

Changing *The Term* of Engagement:

Casting and Mobilizing Amateur Filmmakers in Recent Projects by Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov

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Abstract: *The Term* [Srok, 2012-] is an online documentary film project by filmmakers Pavel Kostomarov, Aleksandr Rastorguev and former television news anchor Aleksei Pivovarov. This essay explores the evolution of the filmmakers' projects which begins with their *I Love You* films in 2010, in order to trace several key questions that reside in the space between traditional mass media (the broadcasting, production and screening of news, television and film) and new media (the networked online communities of the internet). The different manifestations of *The Term* and its offshoots, *Realnost* [*Real'nost'*, 2013-] and *Newsreal: Citizen Journalist* (2013-), transcend traditional and new media, and use the media indeterminacy to promote several initiatives such as political mobilization, citizen journalism and amateur filmmaking.

Keywords: protest movement, Russia, Ukraine, documentary film, media viability, political mobilization, citizen journalism, amateur culture, location-based social networking.

In the first uploaded episode of *The Term* [Srok, 2012-], shot on 6 May 2012, opposition leader Aleksei Naval'nyi is arrested at a protest on Bolotnaia Square in Moscow, one day ahead of the Presidential inauguration of Vladimir Putin.¹ In the video, a police officer holds Naval'nyi's hands behind his back, and threatens to break his wrist if he does not comply. Naval'nyi complains as he is dragged off to a local station. The video clip amassed over 550,000 views on *YouTube* alone, where it was originally uploaded on 21 May by filmmakers Pavel Kostomarov, Aleksandr Rastorguev and Aleksei Pivovarov.² Few people would remember that in the clip, it is not only Naval'nyi who was harmed, but also the unidentified

¹ This essay is based on an ASEEES roundtable, on which I participated in 2013, titled 'Will the Revolution be Visualized?', sponsored by the Working Group for Cinema and Television and organized by Dawn Seckler. The panel focused on the question of how dissent and protest have led feature and documentary filmmakers to embrace or eschew revolutionary visual aesthetics.

² An account was also opened that day on LiveJournal.

cameraman, whose arm was hit while filming the arrest. The camera droops down for a brief moment, as its operator complains of a possible broken arm. The shooting resumes and follows Naval'nyi to the police station's front doors, where further access to cameras is denied.

I highlight this forgotten moment, in what was a very widely shared and watched video, because it epitomizes the viewer-producer relationship that Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov advance in their film projects, starting with their unfinished *I Love You* trilogy [*Ia tebia liubliu*, 2010 and *Ia tebia ne liubliu*, 2012].³ While the two films introduced audiences to the everyday provincial life of twenty year olds, seemingly far away from the political action of the Federal center, useful holistic readings emerge when all of the projects are placed in sequence and analyzed together. In this essay, I trace the evolution of Kostomarov's, Rastorguev's and Pivovarov's filmmaking in order to produce a comprehensive picture of the tensions between traditional mass media (the broadcasting, production and screening of news, television and film) and new media (the networked online communities of the internet) in Russia today. While *The Term* to date is the filmmakers' most well known project, the different manifestations, stages of production and circulation of offshoots *Realnost* [*Real'nost*', 2013-] and crowdsourcing application, *Newsreal: Citizen Journalist* (2013-), have equally important ramifications for activist media in Russia and elsewhere.⁴

All of these projects, from the *I Love You* films to *Newsreal*, transcend media formats and channels of communication: they locate themselves somewhere in between the areas of traditional mass media and new media, and use this indeterminacy to promote a multitude of initiatives such as political mobilization, citizen journalism and amateur filmmaking. The multimedia nature of their ventures reflects the core organizers' different backgrounds: Pivovarov was a television journalist with NTV hosting *Today* [*Segodnia*] only recently leaving for STS in 2013. Rastorguev is a longtime documentary filmmaker, and Kostomarov serves as a cinematographer on many well-known feature film projects, such as Aleksei Popogrebskii's film *How I Ended this Summer* [*Kak ia provel etim letom*, 2010]. Their projects seek to provide alternatives to both mainstream media channels, which have come under increasing state influence, and independent media channels, whose financial viability have been unstable. Although the filmmakers are quick to distinguish between projects in their interviews, a clearly evolving experimentation and methodology is more than apparent. From the *I Love You* films to *The Term* and *Realnost*, we see experiments that all attempt to mobilize self-aware hero-cameramen to provide viewers with a large-scale societal picture molded out of individual biographies. These experiments' offerings are two-fold: 1) they set up the building blocks for a personal involvement in political actions, and 2) they allow for new ways of storytelling, fostering diverging historiographies that often depart from the discourses of state-controlled media.

The projects frame important challenges filmmakers currently face in Russia to visualize any sort of nonconformist form or content. As both professional and amateur filmmakers flock toward new channels of exhibition – media uploading sites and online independent me-

³ Pivovarov did not work on the *I Love You* films, joining the duo for *The Term*.

⁴ *Realnost* will be referred to in this essay by its Russian name, without transliteration, as it is written on the *Realnost* website. The English version of the *Realnost* site (Realnost.com) does not offer a translated title, while other Kostomarov – Rastorguev – Pivovarov productions include English equivalents.

dia sites – the viability and funding sources of these channels remain as large question marks. Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov form one group amongst many who seek to change how filmmakers interact with and challenge the production-exhibition process and gatekeeping mechanisms that limit artistic expression. By tracing the four projects, we can see how changing author-producer relationships straddle the political-financial hurdles of the mass media landscape, offering pragmatic solutions. The projects also give us an opportunity to theorize how activist amateur media can politically mobilize people through their documentation and sharing of everyday encounters.

