

## **The April 16 Archive: A Historiography in the Age of the New Media**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines how historiography has been changed in the age of the new media. The technological advancement of mass media has influenced the way how ordinary people participate in historiography. Thanks to the new media technologies, the democratization of historiography has ever been possible as with popular practices of cultural production. The gunshot rampage in Virginia polytechnic Institute on April 16, 2007 was an important event for examining the potential of popular historiography through individuals' participation in media production. This paper sheds critical light on the April 16 Archive that is created for preserving the past as "digital memory banks" for an emerging potential of popular historiography. In conclusion, this paper recommends critical pedagogic interventions to promote individuals' counter-hegemonic deployment of the new media technologies in the cultural politics of historiography.

### **The April 16 Archive: A Historiography in the Age of the New Media**

This paper examines how individuals actively participate in popular historiography in their everyday lives thanks to the technological advancement of the new media. When the concept of historiography is considered as a cultural/ ideological/ political practice on the past, popular historiography through the new media can empower individuals to be active, grassroots citizen historiographers in the information society. By producing media contents, such as photographs, individuals can negotiate and (re) create the dominant historical interpretation on a meaningful past. Moreover, it furthers an alternative historiography to propose counter-hegemonic interpretation of the past challenging the dominant historiography in society. Ultimately, individuals become able to actively participate in the cultural politics of historiography through the media production.

Kellner (1995) stresses how media culture exerts huge influence on individuals' political perspectives, identities, gender roles, values and desires. Essentially, media culture provides individuals with pedagogical tools to interpret what is normal and abnormal as well as what is desirable and undesirable. Considering cultural politics of individuals' alternative media production, thanks to the ubiquity of the new media such as the Internet and digital cameras, they have many more opportunities to engage in the counter-hegemonic politics of cultural production in the multi-mediated society.

Analyzing the relationship between power and knowledge, Foucault (1980) maintains that knowledge is inseparable from the legitimacy of power. A "strategic knowledge" in discursive practices is at stake

what makes power proliferate in the politics of knowledge (p.145). By participating in popular historiography with the "strategic knowledge" in the cultural politics of historiography, individuals can exercise critical human agency in the counter-hegemonic interpretation of the past "by which less powerful ones struggle for audibility and for access to the technologies of social circulation and by which they fight to promote and defend the interests of their respective social formations" (Foucault, 1980, p. 4).

Therefore, with the notion of historiography as cultural/ ideological/ political practice, individuals' opportunities to produce alternative media production give them a means of counter-hegemonic participation in the public sphere of historiography. In other words, individuals' active participation in media production, together with critical awareness of historiography as the politics of knowledge in the past, is a good source of their cultural, ideological and political empowerment. In this regard, the conventional relationship between the producer and the reader of history has been drastically challenged. The media technology, especially the Internet, has opened an unprecedented space for individuals to realize Benjamin's (1934) belief that a "reader is at all times ready to become a writer" (p. 225). In the age of the new media, individuals become deeply involved in the democratization of interpretations on the past in the public sphere.

#### *The Democratization of Historiography in the Internet*

In general, there are two main approaches to the new media: the utopian/ technophilic perspective and the dystopian/ technophobic

perspective. The main feature of the utopian/ technophilic approach is that it deals with the benefits of information and communication technologies (ICTs); ICTs are believed to empower individuals and facilitate their social-political participation efficiently (Flatley, 2005; Mehra, Merkel and Bishop, 2004; Rheingold, 1993; Ridell, 2002). Long before the Internet was in active use, Hollander (1985) articulates its potential:

The new technology makes direct democracy possible, indeed probable...What is proposed here is to merge the spirit of ancient Athens with the technologies of the twenty-first century - Pericles with digital transmission. *Direct democracy* can and should have a rebirth. (p. 3, emphasis added)

Decentralized communication, a participatory model, and maximum information flow are the main components that make direct democracy probable under the aegis of the Internet technology.

