www.seeingisbelieving.ca/cell/caracas/.

Contenta, Sandro. 'Chilling video shows plight of hostages', Toronto Star 8 September (2004): A3.

Coronel, Sheila S. 'The Media, the Market and Democracy: The Case of the Philippines' Javnost: The Public 8.2 (2001): 109-124.

Cotroneo, Christian. 'Psst 6:30 p.m., at Yonge & Eg', Toronto Star August (2003): B7.

Cox, Geoff. 'the digital crowd: some questions on globalisation and agency', Design Issues 15.1 (Spring 1999), https://www.anti-thesis.net/texts.html.

Crystal, David. 'The Joy of Text', New Statesman 16.774, 15 September (2003): R16-17.

Curwen, Peter. The Future of Mobile Communications: Awaiting the Third Generation (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

Dalpino, Catharin E. 'Mothers and Mobile Phone Mobs: Renegotiating Civil Society', in Deferring Democracy: Promoting Openness in Authoritarian Regimes (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 52-72.

Dean, John. 'The Anarchists' Traveling Circus: New Tools, Tactics, Targets for Global Business Foes,' Positive Futures (2001), https://csf.Colorado.edu/mail/pfvs.

Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. A Thousand Plateaus:Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1987; 1980).

Delio, Michelle. 'Manhattan Mob Meets its Maker', Wired News, 12 September (2003), https://www.wired.com/news/culture/0,1284,60399,00.html.

Dickey, Chrisopher. 'From 9/11 to 3/11′, Newsweek 22 March, (2004): 27-28.

Drew, Rob. 'Fear Itself: Cruising for Music'in Bad Subjects: Political Education for Everyday Life No. 59, February (2002), https://bad.eserver.org/issues/2002/59/Drew.html.

Ellwood-Clayton, Bella. 'Texting and God: The Lord is My Textmate—Folk Catholicism in the Cyber Philippines', in Mobile Democracy: Essays on Society, Self and Politics, ed. Kristóf Nyíri (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2003), https://21st.century.phil-inst.hu/Passagen_engl3.htm.

Fischer, Claude S. America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).

Flichy, Patrice. Dynamics of Modern Communication: The Shaping and Impact of New Technologies, trans. Liz Libbrecht (London: Sage, 1995).

Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

'Flash mobs in Bombay to fade away', The Vancouver Province, 10 October (2003): A36.

Gilje, Paul. A. The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City 1763-1834 (University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

Goggin, Gerard. 'mobile text', M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture 7 (2004) https://journal.media-culture.org.au/0401/03-goggin.php

Griffin, Kevin. 'Flash Mob hits Vancouver', The Vancouver Sun, 30 August (2003): F8.

Harkin, James. 'Life lines', New Statesman 17.774, 15 September (2003): R3-R5.

Harmon, Amy. 'Flash mobs: Just a flash in the pan?' Edmonton Journal, 24 August (2003): D8.

Hayes, Peter. The People and the Mob: The Ideology of Civil Conflict in Modern Europe (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1992).

Hewitt, Giles. 'Flash mobs: a new social phenomenon?' ABC Online 30 July, (2003), https://www.abc.net.au/science/news/stories/s913314.htm.

Ito, Mizuko and Okabe, Daisuke. 'Technosocial Situations: Emergent Structurings of Mobile Email Use' (2003), https://www.itofisher.com/mito/archives/000034.html.

Karastamatis, John. 'Don't start the flash mob without me', National Post, September (2003): T5.

Katz, James E. and Mark Aakhus, eds. Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Kavada, Anastasia. 'Social Movements and Current Network Research', conference paper presented at 'Contemporary Anti-War Mobilizations: Agonistic Engagement Within Social Movement Networks', Corfu, Greece, 6-7 November, (2003), https://www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-962#1890.

Kim, Shin Dong. 'President of Cyberspace,' vox politics, June (2003), https://www.voxpolitics.com/issues/2003/june2003.txt.

Losowsky Andrew. 'A 21-st century protest,' The Guardian, 25 March, (2004), https://www.guardian.co.uk/online/story/0,3605,1176738,00.html.

Lynch, Laura. Dispatches, host Rick MacInnes-Rae, prod. Alan Guettel. CBC Radio One 16 June, (2004), https://www.cbc.ca/dispatches/summer2004.html.

Marvin, Carolyn. When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Mateem, 'They need to lighten up', posting to flashmob, 27 January (2004), https://www.flashmob.info/viewtopic.php?t=25.

McClelland, J.S. The Crowd and the Mob: From Plato to Canetti (London & Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).

McFedries, Paul. 'flash campaign', posting on Word Spy, 31 July (2000), https://www.wordspy.com/words/flashcampaign.asp.

——–. 'Mobs R Us', IEEE Spectrum, October (2003): 56.

McKenzie, Roy. 'Flash mob quacks it up in Cape Town', posting to iafrica.com, 15 August (2003), https://www.iafrica.com/.

MacGregor Wise, John. 'Living in a Deleuzian World,' in Exploring Technology and Social Space (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 57-82.

Melloan, George. 'Whoever Said August was a Dull Month?' Wall Street Journal, August 12 (2003): A13.