Digital Producers and the Aesthetics of Amateur Filmmaking in the *I Love You* Films

The series of projects emanate in documentary film, yet eschew its traditions of authorship and exhibition, and instead work in favor of adopting new tactics found in the realm of new media. The filmmakers typically deflect discussions of genre when questioned about their projects, and it has been this way since they engaged with amateur cameramen. For the *I Love You* films, Kostomarov and Rastorguev placed ads in Rostov-na-Donu seeking herocameramen. After the pair went through roughly 1000 auditions, they gave out cameras to their subjects for extended periods of time, from two months to over a year.⁵ Kostomarov and Rastorguev called the *I Love You* films a ‘beyond-documentary story’ (‘zadokumental’naia istoriia’), and even questioned why the films were entered as documentary films in festival programs (Baraniv’ska 2012). Rastorguev often criticizes the state of documentary cinema and its ties to power, finding that the relationship stifles creativity, as documentary filmmakers take on state ordered projects. In his 2009 manifesto ‘Naturalist Cinema’, he writes that ‘DocFilmProduction is a waste factory’ (‘dokkinoproizvodstvomuusornyi zavod’) and that ‘documentary filmmakers are cloned to the specifications of television networks’ (Rastorguev 2009). While these comments can be read in context of film marketing and the filmmakers’ increasing frustration with the lack of respect and funding for documentary cinema, they also are symptomatic of how traditional documentary cinema is failing to capture life in a faster digital age coupled with a media landscape heavily regulated by the state.⁶

I Love You was a demonstration of another of Rastorguev’s documentary manifestos titled ‘Kinoprobes’ [‘Kinoproby’], published online on Openspace.ru in 2009. The document is a Vertovian-esque manifesto for the digital age in both form and content. The camera, a non-objective object, forces its hero-operator to be conscious of his or her actions: ‘Kinoprobes – This is the NONOBJECTIVE CAMERA – every frame is shot, not by the storyteller (usually by the director), but shot by the conscious hero, and by his will’ (Rastorguev 2009). Like Vertov’s *Man With the Movie Camera* [*Chelovek s kinoaparatom*, 1929], *I Love You* is as much a celebration of the filming apparatus as it is the operator. In the first scene of

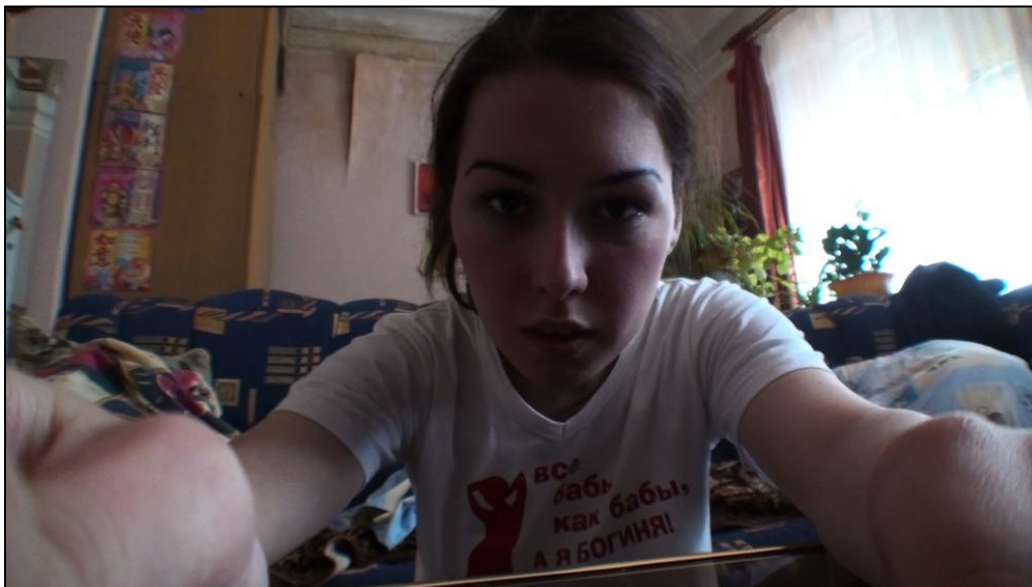
⁵ Rastorguev and Kostomarov routinely refer to their amateur collaborators as heroes across all of these projects.

⁶ Due to the lack of commercial success of the first two films, it is unlikely that the third *I Love You* film will find any funding for postproduction and distribution. The first film, *I Love You* was never sold for distribution, and its only successes came in the film festival circuit and small film clubs in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Volgograd. The Russian Cinema Cultural Fund financed the first film, but did not give money for the second.

the film, the camera is stolen out of a police car, and it travels between hands of youthful characters throughout the film. The film does not document its operators' lives, but reflects on how the camera changes them, or makes them aware of their actions. Unlike Vertov, this cinema is not caught unaware, but rather constitutes a conscious, amateur participatory film project.

This philosophy of the self-filming subject continued into the sequel *I Don't Love You*, a simplified, tighter version of its predecessor meant to attract commercial backing. In my review of the second film, I noted how a particular type of shot epitomized the 'beyond-documentary' style (Image 1): 'When a person is shooting, they will often flip the camera back toward their face. In this quick move that flips back to the self, the camera barrels over and finds the operator. The observer becomes the observed and the act of self-examination becomes more apparent' (Chapman 2013).

