

AGENCY, EMOTION, AND IMAGINATION:
THEORIZING CONNECTION IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

By

Samantha Dols

Submitted to the

Faculty of the School of Communication

of American University

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

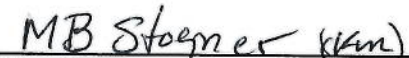
In

Communication

Chair:


Rhonda Zaharna, Ed.D.


Benjamin Stokes, Ph.D.


Maggie Burnette Stogner, M.A.


Ali Fisher, Ph.D.


Dean of the School of Communication

8/14/19
Date

2019

American University
Washington, D.C. 20016

© COPYRIGHT

by

Samantha Dols

2019

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Dedication

With gratitude, I dedicate this dissertation to the forces that have kept me motivated throughout the process of school: my adventure partner and my family.

AGENCY, EMOTION, AND IMAGINATION:
THEORIZING CONNECTION IN PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

BY

Samantha Dols

ABSTRACT

The imminent contact between people from different ideologies, cultures, and political perspectives brings the need for innovative strategies of connection, or ways for individuals and groups to build and sustain meaningful connections with each other. Accordingly, this research explores the concept of “connection” through a grounded theory methodology, which includes an instrumental case study on Shared_Studios’ Portals. “Portals” refers to a network of media that connect people from different parts of the world through live digital interaction. Through the repurposing of old shipping containers, which are painted gold and outfitted with specialized audiovisual equipment, each “Portal site” contributes to a global network of interconnected environments that feel spatially continuous, offering life-size engagement between individuals who otherwise would likely not meet – individuals from Mexico, Afghanistan, the United States, Iran, Rwanda, Sweden, and so forth.

This research situates the exploration of connection in the field of public diplomacy and provides scaffolding with concepts from two bodies of scholarship. From public diplomacy, issues of nonstate actors, relationship-centric paradigms, and new media and technology are emphasized. From 21st century media, affordances of involvement, immersion, and presence are elucidated, and relevant trends of Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech are highlighted. These concepts lead to a case study on Portals, an emblematic example of new media that could be positioned as a vehicle for fostering intergroup and intercultural connections.

The major finding of this research – a working theory, or more appropriately, a framework for connection – suggests that connection is malleable, determined by an alchemy of agency, emotion, and imagination. Awareness of this idea can aid in diagnosing the strength, or quality, of a connection between actors, and serve as a map for improving the quality of a connection between actors. While the framework itself emerges from the study and observation of one case, and is therefore in need of further experimentation, the overall research findings reveal 1) the value of Portals itself as a potential tool for public diplomacy, and 2) concrete lessons that can be applied to the general practice of public diplomacy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research came to life – and stayed alive – with the help of many individuals. While the following cannot fully capture my appreciation, I would like to acknowledge the guidance and encouragement of those who helped me along the way.

First, to my committee. To my advisor, Dr. Zaharna, thank you for believing in my ideas and leading me through this experience with a spirit of patience and persistence. To Maggie, Ben, and Ali, thank you for your valuable insights and steady support.

Second, to the team at Shared_Studios. With much gratitude, I recognize the privileged position I assumed in this study, one where I had relatively uncomplicated access to a still-emergent medium and its enthusiastic and accommodating leaders. The individuals I interviewed were inspiring collaborators, and I am thankful for their openness, flexibility, and commitment to advancing the mission of their work. To Amar and team, thank you for letting me be part of your deeply important work.

Third, to my personal board of advisors. To Dr. John, thank you for your profound mentorship in all facets of life. I continue to learn from the way you gracefully embody wisdom and compassion. To Lisa Burkett, thank you for revitalizing my focus and commitment. I will forever be grateful for your generosity. To my mom, thank you for being my source of humor, strength, and balance. To my dad, thank you for being a reliable and helpful sounding board. To my sister and brothers, thank you for your continued support and friendship; I am deeply grateful for each of you. To my network of family and friends, thank you for always listening, boosting my morale, and reminding me what is important.