With regard to ICTs' probability of reviving direct democracy, Habermas's (1989) notion of the "public sphere" is the most celebrated concept. A democracy is a "direct democracy" when the ideal notion of the public sphere is realized with critical human agency's autonomous participation. Based on "communicative rationality," Habermas (1989) believes that individuals can achieve personal autonomy in the "public sphere" that is free from governmental or corporate control. In this public sphere, individuals can exchange their own interpretations of a historic event. In other words, interactive and decentralized communication on the Internet can invigorate the democratic historiography of the "public sphere" with individuals' active participation in popular historiography as the

alternative interpretation of hegemonic history. Even though Habermas's claim on the "public sphere" is utopian without considering the "digital divide" among class, gender and race, it is still a powerful concept to examine the Internet's potential.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the dystopian/ technophobic perspective focuses on the immense colonization of the new media by capital. In this point of view, the Internet has not revitalized the "public sphere," but rather has been dominated by the voracious interests of corporate capitalism (Brown, 1997; McChesney, 2002; Wilhelm, 2000). Under this analysis, commodification and commercialization are the current trend of the Internet. Promoting "direct points of sale" as one example, the interactive communication of the Internet serves the marketing strategies of corporations (Dawson & Bellamy, 1996). ICTs in this view provide individuals with limited or fragmented information in order to market corporations' commodities. In sum, the discourse and information on the Internet are controlled not by individuals but by capital (Dahlberg, 1998).

More than anything else, there is a relative democratization of the media access with the development of new media technologies. Referring to the politics of the media as a "refined instrumentalism" (p. 216), Scott and Street (2000) believe that the new media provide both the establishment and the marginalized with the unprecedented opportunity that a "new form of political discourse in which politics acquires a new language and new criteria of judgment" for domination and liberation is possible (p. 218). As much as the

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<sup>1</sup> On the digital divide, see <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/net2/falling.html>.

dominant manipulate the mainstream media to proliferate their ideological hegemony, the marginalized are also able to deploy counter-hegemony by taking-over a new set of political opportunity structures offered by the new media. In this respect, grassroots citizen historiographers have a much broader space to engage in the cultural politics of historiography in the age of the new media.

However, the new opportunities offered by the ICTs do not automatically secure a successful democratization of historiography. To this end, research has to focus more on individuals' concrete uses of the technology than on its characteristics and encourage them to publicize their agendas through the technology. As for a more acute understanding of individuals' Internet uses, Steve Jones (2003) proposed a research orientation for dealing with the Internet:

Reorient your research lenses from attentions of textual presences on the Internet to attentions of networks of people and power; from questions of *what* constitutes power in the realm of machines to questions of *how* power is constituted in networks of human activity (Werbin, 2005: 165. emphasis original).

In other words, to assess the real benefits of the Internet uses, research has to focus more on individuals' actual uses of the technology than on its impact on the users. Though the Internet has immense possibilities, different motives and purposes for using the technology result in various effects. In this vein of argument, Livingstone, et al. (2005) assert that an individual's concrete use of the Internet depends on his or her socio-economic and cultural-ideological contexts. As discussed above, consequently, there should be a concrete pedagogical intervention to provide individuals with the

philosophy of technology to pertain this analysis and thus make it more culturally/ ideologically/ politically practical to deploy new media technologies for the democratization of historiography on the Internet.

*Rethinking Historiography in the VA Tech Tragedy*

The Virginia Tech tragedy has provided a watershed event to rethink historiography as well as journalism. From the beginning of the tragedy on, the conventional distinction between professional journalists and ordinary people who have portable media devices has been blurred in terms of reporting the tragedy.<sup>2</sup> Students recorded the horrendous scene of shooting in the real time and circulated the multimedia artifacts around the globe through the Internet. Before professional journalists arrived to cover the tragedy in the campus, dozens of the students of VA Tech already documented the atrocity with their handy media such as cell phone cameras and digital camcorders. With this grassroots media production, laymen become authentic reporters and historiographers on the tragedy.