Image 1. An example of a selfie in *I Don't Love You*



Source: Pavel Kostomarov's and Aleksandr Rastorguev's *I Don't Love You* (2012)

This type of self-portraiture is the cinematic equivalent of the selfie, a popular genre of digital photography. In a selfie, the shot is either reflected off of a mirror or the user reaches out with his or her arm, pointing the camera back toward oneself.⁷ I want to return to this aesthetic below, and illustrate how Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov, in the evolution of their work, mobilize groups of people, particularly youths, through these participatory acts.

In *@ is for Activism* (2011) Joss Hands theorizes the emancipatory nature of new media through Walter Benjamin's 'Author as Producer', in which he detailed how art must not only challenge dominant structures from a conceptual point of view, but that it also must trans-

⁷ Although the selfie is a contemporary digital phenomenon, its origins date back to the beginnings of photography and even further back to the self-portrait painting. Proto-examples in photography captured famous figures such as Tsar Nikolai II of Russia and Dutchess Anastasiia, whereas in painting, artists used mirrors as a tool for self-depiction.

form the very conditions of production (Hands 2011: 48). Benjamin was interested in an author who understood his or her role in the system of capitalist production, and who desired to fundamentally change that relationship through innovation (Hands 2011: 49). Hands reworks Benjamin's notion into his own concept of 'digital author as producer', writing that the first step in overcoming traditions of media transmission and reception was to establish active participants who formed networked connections: 'The role of media in this mobilization is obviously to be found primarily in its capacity to create multidirectional communications, and in doing so to disseminate knowledge and information, and facilitate coordination between actors on a scale and within a time-frame impossible prior to the emerge of such technology' (2011: 50-51). Yet technology is not the sole determinant. It must be directed properly, away from reinforcing existing power structures, and toward changing how users consume texts (2011: 52). Hands cites well known examples on how technology has allowed gaps between professional and amateur to be closed, and how more users are brought into the realm of content production and distribution (2011: 52). Hands' approach highlights the transformation between a two-way transmission and the infinite nodal points of an online network, noting how this reconfiguration can have emancipatory possibilities.

One area of Benjamin's text Hands does not cover, which is particularly useful for our textual analysis of new media projects, is Benjamin's reflection on the role of the author and the melting away of genre. Benjamin was primarily interested in the newspaper, writing on how to liberate it from dominant capitalist structures that controlled the means of production. Looking toward the Soviet newspaper, ironically for us, Benjamin found solace in the 'operative writer', a progressive figure whose 'mission is not to report but to fight; not to assume the spectator's role but to intervene actively' (Benjamin 1998: 88). More importantly, Benjamin focuses on an everyman producer, whose authority to write does not come from professionalization, but instead, through common knowledge, common property and one's very own socially conditioned nature: 'The reader is always prepared to become a writer in the sense of being one who describes [Beschreibender] or prescribes [Vorschreibender]. As an expert – not in any particular trade, perhaps, but anyway an expert on the subject of the job he happens to be in – he gains access to authorship' (1998: 90). This fluid relationship between the author and producer has profound implications for the discourse of the modern period: 'we see the vast melting-down process of which I spoke not only destroys conventional separation between genres, between writer and poet, scholar and popularizer, but that it questions even the separation between author and reader' (1998: 90). While this instance is not important for Hands, I see a point of application for how we can look at new media today, which coopts and merges a number of conventional mass media platforms for clarity of transmission, but also for tactical purposes.

Leah H. Lievrouw's study, *Alternative and Activist New Media* (2011), takes a genre study approach to explore how activist projects transmit messages. She writes that, on the one hand, activist projects often reconfigure, or remediate mass media to ensure that transmission is intelligible. On the other hand, genres of activist media must convey distinction and exclusivity: 'they can also be so specific to a certain group's worldview or situation that outsiders may not understand them – so genres can also act as boundaries or markers that exclude outsiders and reinforce the power of insiders' (2011: 21). Lievrouw's invoking of

genre highlights how activist new media occupies intermediary spaces between two poles: it simultaneously mimics and references traditional genres to ensure transmission, but at the same time, blends genre boundaries and eschews the mainstream media for the sake of creativity and differentiation.

Activist projects have the ability to host a multitude of forms, linked folds of one another that quickly package topical material in a timely matter, just like mainstream news sources. I am more interested, however, in the creative implications of this process of remediation. Lievrouw cites Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's notion of remediation, finding that in their study 'the symbolic or representational aspect takes precedence over its material nature as something that people *do*' (Lievrouw 2011: 218; emphasis in original).⁸ She expands remediation as a 'material practice and form of social and cultural engagement, including individual expression, interaction, and social relations as well as the generation, circulation, and use of content' (2011: 218). She highlights that engagement in practices of remediation keys collective creativity in new social movements (2011: 218).⁹ In *The Term* and *Realnost* the digital producer's engagement with storytelling is simultaneously a remediation that mimics television broadcast film footage, but it also is the beginnings of something else, 'The Beginning of a Big Story'.¹⁰ These clips are part of a larger storytelling process that encourages alternative historiographies of the so-called 'news' event.