Finally, to my partner, Raj J. Das, thank you for helping me stay motivated and inspired. Your willingness to listen, challenge, celebrate, ideate, and dream up new adventures has kept me going.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Snapshot and Overview	1
The Problem of Connection	3
Situating the Problem within Public Diplomacy	6
Background on Public Diplomacy	9
Research Questions	11
Main Concepts	12
Methodology: Grounded Theory	14
Overview of Grounded Theory	15
The Straussian Approach	17
Methods.....	22
Instrumental Case Study	23
Case Selection: Shared_Studios' Portals	23
Data Collection and Analysis.....	25
Statement of Reflexivity	30
Significance.....	32
Dissertation Overview	34
CHAPTER TWO: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY	37
Snapshot and Overview	37
Contextualizing Public Diplomacy	38
Definition	38
From Traditional Diplomacy to New Public Diplomacy.....	40
Three Central Issues Related to Connection	43
Non-state Actors	43
Relationship-centric Frameworks	48
Media and Technology	65
History of Making Connections.....	70
Gift Exchange	70

In-person Exchange	71
Limitations	74
Conclusion	77
CHAPTER THREE: 21 ST CENTURY MEDIA	79
Snapshot and Overview	79
Contextualizing 21 st Century Media	80
Definition	81
From Traditional Media to New Media	81
Parameters of 21 st Century Media.....	87
Affordances Related to Connection	90
Understanding Affordance.....	91
Affordances in Focus: Involvement, Immersion, Presence	94
Factors that Affect Presence	99
Different Types of Presence.....	100
Industry Overview: Concepts and Initiatives Related to Connection.....	104
Impact Storytelling.....	105
PeaceTech	107
Companies and Organizational Initiatives	109
Conclusion	113
CHAPTER FOUR: CASE PROFILE ON SHARED_STUDIOS' PORTALS	115
Snapshot and Overview	115
Foundation	116
Basic Idea.....	116
Origin Story	118
The Growth of Portals.....	125
The System's Creators: The Leadership of Portals.....	126
Organizational Vision	126
Core Leadership.....	130
Community Curators.....	131
Ambassadors	134
The System: The Technology and Ecosystem of Portals.....	134
Establishing a Portal in a Community	134
Exterior Features and Design.....	138

Interior Features and Technological Components	141
The System's Users: The Participant Experience	145
The Typical Exchange	145
Types of Interactions.....	146
Diplomatic and Political Cases	153
Other Research on Portals.....	154
Conclusion	157
CHAPTER FIVE: CASE ANALYSIS	158
Snapshot and Overview	158
Methodological Review	159
The System's Creators: How the Leadership of Portals Fosters Connection	161
Through Simple and Organic Communication	161
Through a Strong Internal Culture.....	163
Through an Expanding Network of Allies.....	165
Through Cultural Accompaniment	166
The System: How the System of Portals Impacts Connection	168
By Creating Feelings of Presence	168
Through its Position as a Phenomenon of Art	171
Through its Position as a Special Destination.....	174
By Acting as a Community Anchor.....	177
By Providing a Novel Experience.....	179
The System's Users: How the Participants of Portals Build Connection	181
By Co-Creating a Shared Narrative and Reality	181
Through Ritual Communication	183
Through the Commitment to Listen.....	185
Through Residual Wonder and Engagement	186
Conclusion	187
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION	188
Snapshot and Overview	188
A Framework for Connection	189
Agency	190
Individual Participatory Agency	190
Agency as an Affordance.....	190
Community Agency	191

Emotion.....	191
Intimacy	192
Wonder and Awe	193
Enduring.....	194
Imagination	195
Personal Imaginative Landscape.....	196
Imagining Otherness	197
Imagined Future	198
Lessons for Public Diplomacy	198
Limitations	206
Suggestions for Future Research	211
Conclusion	216
APPENDIX B SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY CURATORS	220
APPENDIX C SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS.....	222
APPENDIX D SUMMARY OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN GROUNDED THEORY METHODS AND PROCESSES	223
APPENDIX E SAMPLE GOLD BOOK ENTRIES.....	224
REFERENCES	225