More importantly, traditional media outlets were dependent on the textual, visual and oral documents from the grassroots historiographers/ reporters of VA Tech. To provide more vivid reality of the moment, CNN as a conventional mass medium had students' own video documents aired in its channel. Therefore, Garofoli (2007) stresses that "the Virginia Tech shooting is the first major U.S. news

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<sup>2</sup> For a broader socio-political-ideological account for the impact of the VA Tech massacre, see a special issue of *Fast Capitalism*, 3/1. [http://www.uta.edu/huma/aqger/fastcapitalism/3\\_1/home.html](http://www.uta.edu/huma/aqger/fastcapitalism/3_1/home.html)

story in which traditional media and new-media technologies became visibly interdependent" (*The San Francisco Chronicle*, p. A1). In this regard, the grassroots reports of tragedy naturally provide an unprecedented opportunity to realize the democratization of historiography on the Internet. With more deliberate and authentic portrayals of the tragedy, individuals can challenge the mainstream historiography. Not only do they produce the detailed account of the tragedy based on their own experiences, but also do ordinary individuals become able to publish their own multimedia historiography such as photography. More specifically, digital photographs on the tragedy supply us with the vast explanatory alternative to the traditional written historiography. Even the gunman, Mr. Cho, produced his own multimedia manifesto that contains his alleged justification of his brutality through photographs and video.

In terms of the potential of grassroots historiography/ journalism, the VA Tech tragedy showed the most vivid example yet of emerging Internet media outlets, such as Facebook and YouTube as alternative venues of publication. They play a huge role as an alternative news source creating a mosaic of news coverage with diverse perspectives on the tragedy. With the distributed media devices for documentation and the decentered posts to circulate the tragedy reportage, it is virtually impossible to guarantee that history/ news itself can be filtered, packaged, edited, sanitized, polished, and secured by the dominant group. In sum, today's highly media-saturated environment provides individuals with many more opportunities to practice the counter-hegemonic cultural politics of popular historiography/ journalism.



*The April 16 Archive: The Potential of Popular Historiography*

There is a groundbreaking effort to realize the democratization of historiography by implementing the emancipatory potential of the Internet and digital media devices in the April 16 Archive. With the assistance of George Mason University's Center for History and New Media (CHNM), Virginia Tech's Center for Digital Discourse and Culture (CDDC) inaugurated the archive, a digital archive which collects and presents the stories and digital records of the VA Tech tragedy on April 16, 2007 (<http://www.april16archive.org>). The archive basically aims for the VA Tech community's more democratic, collective historiography on the tragedy. In other words, the archive provides ordinary individuals with the open space for "collecting first-hand accounts, on-scene images, blog postings, and podcasts" produced autonomously.

Operated by the VA Tech's CDDC, the archive serves as the historiographic public sphere on the tragedy that mainly "contribute[s] to a *collective process of healing*, especially as those affected by this tragedy tell their *stories in their own words*" (<http://www.april16archive.org/about>, emphasis added). As the members of the VA Tech community or sympathetic others, individual contributors to the archive try to get over the horrendous event with offering condolence to each other: "Feeling that we truly are brothers and sisters to all of you, please know that our prayers are constantly with you as is our great sympathy" (<http://www.april16archive.org/object/181>). More importantly, unlike other accounts by the mainstream media, the contributors strive for narrating the tragedy as the opportunity to get more solidarity for the

VA Tech community members as well as with other communities: “It is amazing how we as a society can come together and love and pray for those who are hurting” (<http://www.april16archive.org/object/206>).

Based on the interactive and decentralized communications on the Internet, the archive provides a multifaceted and collective account of a single event contributed by many people. Sharing their own ideas, memories and concerns, individuals not only are able to participate in the popular collective historiography on the tragedy but also offer chances to write a mutually condoling alternative history for themselves. Technologically, there is little restriction on the form of posting documentation in the archive; individuals can upload to share anything that can be stored in it. Therefore, the archive challenges the conventional discipline of historiography by eliminating the boundary between historiographers and historioreaders as well as the legitimacy of historiographic methods. In this regard, individuals exert autonomous agency to negotiate and recreate the meaning of the tragedy as active participants in popular historiography of the archive.