'We were at Bolotnaia': Mobilization and New Online Historiographies in *The Term*

On *YouTube* and other media hosting sites, *The Term* carries the label of 'Documentary Online Film.' Kostomarov jokingly described the project as if 'Twitter got married to a documentary film' (Baraniv'ska 2013). This remark highlights the dual nature of the project: documentary films are finished projects, crafted, edited and released as complete projects. Tweets are fragments, often purposely misspelled and abbreviated. *The Term* embraces both formats; each episode is akin to a single tweet, while the complete film, is a professionally edited collection, a montage with contextual meaning. The filmmakers thus try to give shape to online expression, in that they see internet videos as dispersed content, lacking a true direction or unified message buried under an overabundance of trash. They view traditional editing as a way to form serials, four to eight minutes in length, that give meaning and purpose for people to watch. *The Term*, *Realnost*, *Newsreal* and even the *I Love You* films, organize amateur video into a structured digest viewing experience. They give a dispersed collection of amateur-shot footage a unified venue.

The Term contains hundreds of videos uploaded online to various media hosting sites, and the episodes are shared by the filmmakers through a number of social networking chan-

⁸ For theory on remediation see Bolter and Grusin 2001.

⁹ Vlad Strukov writes that the Russian government traditionally viewed the internet as a vehicle for media transmission, but recently acknowledged it as a space that fosters creativity (Strukov 2009: 220).

¹⁰ *The Term*'s slogan, which can be found in the 'About' section on *YouTube* for every episode, is 'Beginning of a Big Story'.

nels, such as Facebook, LiveJournal, VKontakte and Twitter.¹¹ The project includes 26 different cameramen and 32 editors. Episodes cover a variety of current issues. The most prominent clips feature protests and other gatherings, such as the vigils outside the Taganka Courthouse during the Pussy Riot trial. Other episodes offer behind the scene conversations with opposition leaders. While the filmmakers are more closely aligned with opposition movement leaders, *The Term* does include episodes with Kremlin supporters, such as Vasilii Iakemenko following his removal from the Nashi movement.

Perhaps the largest media event surrounding *The Term* did not occur within the frame of its cameras. On 6 December 2012, Kostomarov's apartment was searched, and some of his hard drives with film footage were taken as evidence to incriminate those who participated in the protests on 6 May at Bolotnaia Square. The event generated massive publicity, when during an off-air portion of a live interview with *The Term* filmmaker and journalist Pivovarov, Prime Minister Dmitrii Medvedev seemingly absolved Kostomarov and called the investigators, who showed up unannounced to the apartment at 7 A.M., 'assholes' ('kozly') ('Medvedev nazval sledovatelei' 2012). Despite Medvedev's live microphone mishap, and later, his personal reassurance that Kostomarov would not face charges for any participation in the Bolotnaia Square protests, the events had negative consequences for future production. No new episodes were uploaded to *YouTube*, and it was not until the next month in January 2013 that the project continued under a new name, Lenta.doc, hosted by the independent media site Lenta.ru.

Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov still plan to release *The Term* as a full film. It is currently listed as in post-production stage according to the Tallinn-based production company Marx Film.¹² The filmmakers admit that they would have to edit the version for festival screenings, rendering the protests in a more thematic, rather than direct treatment, in order to avoid future problems with authorities. Although the project will be eventually screened as a full-length feature film at festivals, the online episodes have undoubtedly caused a larger impact in terms of viewership and media coverage.¹³ Yet it does not matter that *The Term* is still unfinished two years after its beginnings. Its timely coverage of events and circulation of episodes have garnered the most attention, making it perhaps more important than the film itself.

The Term is not simply a form of political activism by way of its content. Its activism stems from how it encourages digital consumers to become digital producers. The filmmakers are mobilizing new cameramen to travel across the Russian landscape and beyond, to capture the emotion, life and conflict found in everyday life. At the heart of this construction is a holistic picture of the world, a creation of a digital political landscape of Russia. Territorial tagging is a type of digital occupation that marks where we have been and what we have seen. Social media applications allow us not only to track the spaces in which we inhabit, but to broadcast them to others. It often has everyday applications, like checking into a restaurant, but it is within this very same rhetoric of occupation that marked the Russian protest

¹¹ Episodes are routinely posted on <https://www.facebook.com/srokdoc>, <http://srok-doc.livejournal.com>, http://vk.com/srok_doc, and <https://twitter.com/srokdoc>.

¹² See www.marxfilm.com.

¹³ Selected episodes were planned for the DocuDays Ukrainian Festival 21-28 March 2014 but were replaced with episodes of *Realnost*.

movement of 2012. The slogan ‘We Were there at Bolotnaia Square, and will come there again’ marks the occupation of a location, and places the people at that place, indicating their participation.

The making and marking of space relates to the mobilization of crowds, a topic that is seeing increasing reconstitutions through the use of digital connections. Hands calls this process ‘Mobil(e)sation’, finding that social networks further enable crowds: ‘Thus a crowd, or indeed a more dispersed network, intensively communicating with mobile phones, can obtain the character not only of a swarm, but also of an emergent intelligent entity’ (2011: 126). I am less interested in the organizational structuring, and more interested in visual ties. How does location shooting form a bond with a viewer, placing him or her in dialog with onsite producers? The use of mobile phones in citizen journalism perfectly illustrates these two modes of mobilization. During the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, mobile phones were used to organize gatherings, creating the networked intelligent entity that Hands mentions. It was the picture taking capability of the phone, however, which became one of the symbols for participation in the uprisings (Image 2). The ubiquitous image of raised hands, often a visual marker of unrest, was joined by the presence of the mobile phone, whose embedded camera documents the surrounding crowd.