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<i>Figure 1. A Portal in Times Square, New York City.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Figure 2. Research Map</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Figure 3. Framework for Connection.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Figure 4. Parameters of 21st Century Media</i>	<i>89</i>
<i>Figure 5. Scale of Engagement.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Figure 6. A collage of various images from the Portals experience.</i>	<i>117</i>
<i>Figure 7. The four dominant Portal types</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>Figure 8. Organizational Structure of Portals</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Figure 9. Portal in New Haven, Connecticut</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>Figure 10. Portal in Erbil, Iraq</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Figure 11. Portal in Baltimore, Maryland.....</i>	<i>141</i>
<i>Figure 12. Bakshi and Delaney working on the first Portal, 2014.....</i>	<i>142</i>
<i>Figure 13. Baltimore Community Curator shows technology behind the wall</i>	<i>142</i>
<i>Figure 14. Community Curator logs online.....</i>	<i>144</i>
<i>Figure 15. Musicians in Herat, Afghanistan perform.....</i>	<i>144</i>
<i>Figure 16. Herat, Afghanistan connects to San Francisco.....</i>	<i>145</i>
<i>Figure 17. A selection of potential uses for Portals</i>	<i>147</i>
<i>Figure 18. Usage opportunities for Portals.....</i>	<i>152</i>
<i>Figure 19. Framework for Connection.....</i>	<i>189</i>

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Snapshot and Overview

“I’ll never forget the subtle trust-building and opening...it was sacred...there would be periods when we’d be in there for 15-20 minutes with this person...there was something qualitatively...that was really pure and got to something really integral about what it means to be human and to listen and hear and just to hold space, and I think that’s really incredible. Those moments were endless, potentially multiple times a day I’d have those interactions. It was life changing, completely life-changing” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018).

This excerpt offers a glimpse into just one person’s experience with Shared_Studios’ Portals (“Portals”). Portals refers to a network of media that connect people from different parts of the world through live digital interaction. It is one of three opportunities offered by Shared_Studios, a multidisciplinary art, design, and technology collective that aims to “ground the connective potential of new technology in physical spaces to create more accessible, secure, and sacred encounters between diverse populations” (“Kickstarter, Portals by Shared_Studios,” 2015, para. 21). Through the repurposing of old shipping containers, which are painted gold and outfitted with specialized audiovisual equipment, each Portal contributes to a global network of interconnected environments that feel spatially continuous, offering life-size engagement between individuals who otherwise would likely not meet – individuals from Mexico, Afghanistan, the United States, Iran, Rwanda, Sweden, and so forth.



Figure 1. A Portal in Times Square, New York City

This dissertation tells the story of Portals and its capacity to function as a tool for building meaningful connections between individuals and communities. As will be illuminated, Portals serves as an optimal vehicle for studying and revealing deep perceptions about interpersonal and intercultural connection. When used optimally, Portals provides opportunities for people to reimagine themselves in relationship to others. Through the sharing of stories, ideas, and rituals among citizens from different publics, participants are able to redraw boundaries of identity. The experience creates a rare type of engagement within the global public sphere and summons an enduring sentiment from a perspective within public diplomacy scholarship: “We do not just bring inherited identities and meanings to the public sphere; we reimagine them there through conversation and other forms of engagement” (Banai, 2014).

The idea of reimagining identities inspires this research and embodies one of its core insights: the increasingly complex challenge of intercultural connection, whether that be within a nation or among nations, must be met with reimagined strategies of engaging with “the Self” and

“the Other.” This dissertation strives to contribute to that reimagining. With this mission in mind, the rest of Chapter One will serve as an introduction to the research agenda; it will provide a summation of the research process, including an elaboration upon the problem the research addresses, the primary concepts the research involves, the research methodology and methods, and the significance of the research.