*Narrative as the Democratic Potential of Popular Historiography*

White (1987) proposes narrative as the genuine tool for historiography research and practices. Just as Gadamer (1960) problematizes social sciences’ obsession with the objective/mechanical methodology of hard/ natural sciences, White (1987) stresses the subjectivity of narrative as the key component of historiography. The subjectivity of narrative corresponds to what Gadamer (1960) proposes hermeneutics as a humanities’ genuine

research tool because historiography is subjective reconstruction of facts through a researcher's own perspective and interpretation. In other words, because historiography is the product of a historiographer's embeddedness in the given social/ economic/ political/ cultural/ ideological conditions, there are different subjective interpretations and reconstructions of historic events in any type of historiography. Therefore, it is a kind of the dominant historiography's hegemonic ideology to perpetuate its legitimacy to stress that "the notion that real events could 'speak themselves' or be represented as 'telling their own story'" (White, 1987, p. 3).

Specifically, White (1987) maintains that historiography is the product of a historiographer's concrete socio-political situatedness because a "tendency of modern historians to rank events in the record hierarchically from within a perspective that is culture-specific, not universal at all" (p. 10). Originally, Nietzsche believes moral and ethical propositions do not reflect objective or universal moral truths, but instead highly relative to social, cultural, historical or personal conditions. Nietzschean relativism suggests that historiography as the moral/ ideological/ political claim of certain social positions can only be applicable to certain cultural boundaries in the context of individual interests. In this regard, White (1987) also emphasizes the nature of narrativity as the historical relativism: "narrativity... is intimately related to, if not function of, the impulse to moralize reality, that is, to identify it with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine" (p. 14). From this point of view, the interpretative relativism of the tragedy by the VA Tech community in the archive provides a good resource for the alternative historiographic perspectives on the tragedy.

The main purpose of interpretative relativism is to exert influences over others by assuming or subjectifying a meaning/ perspective out of a group of meanings/ perspectives. Therefore, narrative/ discourse is closely interlocked with power (Foucault, 1970; 1980). In this respect, historiography is the discourse of power because it is a subjective reconstruction of the meaningful past as a way to present cultural/ ideological/ political interests. White (1987) further argues that the interlockedness of power and historiography: the "value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closer of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary" (p. 24). It is how the archive tries to provide the VA Tech community members with the emancipatory power of human agency to reconstruct the tragedy subjectively as an opportunity to get solidarity and recovered by themselves.

The archive tries to make a healing and condolence emplotment of the tragedy as an ideological/ cultural value of their grassroots historiography while narratively reconstructing the event. With the notion of "emplotment" as a means of historiographical reconstruction, White (1987) evaluates the historiography as a kind of literary practices that "events are made into a story by the supposition or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others" (p. 84). Basically, historiography is realized by an ideological process of selection because "we can sense of sets of events in a number of different ways" (p. 85). This is the very point that the narrative of historiography is another name of selective discourse for ideological power, or at least perspective power. Considering historiography as "the possible sets of relationships," White (1987)

supposes the reconstructedness of the facts in the name of "historical narratives" (p. 94). At this point, "the primary meaning of a narrative would then consist of the deconstruction of a set of events (real or imagined) originally encoded in one topological mode and the progressive restructuring of the sets in another topological mode" (p. 96). Therefore, historiography is the ideological.