Image 2. Camera phones and protest in Egypt



Source: <http://framework.latimes.com/2011/11/18/egypt-protest/#/21> (accessed 16 May 2014).

I liken *The Term*'s cinematic construction to location-based social networking applications, which digitally check people in and out of both real and virtual locations. *The Term* 'checks in' viewers and makes them privy to the smallest inversions of hierarchies witnessed only in everyday life. Although it gives significant screen space to famous political figures, it often frames their actions outside of the spectacle of a news camera lens. For example, Naval'nyi appears in many of the episodes, but not always in moments of political activism. Since the videos are minimally edited, we gain access to candid moments, following him as he trips and falls on the way to a sentencing in Kirov. We dance alongside him at a nightclub in an episode called 'A Party without Putin' ['Vecherinka bez Putina'] (Srok Documentary 17.6.2012). Footage provides more than an eyewitness account or more than a feeling of voyeurism. It mimics the first-person act of taking part directly in events, which is crucial in understanding our exposure to multiple channels of access in a post television broadcast era.

The Term gently prods at the sore spots of Russian daily life, and overturns dominant hierarchies on the smallest levels, showing minute battles being won on a daily level. It places these moments within a larger historical and national picture, linking viewer-producers who collect stories on the micro level to form a chronicle told on a national macro level. At the heart of these small battles is mobilization and activity of people, and I think if we were to use a different term – one borrowed from the entertainment world – we could call it casting. The filmmakers do not state this overtly, but to them, casting is mobilization. Rastorguev is quoted in an interview expressing the importance of casting:

Casting is an instrument, in the creative conceptualizations of life. The life of the people, as an active and creative mass, is everywhere. They can be doing things with us or without us. But if we can establish a parental impulse, that sinks all of these erratic creative billiard balls, and puts them in their right pockets. A single impulse for the whole country would be cool. To have a whole country film one big film or to have 100 episodes of one serial. (Borovik 2013)

This quote was not made in reference to *The Term*, but rather to their more recent project *Realnost*, which blends the reality show quality of the *I Love You* films with the social content of *The Term*. He continues, 'if the whole country can tell their own great history, then we would have a nation of great storytellers. And this, by the way, is a patriotic task. Medinskii should give us a prize' (Borovik 2013).¹⁴

Casting the New Opposition: Hipsters and Gonzo Journalism in *Realnost*

While *The Term* provided timely coverage of events and resituated them from new viewpoints, it rarely featured its cameramen on screen. They can be heard in the background periodically, or appear in the frame out of necessity of the shot, but by no means are they individualized faces. *Realnost* changed this mode of storytelling, including the personality of the

¹⁴ At this point in the interview, Pivovarov interrupts Rastorguev, and says 'First money! Then a prize' (Borovik 2013). Their cynical responses show a self-awareness that *Realnost* will not be supported by the Ministry of Culture.

documenter as the *dominanta* of episodes.¹⁵ *Realnost* calls its cameramen ‘reality heroes’ (‘geroi real’nosti’), a play on words with the project’s title and a gesture to reality television. *Realnost* has already covered important events, placing its casted cameramen at the forefront of the Maidan protests in Kiev, the stationing and mobilization of Ukrainian and Russian troops across Crimea, and the Olympics. On Facebook, *Realnost* classifies itself as a television channel and is meant to serve as an alternative to state sponsored news broadcasts. The ‘News’ caption appears in *Realnost*.News videos, illustrating Bolter and Grusin’s notion of remediation. Along with the representational remediation, we also see creative remediation of practices by *Realnost*’s news team. *Realnost*.News prominently features three main anchors: Keti, Dzhus and Andrei Kiselev.¹⁶ While Kiselev’s videos are clearly targeted for an older, intelligentsia audience (for example one episode is based on Venedikt Erofeev’s *Moscow – Petushki* [*Moskva – Petushki*, 1970]), most of *Realnost*’s heroes are young and quirky, displaying a playful inquisitiveness that does not align with the content they are covering. The most active reporter, a teenager named Keti, has her own playlist ‘Keti News’ [‘Keti.Novosti’] as a subset of the *Realnost* fan page, totaling 28 videos and almost two hours of footage.

In one video, Keti walks around looking for picketers on Moscow’s Red Square, finding subjects to interview. She speaks to the viewer, informally inviting them: ‘Let’s go shoot!’ Finding a protestor speaking out for the release of prisoners, she complements him for being able to hold the sign over his head for so long. The video is interesting in that Keti’s movement of the camera forms visual ties between Keti, the protestor, the other observer shooting video and the audience (Images 3-6). The circular camera movement hermetically seals the area where the protest is taking place, linking the participants together in motion and cause. As the camera quickly swings over on its side, we barely see the security guards who are excluded from the camera’s gaze.