The Problem of Connection

As globalization persists, so too does the inevitability that heterogeneous groups will come into contact with each other. Whether due to refugee or humanitarian crises, economically incentivized immigration, international or intranational motility, communities around the world will continue to confront changes in their demographic and cultural compositions. Migration is estimated to affect more than 450 million people worldwide by 2050, presenting a pressing challenge worthy of attention (Dyer, 2014). The promise of an interconnected future impends, and with this comes the need for nations, cities, and neighborhoods to enhance their capacity for making – and sustaining – meaningful connections with one another.

In an ideal scenario, these changes would unfold effortlessly, met by openness and a widespread commitment to inclusion. Long-established and new community members would have ample opportunities to engage with one another, and an environment of polyculturalism would endure, wherein different cultures would be fully embraced, celebrated, and recognized for being interrelated (Prashad, 2002). Amidst differences, people would pursue harmony in the new global sphere, connected through digital and nontraditional networks of communication and interaction. Diversity among groups would serve not as poison but as fuel for the construction of identity and relationship.

However, a different reality often emerges, revealing that while commodities and capital may move seamlessly through boundaries, people do not (Franz, 2018). Complicated by issues of identity, perceived otherness, and the perpetuation of conflict narratives, a common progression often emerges: one group, most typically a host or majority group, resists the prospect of integration with another, concerned that their extant identity will be threatened or changed (Pettigrew, 1998; Stephan & Corneblum, 2001; Stephan & Renfro, 2002). Reacting to limited perceptions, the group practices out-group degradation, concerned that “Others” pose a risk to their welfare, resources, values, or worldviews (Stephan, Ybarra, & Morrison, 2009). As a result, damaging social constructs, such as racism and sexism, are reproduced, and xenophobic attitudes are reinforced (Soros, 2016). The “clash of civilizations,” as suggested by Huntington (1996), is nearly realized; one group acts on their imagined superiority over another and perpetuates a division between the seemingly different communities.

In an effort to allay these potential clashes, governments and institutions implement policies directed at the applied or “hard” dimensions of change. Borrowing from Nye’s (2005) dichotomy of power, the hard tactics prioritize economic participation and legal concerns. Consider the Living Cities’ Integration Initiative, which strives to “induce economic security and close racial wealth gaps for low income people and people of color in cities” (Living Cities: Innovate, Invest, Lead, 2019), or the host of literature on labor market integration as a means for inclusion put forth by the European Parliament and the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (Konle-Seidl & Bolits, 2016; “Working together: Labour Market Integration of Refugees in Germany and other OECD Countries,” 2017). Reliant on measures linked to tangible resources and fueled by the ambition to win over a populace, these hard strategies are inclusive of anti-discrimination laws; problems of access to services, such as housing, sanitation,

education or employment; and providing infrastructural support for entrepreneurial endeavors (Maytree Foundation, 2012; Laurensyeva & Venturini, 2017), all of which are strategies that underscore logistical challenges and dilute the subsequent social ones.

While these policies are effective in significant ways, they often fall short. Accordingly, this research explores an alternative path, one that attends to the soft dimensions before the hard, the meaningful cultural interactions before the laws intended to sustain them. It asks how the problem of connection – between individuals and groups who believe they are different from each other – might be tackled in a novel way.

Laurensyeva and Venturini (2017) issue a call for future research in their review of the “Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy.” They pose the question: Can social integration happen before economic integration and then facilitate the latter? They suggest that the investigation of these links, and of the network effect on proxies for social integration (e.g., development of trust, values, and social preferences), could contribute to the development of more efficient integration policies. To extend this concept, what happens when an initiative that embodies something more akin to “soft” power is implemented, when the focus shifts from economics to the interpersonal, the social, and the cultural? How might exploring more abstract issues, including the nuanced, the emotional, and the intangibles, be worthwhile? How do invisible attributes help people and communities form and maintain connections? It is in this broad and often philosophical arena that the proceeding research unfolds.