The myth of objectivity in the mainstream historiography provides ideological disguise of the dominant hegemony of it because by proposing historiography as objective and scientific, the dominant group perpetuates its ideological hegemony as commonsense. This process of making dominant ideology commonsense further justifies hegemony of the dominant (Gramsci, 1971). Therefore, it is highly crucial to point out that every historiography is the reconstruction of facts through ideological narrative. There is no such a thing as objectivity, but only the multitudeness of perspectives. With the notion of historiography as narrative, there can be alternative or counter-hegemonic historiography because historiography is nothing but reconstruction. Just as the dominant exerts cultural/ ideological hegemony through the reconstruction of facts, the marginalized can also practice counter-hegemonic politics of historiography through their alternative reconstruction of the historic past. It is this kind of the counter-hegemonic reconstruction to produce positive, empowering narrative of the tragedy in the archive.

Narrative as the key component of historiography plays a pivotal role to empower the VA Tech community in the archive. Through the narrative of mutual condolence, individuals fundamentally intend to "contribute to a collective process of healing, especially as those

affected by this tragedy tell their stories in their own words” (<http://www.april16archive.org>). Moreover, the multiplicity of narrative provided by the decentralized and interactive communication of the Internet makes possible the more detailed and diverse documentations as well as interpretations on the tragedy. In this regard, the archive provides the VA Tech community with an opportunity to realize the emancipatory potential of the narrative’s multi-vocality in the Internet’s popular historiography. Therefore, the archive gives another breakthrough for historiography as a democratic, collective and participatory storytelling for the empowerment of heartbroken VA Tech community members.

*Photography as Popular Historiography Method in the Archive*

Photography is a frequently used method of historiography in the archive. There were 188 photographed images (60%) out of the total 315 postings in the archive when I wrote this article on June 3, 2007 (<http://www.april16archive.org/browse>). Compared to written verbal communication, the visual mode of communication is more efficient in terms of its hermeneutic capabilities. As the cliché goes, seeing is believing. Gergle, Kraut and Fussell (2004) examine how visual information affects communicative practices and how it facilitates shared belief:

Shared visual information can be *an extremely efficient collaboration mechanism*, particularly when behaviors and actions are linguistically complex. It also serves as a *precise indicator of comprehension*. Finally, it may be used to provide *situational awareness* in regard to the overall state of a joint task (p. 492, emphasis added).

Thanks to the communicative efficiency of digital photography, the archive's grassroots historiographers share and cobble together a collective, multifaceted memory which no one person could ever create in traditional print media. Just as Sontag (1973, p. 7) believes that "photography implie[s] the capture of the largest possible number of subjects," the photography contribution by grassroots historiographers provides the archive with unimaginable numbers of perspectives and interpretations on the tragedy, i.e., the multi-vocality of memory.

The value of photographs as a historiographic method prevails in the archive. Compared to moving images in the media, still images of photographs give much more memorable moment for the past. Sontag (1973) asserts: "Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned in to a slim object that one can keep and look at again" with broad socio-politico-ideological impacts (p. 18). For example, the photographed images of historic war, such as Vietnam War, raised the critical consciousness on atrocities of war. However, the photographs in the archive focus more on the condoling efforts of the Virginia Tech community members to get over the tragedy rather than circulating the horrendous representations of the tragedy. In the archive, the powerful photographic image is employed to reinstate the community's pride to surmount the massacre: "We are Hokies. We will prevail!"<sup>3</sup>

The photograph contributed to the archive is a collective method of the VA Tech community's empowerment because taking and posting

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<sup>3</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/3>.

photographs are “mainly a social rite, a defense against anxiety, and a tool of power” (Sontag, 1973, p. 8). The photography in the archive is mainly for the purpose of alleviating and healing the trauma of April 16 tragedy. Certainly, the main motive of the photographs contributed from grassroots historiographers is to show and share their desire to overcome the tragedy.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the photography in the archive is the expression of the VA Tech community’s will to overcome the pathos of the tragedy more than a means of an “elegiac art, a twilight art,” while it is true that “Most subjects photographed are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos” (p. 15).

The grassroots historiographers of the archive try to minimize the saturation effect of photographs. Sontag (1973) alerts that the “vast photographic catalogue of misery and injustice throughout the world had given anyone a certain familiarity with atrocity, making the horrible seem more ordinary – making it appear familiar, remote (‘its’ only a photograph’), inevitable” (p. 20-1). In this regard, the grassroots historiographers in the archive emphasize presenting the VA Tech community with condolence for the trauma by depicting communal effort to overcome the tragedy.