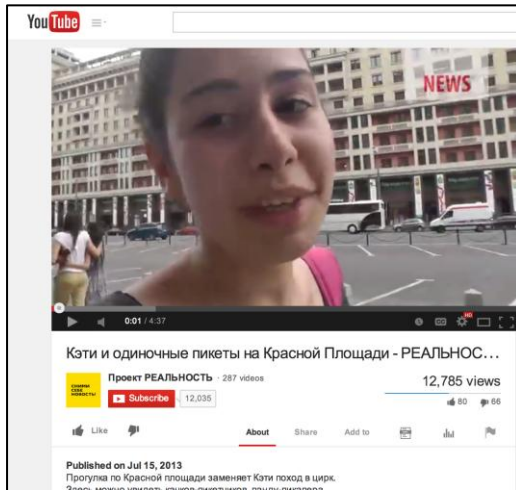
The episode is not just about protest, but includes a deep subtext on the difference between amateur and professional journalists. During the protest, Keti runs into professional journalists for Public Television of Russia [Obshchestvennoe televidenie Rossii (OTR)], and asks them, ‘For whom do you shoot?’ They treat her poorly, moving her out of the way to interview a protestor. After this encounter, Keti meets another man with a camera, and she asks him the same question. The man answers that he shoots for himself, and Keti enthusiastically replies that she does too. In the next shot, she notices a young boy using his cell phone, and encourages him to shoot. Returning to Lievrouw’s notion of genre in activist new media, we can see how *Realnost* uses the genre of citizen journalism to convey feelings of both inclusivity and exclusivity. *Realnost* presents itself as a hip youth media project, shot by active figures for a likeminded audience. The move is clearly an attempt by the filmmakers

¹⁵ The filmmakers are always very quick to point out that *The Term* and *Realnost* are different projects. Many of these comments, however, come in the context of difficulties and harassment the filmmakers faced while producing *The Term*. Pivovarov even claims that politics is just background noise in *The Term*, behind other important themes of life, communication and human activity (Fokin 2013). He admits in a separate interview that *Realnost* is a safer endeavor: ‘From the point of view of safety, our relations with investors, we are of course more calmly working on this project than in *The Term*’ (Fuksova 2013).

¹⁶ Kiselev was assaulted and briefly detained by Berkut special police forces on 23 January 2014 in Kiev while filming for Lenta.ru.

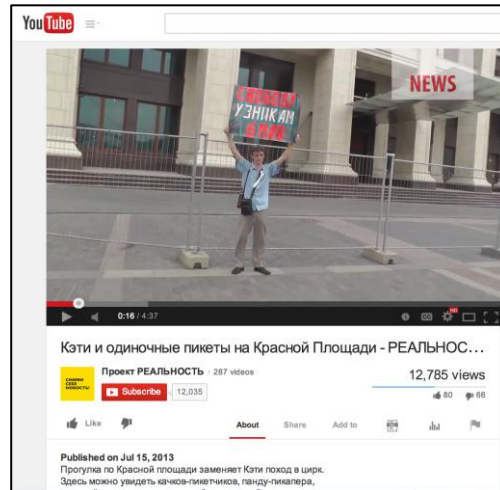
for *Realnost* to gain popularity with younger audiences. *Realnost* is to *The Term as I Don't Love You* was to its predecessor; its structured form and more coherent cast of characters are aimed at drawing in viewers, who ideally bond with personalities and adopt their social message.

Image 3. Keti at a protest in Moscow



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoG6jQ9sdcw> (accessed 16 May 2014).

Image 4. Keti filming a protester



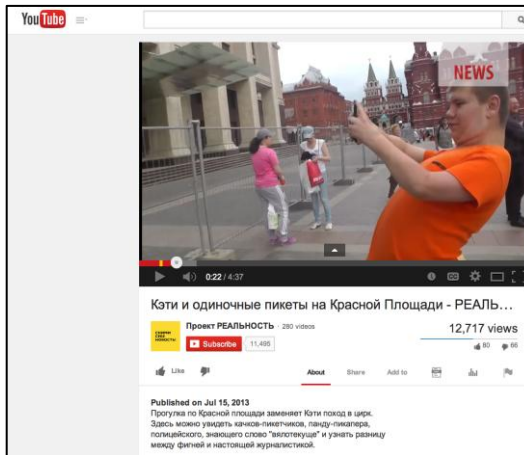
Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoG6jQ9sdcw> (accessed 16 May 2014).

Image 5. Keti not filming security



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoG6jQ9sdcw> (accessed 16 May 2014).

Image 6. Keti admiring another person filming



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EoG6jQ9sdcw> (accessed 16 May 2014).

In a March 2014 episode, titled ‘Journalism is sick, but I am not yet’, two *Realnost* journalists, Andrei and Grigorii, attended and covered the February 2014 Union of Journalists Annual Ball for the Press. The *Realnost* coverage is bookended by two scenes that destabilize the notion of professional journalism. The first takes place on the way to the ball, as Andrei and Grigorii walk on the street and discuss the event. Distracted by a dog, he asks its owner, ‘Can I film your dog?’ When the owner replies ‘no’, they walk away and say they will delete

the video. Any professional journalistic credibility is lost, as this footage is included in the final cut. The two shoot in tandem, switching roles as journalist and cameraman when one gets tired of carrying the camera. Andrei jokes that he wants to dance with journalist Iulia Latinina at the event. Grigorii replies that he is ashamed. They flirt with a waitress upon entering the event, facetiously asking her, ‘Who are all these people’?