Merritt, Anne. 'Where did all the flash mobs go?' Queens Journal 28.l31, 23 January, (2004), https://www.queensjournal.ca/articlephp/point-vol131/issue28/postscript/lead1.

Micah. 'Swarming and the Future of Protesting', Why War? 1 August (2003), https://www.why-war.com/features/read.php?id=4#part4.

Michael, D. 'Flash Mobs Doonesbury Style,' posting to cheesebikini? 8 September (2003), https://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/cat_flash_mobs.html.

Monty. Posting to cheesebikini? 8 September (2003), https://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/000756.html.

Moore, Dene. 'Hi-tech has police on alert', Toronto Star (Sep. 27, 2004): A2.

Morrison, Jennifer. 'Flashmob trend of harmless stunts catching on', CanWest News, 5 August (2003): 1.

Nold, Christian. 'Legible Mob' (2003), https://www.softhook.com/legible.htm.

Paul. 'Flash Mobs Doonesbury Style', posting to cheesebikini? 8 September (2003), https://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/cat_flash_mobs.html.

Rafael, Vincente L. 'The Cell Phone and the Crowd: Messianic Politics in the Contemporary Philippines', Public Culture 15.3 (2003), 399-425.

Rheingold, Howard. Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002).

——–.'Rheingold Media Appearances Monday', posting to smartmobs, 10 August (2003a), https://www.smartmobs.com/archive/2003/08/10/rheingold_media.html.

———.'From Flash Mobbing to Political Swarming', posting to smartmobs, 13 August (2003b), https://www.smartmobs.com/archive/2003/08/13/from_flashmobbi.html.

Ryan, Maureen, 'Internet Spawns 'Flash Mobs', Knight Ridder Tribune Business News 11 July, (2003): 1.

Savage, Sean, 'Press Mobs and Cop Mobs', posting to cheesebikini?, 31 July (2003a), https://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/cat_flash_mobs.html.

———. Posting to smartmobs, 13 August (2003b), https://www.smartmobs.com/archive/2003/08/10/rheingold_media.html.

Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. The Railway Journeys: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century, trans. Anselm Hollo (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979).

Shmueli, Sandra. 'Flash mob craze spreads', CNN.com/Technology, 8 August (2003), https://www.cnn.com/2003/TECH/internet/08/04/flash.mob/.

Shnayerson, Maggie and Goldstein, Lauren. 'At least they don't do the wave', Time 162.7, 18 August (2003): 20.

'Smart mob storms London,' BBC News, 8 August (2003), https://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/mpapps/pagetools/print/news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/3134559.stm.

Stallybrass, Peter and White, Allon. The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

Stiles, Kristine and Selz, Peter. 'Performance Art', in Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 679-695.

Taghizadeh, Tara, 'Warning: You've Been Flash Mobbed,' AlterNet.org, 9 October (2003), https://www.alternet.org/story/16926.

Taylor, Elanor. 'Dadaist lunacy or the future of protest?' Social Issues Research Centre, 12 August (2003), https://www.sirc.org/articles/flash_mob.shtml.

The Mob Project, 'Plans for the Fourth Manhattan Flash Mob', posting to cheesebikini?, 9 July (2003), https://www.cheesebikini.com/archives/cat_flash_mobs.html.

Thomas. 'German Flashmobs by way of New York', posting to smartmobs, 3 August (2003), https://www.smartmobs.com/archive/2003/08/03/german_flashmob.html.

Tom, 'Hacking the Flashmob: Manifesto', posting to flashhack, 9 August (2003), https://www.antimob.com/.

———.'Disperse Now', posting to flashhack, 3 October (2003), https://www.antimob.com/.

Tomkins, Richard. 'Inside the mob', Financial Times (Aug. 29, 2003): 10.

Townsend, Anthony M. 'Life in the Real-time City: Mobile Telephones and Urban Metabolism', Journal of Urban Technology 7.2, August (2000): 85-104.

van Rijn, Nicolaas. 'Invasion of the flash mobs', Toronto Star (Aug. 5, 2003): A3.

Walker, Leita. 'Synchronized, collective and so far pointless,' The Christian Science Monitor, 4 August (2003), https://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0804/p01s02-ussc.htm.

Williams, Raymond. Television, Technology and Cultural Form (London: Collins, 1992; 1974).

———. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (London: Fontana, 1976).

Wong, Ivy. 'Ways to showcase your brand in a flash with mob mentality', Media 19 September (2003): 15.

Young, Sarah. 'Mob debut over in a flash', The Vancouver Province 20 August, (2003): A30.

The Fibreculture Journal (ISSN 1449-1443) — Issue 6, 2005-12-11. This article is published under CC BY-NC-ND. The author retains copyright.

This PDF is an archival offprint generated from the journal's text archive on 2026-11-15. It is not the publisher's version of record; the published article is at https://six.fibreculturejournal.org/fcj-030-flash-mobs-in-the-age-of-mobile-connectivity/. Page numbers here are not the published pagination. Where paragraph numbers appear in the margin they are the journal's own and are the citable unit.