Consequently, the ubiquity of the new media provides individuals with ever more opportunities to realize the democratization of historiography in their everyday lives. Photography as a form of the cultural politics of the media invites grassroots historiographers to participate actively in the process of alternative meaning making of the meaningful past. Sontag (1973) affirms photography’s

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<sup>4</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/135>.



democratizing effect of historiography/ journalism in the age of new media: “the information that photographs can give starts to seem very important at that moment in cultural history when everyone is thought to have a right to something called news” (p. 22). Considering the interlockedness of power and knowledge, popular historiography in the new media encourages individuals to participate in the politics of historiography more effectively.

*Photography as Alternative Narrative in Popular Historiography*

Photography has been extensively used as an alternative way to convey the VA Tech community’s deep sorrow and offer condolence by itself. Moreover, it is an effective means for reconstructing the meaning of the tragedy as an opportunity for mutual solidarity. Naturally, among 188 photographed images out of total 315 postings in the archive, there were three overarching themes: memorials, solidarity, and counter-hegemonic reconstruction. As reviewed above, the themes of the photography deal with the subjective reconstruction of the tragedy through the alternative perspective of VA Tech community members.

The images of the memorial are the most salient theme in the archive. There were 63 photographic images of this kind. The images mainly served for commemorating those who were dead from the rampage and sharing the community’s grief.<sup>5</sup> As a process for mutual healing projects, the images call for the VA Tech community’s

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<sup>5</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/313>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/84>.

collaborative action to recover the tragedy.<sup>6</sup> There is an inter-media collaboration to commemorate the deceased in the tragedy, sharing virtual memorials in the Second Life.<sup>7</sup> In the virtual world simulation website, <http://secondlife.com>, individuals create a communal space for the victims to live happy together.

In the images of solidarity, the archive users endeavored to reconstruct the tragedy as an opportunity for securing solidarity in the VA Tech community as well as with other communities. Candlelight vigils were the most popular participatory manifestation for the VA Tech community members to share their grief and promote solidarity with each other.<sup>8</sup> Phenomenally, the vigils and memorials for the VA Tech community were not limited to the community itself; there were many inter-collegiate vigils and gatherings to show many others' solidarity to support the community. There are the photographic images of nationwide collegiate memorial vigils: University of Pittsburg; Brigham Young University; Salem State College; Appalachian State University; Oklahoma State University; University of Michigan; Ohio University; George Mason University; Case Western Reserve University; Richard Stockton College; and Pennsylvania State University in the archive.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/393>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/273>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/245>.

<sup>7</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/98>.

<sup>8</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/382>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/296>.

<sup>9</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/207>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/191>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/186>;

Outreach community support for the VA Tech was another image as the symbol of solidarity. There were many memorial services in Blacksburg, Virginia where the VA Tech is.<sup>10</sup> More surprisingly, there were photographs of a Buddhist temple in South Korea where there was a Buddhist ritual service to wish the deceased's happiness in the other world.<sup>11</sup>

The most discernable feature of the photographic images in the archive is the counter-hegemonic narrative against the mainstream mass media and the stereotypic portrayal of Mr. Cho as a ruthless murderer. The mainstream mass media largely reported the tragedy as sensational breaking news without enough in-depth analysis and deliberate interpretation. NBC's broadcasting of Mr. Cho's media manifesto caused harsh criticism of the media's sensational coverage. The VA Tech community was aware of the problem of the mainstream media's reportage and started to take an action to warn them saying

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<http://www.april16archive.org/object/134>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/316>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/211>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/317>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/6>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/189>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/177>;

<http://www.april16archive.org/object/206>.