Despite their whimsical approach to covering the event, Andrei and Grigorii manage to interview Aleksei Simonov, founder of the Glasnost Defense Foundation and chair of the jury for the Andrei Sakharov prize in journalism. In the video, Simonov calls out Dmitrii Kiselev for having no connection with viewers, and simply acting as a mouthpiece for the state. He tells them that journalism in ‘Russia today is sick’, but ‘I am not yet’. In another important moment inside the event, a random person approaches the duo after recognizing them and asks if they are from *Realnost*. The scene carries no importance in the unfolding of the episode, yet it is purposely left in, not because it lends any journalistic credibility to the reporters, but rather because it depicts *Realnost* as a trendsetting project. The episode ends as it began, with the duo walking back from the event. They end up at an apartment, and Andrei plays songs on an organ. A brief final shot shows the two outside in the courtyard playing on a teeter-totter.

These videos are Kostomarov’s, Rastorguev’s and Pivovarov’s attempt at Gonzo journalism, a term coined to describe the literary journalism by Hunter S. Thompson (Mosser 2012: 85). Gonzo journalism catapults the subjective personality into the center of the news story, and presents it from their perspective. The filmmakers are adopting a genre that has recently become popular in the West, where audiences have embraced youthful citizen journalism reporting by outlets such as *Vice Media*.¹⁷ In fact, a recent episode of *The Term* cross-advertises *Realnost*, calling it a ‘Russian *Vice*’ (Srok Documentary 13.3.2014). While Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov attempt to portray *Realnost* as a hip amateur-oriented news outlet, the channel is still professionally mediated. The utopian ideals of shooting one’s own story is nonetheless controlled through a casting office, whose contact coordinates are listed at the end of every video. The hype surrounding *Realnost* makes claims of being at the forefront of a new journalism movement. Is the project inviting youth admiration toward a truly participatory media, or is it instead using the young journalist to construct a fashionable product?

Independent Media Viability and the Battle for Online Space

Realnost is the most successful project to date to take the aesthetics of amateur, user-generated online videos, and redirect them into political territory. Internet users become indissociable from cameramen, journalists and protesters. Other filmmakers are increasingly turning toward online media as an alternative to traditional forms of production and exhibition. For example, *Kommersant* correspondent Anastasiia Karimova’s 2012 journalistic

¹⁷ *Vice* originated as a magazine devoted to art, fashion and culture in 1994. It has evolved into an online media outlet promoting socially conscious stories through its news division, travel film production, and photo exhibitions.

online-expose *The Real Putin / Nastoiashchiii Putin* carries the label in the opening credits ‘Commissioned by citizens of the Russian Federation’ (‘po zakazu grazhdan Rossiiskoi federatsii’), and is advertised as a film that can only be shown on the internet (AnjeyPetrov 2012). It is even more interesting to see some of the same rhetoric appear in the marketing of feature films, perhaps stemming out of economic woes more than anything. Established director Mikhail Segal embraces the attitude toward a more participatory filmmaking process in his films. Describing his unfinished film *The Club of the Self-made Song* [*Klub samodeitel’noi pesni*] on the crowdsourcing page Planeta.ru, he writes: ‘To those who enjoy my films. I think the most striking thing about our time is the fact that an audience can immediately invest in future projects (i.e. crowdfunding); and they can create their own material, be a producer, be a member of a film crew. It is precisely ordinary people who should become a new universal production center, that then comes to the movie theater, not depending on the tastes of commercial producers or “from state orders”’ (Segal 2014).¹⁸

These are just a few examples of filmmakers addressing audiences as producers. It signifies an important shift to engage people outside of the confines of commercial industries and state-sponsored projects. Filmmakers are beginning to address their audiences, who are no longer gathering in theaters or even in front of televisions, but instead access material on phones, on tablets and on computers, both at home and on the move. There no longer exists a notion of a coherent audience who collectively watches a film. Kostomarov supported this stance on a 13 November 2013 episode of Kseniia Sobchak’s *Sobchak Live* [*Sobchak Zhiv’em*, 2012-], where the three filmmakers did publicity for *The Term*. Kostomarov stated that he could not describe what *The Term* was really about, because ‘everyone has to watch and decide on their own’ (Fokin 2013).

These producers are filmmakers of a new type: they want to align with people who are no longer oriented toward cinema and television. The utopian notion that ‘the revolution will be televised’ refers back to an age that is past. Television and other channels of mass media will not be at the forefront in telling stories of change, let alone break the latest news developments. Visualizing dissent and conflict in the digital age has so far been carried out by creatively uniting several layers of media. In the numerous episodes, posts, video clips and interviews uploaded by Kostomarov, Rastorguev and Pivovarov, we can see the wide array of media, from documentary cinema and its film festival circuit home, to the aesthetics of amateur filmmaking and its online home, to reality television, and finally to television journalist practices. *I Love You*, *The Term* and *Realnost* are projects that operate on the margins of all of these different media. They do not and cannot occupy a central place within any single medium; the projects are outcasts when defined in one area.