<sup>10</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/3>

<sup>11</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/browse/?tags=buddhism>

"We ask that you respect our grieving and recovery. Please no media beyond this point."<sup>12</sup>

As a part of mutual healing process and condolence, the VA Tech community started to reconsider Mr. Cho as its brother who deserves mourns for his death. A user of the archive expresses grief to Mr. Cho:

I hope that if I ever meet anyone like you I will have the courage and strength to reach out and change his or her life for the better. I hope your family is able to get through the misery they are in because of you. I hope the damage you inflicted on so many lives is healed soon and never repeated. I hope the anger towards you that resides in so many hearts turns to forgiveness. I hope the earthly troubles of all 33 of you are a fleeting distant memory. (<http://www.april16archive.org/object/239>).

Moreover, as a counter-hegemonic interpretation of the tragedy, contributors to the archive showed sympathy for Mr. Cho's chronic psychological distresses, and criticized society's negligence of an omen of Mr. Cho's extreme atrocity.<sup>13</sup> More crucially, one contributor raised the fundamental question about the social construction on the uses of lethal weapons: "What if Cho Seung-Hui had joined the U.S. Marines and all of the victims were Iraqis?! Would he be called a *murderer* or a *hero*?" (<http://www.april16archive.org/object/214>, emphasis original).

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<sup>12</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/298>.

<sup>13</sup> See, <http://www.april16archive.org/object/215>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/216>;  
<http://www.april16archive.org/object/217>.

*The April 16 Archive: The Historiographic Empowerment of Laymen*

The decentralized structure of the Internet communication gives individuals a more favorable space to participate in the discursive public sphere. From this point of view, the archive is a "vantage-point of a broader understanding of local agency" to promote individuals' active counter-hegemonic practices on the past (Ridell, 2005, p. 162). In other words, individuals can actively participate in a field of hegemonic struggles around historiography for their own cultural/ ideological/ political empowerment by utilizing the emancipatory potential of the new media technologies.

Steinberg (1999) excellently examines how narrative serves to raise human agency for counter-hegemonic empowerment in larger structural conditions. For a more acute understanding of individuals' discursive practices, Steinberg (1999) focuses on the multi-vocality of discourse and its interactivity between individual utterances and structural representation systems. The meaning and practice of individual narrative is a "product of social interaction" (p. 744). Given the fact that discourse is the product of ideology, discursive structure has hegemonic power within its ideological and political structure; however, thanks to its multi-vocality, the hegemony does not always stay intact. Counter-hegemonic opportunities are always possible by both the nature of discursive structure and critical human agency's active engagement in it. Consequently, it is this kind of the counter-hegemonic employment of multi-vocality to reconstruct narrative on the tragedy that the VA Tech community members make active uses of the decentralized and participatory communication of the Internet to get over the atrocity on April 16, 2007.

Definitely, the new media technologies provide individuals with the “vantage-point of a broader understanding of local agency” which eagerly strives for reconstruction of the discursive public sphere for collective as well as individual empowerment. However, the new opportunities offered by the new digital media do not automatically secure successful democratic public sphere for counter-hegemonic historiography. To achieve this end, there should be active pedagogical interventions to encourage individuals to make transformative uses of the technologies for social change as well as individual empowerment. Emphasizing critical human agency and its struggle to achieve liberation from hegemonic over-determinations of the media in people’s everyday lives, a critical pedagogy of the media should endeavor to empower individuals to exercise more acute socio-political deployment of the new media technologies.<sup>14</sup>

With critical media pedagogy’s promises on the transformative uses of the new media technologies, individuals can participate in the counter-hegemonic cultural politics of media production as a means of grassroots citizen historiography because they can subvert the dominant ideology based on their concrete lived-experiences which provide a better understanding of the dominant ideological hegemony. Consequently, to proliferate the vast potential of the new media for the democratization of historiography, as in the case of the April 16 Archive, there should be a solid pedagogical intervention, critical media pedagogy, in formal as well as informal educational environments.

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<sup>14</sup> For more discussion on the emancipatory uses of technologies, see Feenberg, A. (2002). *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited*.

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