This quality of homelessness is symptomatic of the place of new media in relation to traditional channels of transmission. The online realm, which has been perceived in the last twenty years as the most democratic and emancipatory space, has become the main battlefield for producers in Russia today. It is becoming just as problematic to find funding and employ a staff to produce online content. We are seeing these difficulties in the last couple of years, as online sites like Openspace.ru, or even larger media outlets like Rosbalt.ru, are

¹⁸ The film was finally released in 2014 under the title *A Film about Alekseev* [*Kino pro Alekseeva*].

shutdown or have their funding taken away due to political pressure.¹⁹ On 13 March 2014, Lenta.ru announced that its editor Galina Timchenko, had resigned from her post, and that she was replaced by Aleksei Goreslavskii, a pro-Kremlin figure. While the news service's parent company Afisha-Rambler-SUP reported that Timchenko had stepped down, journalists within Lenta.ru complained of the latest crackdown amongst a number of independent media sources. Responding to the breaking news, a video was uploaded to *The Term's* YouTube page showing footage of Timchenko from January 2013, when Lenta.ru first took charge and hosted *The Term* in its time of need. The video celebrates Timchenko's leadership and active demeanor, in which she describes the situation as 'life and death' (Srok Documentary 2014). The video is marked Lenta.Doc Episode 0000, unveiling what was the first video shot under the *Lenta* name. The upload is clearly a defiant act, and it shows that even if *Lenta* changes under its new editor, its old leadership will live on through old documentary footage. In the video, Timchenko tells her colleagues, 'Guys we *really* are marking the best site in this country. And let us go forward and make it even better' (Srok Documentary 2014).

The attack on independent media channels is just one attempt of the Russian state to control information dissemination online. Independent media has to compensate more than it would like because state media rarely wavers from pro-Kremlin stances. Independent media becomes oppositional, not simply to counter state politics, but to carve out a consumer niche opposite state media outlets. Independent media sources, such as *Lenta*, *Slon*, *Snob*, *Colta* and *TV Rain*, have attempted to offer alternative choices, but there is the problem of overlapping voices and poor branding. Maksim Kononenko of *Kommersant* noted the ubiquity of Russian independent media in a recent interview, saying that the same players offer commentary on different sites, and that there is no differentiation: 'no one can make heads or tails of all these elephants, openspaces, colts, etc. everywhere the same sad content. everywhere the same old Kashin. everywhere there are fewer unique visitors than there are staff' (Tselikov 2013).

Kostomarov's, Rastorguev's and Pivovarov's most recent undertaking to counteract these trends is a social networking platform that seeks to promote amateur journalists. The application, *Newsreal: Citizen Journalism Network*, will provide exposure for journalists to promote and receive financial backing from their networked audience, who will rank relevant stories and fund amateurs in the field to pursue their work. This idea of the digitally enabled and financed citizen journalist or citizen filmmaker is something we are seeing appear as a result of changing notions of citizenship in the digital age. Not only are there now new channels for expression, but also new situations for governments to respond to outcry from citizens.²⁰ The channels have opened with more opportunity for complaint in the public realm, and this has in turn, changed the ways in which the state responds to citizens. Stephen Coleman and Jay

¹⁹ On 31 October 2013, a Moscow court ordered the closure of the news website Rosbalt.ru for posting videos supposedly containing profane language. The court cited videos from the actionist art group Pussy Riot, and Rosbalt was closed for linking videos from YouTube, a site never challenged by the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications [Federal'naia sluzhba po nadzoru v sfere svyazi, informatsionnykh tekhnologii i massovykh kommunikatsii (ROSKOMNADZOR)] (Anishchuk 2013).

²⁰ See Allan and Thorsen (2009) on the crisis reporting, and Hudson and Temple (2010) on the argument against amateur journalism.

Blumler write that new expectations and meanings of citizenship create the expectation to be heard and listened to beyond voting: ‘Government is finding it extremely difficult to respond satisfactorily to the many new needs and problems that are continually being thrown up by the pressures of a rapidly changing society. Top down ways of coping – through established bureaucratic routines, interdepartmental committees, commissioning opinion surveys, and so forth – are simply inadequate’ (2009: 10). With the advent of blogs, independent news sites, and user-driven content, the place of the large news organization and the professional journalist as official distributors also has been contested. News organizations and mainstream journalism have tried to respond to an uneven playing field, where breaking news can be circulated more quickly by networks of users, who have no regard for journalistic practices or integrity.²¹ While news organizations are challenged to report the news, they have found it necessary to coopt user content, frequently crediting amateur cameramen and airing raw, unedited video.²²

Kostomarov and Rastorguev are filmmakers who would like to free the aesthetics of cinema from industrial and state confines. Rastorguev commented on this aspect of cinema long before beginning *The Term*: ‘Cinema has to be diametrically opposed to politics. Because cinema is freedom, it is the everyday, the uncontrollable, it is anthropology. Whereas politics is systemic, socialized, control’ (2008). Everyday life and its representation are placed at odds with film industries, politics and state control. The online realm is an ideal space for the filmmakers to express the dynamism of everyday life and its uncontrollability. The multimedia platforms the filmmakers use give hope that the big story can be told. Given such grand goals, these projects are refreshing in that they do not rely on the aesthetics of the spectacle. They strive beyond the surface level of symbolic imagery through the ground level viewpoint of the amateur cameraman. Individual stories can be distinguished and told in new ways, offering a stark contrast from mainstream media’s rendering of the people as masses. Only then, can alternative stories be told, moving further away from the generalizations that traditional media gleans from larger historical events and mass spectacles of human activity.

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²¹ This notion of the de-professionalized and more personalized post-broadcast era can be seen in the slogans for both *YouTube* and *Realnost*, which are ‘Broadcast Yourself’ and ‘Go on, film the news!’ (‘Snimi sebe novost’!).

²² On 17 October 2012, the filmmakers accused Arkadii Mamontov for illicit use of *The Term* film material included in an investigative film *Provocateurs 3*, which was aired on channel Russia-1 (‘Arkadiia Mamontova – avtora’ 2012).

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