As an important disclaimer, “connection” is polysemous and multifaceted, capable of being understood and applied through a diversity of lenses and levels of abstraction. While this research acknowledges several definitions, the overriding aim is to theorize about connection, to conduct an analysis that helps refine the concept and understand its composition. This research

rests upon ideas of connection that account for the depth and intimacy of interpersonal or intergroup relations, including social connection, the perception that one is cared for and valued by others, the feeling of being connected to a larger community (Eisenberger & Cole, 2012; Kawachi & Berkman, 2014), and the human connection made of intimacy and mutual recognition (Marar, 2014). As a way to extend these definitions, and to position connection explicitly within public diplomacy, this dissertation seeks to present a novel perspective.

Situating the Problem within Public Diplomacy

Given the multitude of perspectives from which to explore connection, this research positions itself in the construct of public diplomacy. This choice was made for several reasons:

First, the concept is relevant and timely. While President Trump should not be credited, his presidency has perverted the practice and meaning of diplomacy. Since his election in 2016, acts of insularity, nationalism, and divisiveness have notably increased (Begley, 2018), impacting relationship-building strategies at both the domestic and international level. Without question, his behavior has disrupted normalcy and incited destructive waves in the diplomatic community (Bennett, 2018; Boot, 2018; Curtin, 2018; Sun Sentinel Editorial Board, 2017). In this chaos, however, lies an opportunity to critically examine public diplomacy and consider its future.

Second, scholars and practitioners within public diplomacy increasingly call for more innovative and imaginative thinking. The field itself appears self-aware, attentive to its flux and the corresponding need to adapt. To cite just a few examples:

- “This is the era of thinking differently. MoFAs [Ministries of Foreign Affairs] and we diplomats need to begin reinventing ourselves and reimagining the way by which we

are able to engage the public and bring diplomacy and foreign affairs to the people” (Alcantara, 2017, para. 7).

- “We need to develop ‘new’ diplomatic concepts, which at least in my understanding and approach means that we need to come to terms with and reimagine ‘old’ concepts of diplomacy” (Constantinou, 2006b, p. 355).
- “Contemporary technology and new media have drastically modified the ways states conduct foreign policy, and embassies must cater to this environment by reaching out to mass publics using novel approaches” (Buckle, 2012, p. 1).
- “Diplomats will need to be more open and willing to go ‘off-message’ and to engage in genuine dialogue and debate...they will need to be encouraged to, and rewarded for, taking risks...” (Riordan, 2004, p. 14-15).
- Regarding the digitalization of diplomacy, “for some diplomats it is a time of innovation and experimentation. For others, it is a culture shock” (Manor, 2016, p. 10).
- “Some authors have already suggested experimentation as an important feature of diplomacy (Keens-Soper, 1975; Latour, 2004), and this is a view that I fully share. The issue is how far we are willing to extend diplomatic experimentation, skill, and innovation beyond brokering alliances, packaging agreements, and drafting constructive ambiguities” (Constantinou, 2006b, p. 17).
- “Diplomacy can help make the world a better place, but it has failed to come to terms with the requirements of world order management in the 21st century...if this is to change...grand strategy will have to be de-militarized, and all elements of the diplomatic ecosystem – the foreign ministry, foreign service and, most crucially,

diplomatic practice – re-imagined and transformed from the ground up” (Copeland, 2019, para. 5).

Third, public diplomacy currently grapples with several issues that make it ripe for exploration. As will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter, public diplomacy continues to evolve from a traditional governmental space into one that is more open and collaborative (Arsenault, 2009; Melissen, 2005; Riordan, 2004; Ogawa, 2013). Activity is no longer restricted to traditional diplomats and governmental actors but extends to non-state civic actors who eagerly seek a voice on the world stage (Hocking, 2008; Zaharna, Arsenault, & Fisher, 2013). The role of technology is increasingly important, with practitioners seeking new ways to fold 21st century media into their efforts (Ross, 2011; Bjola, 2015; Manor, 2016). Scholars advocate for relational frameworks, signaling a growing awareness of diplomacy’s human dimension, the fundamental worth of relationships and their ability to produce or impede diplomatic efforts (Buckle, 2012; Brown, 2013a; Zaharna et al., 2013).

Fourth, it can be argued that connection is a prerequisite for any diplomatic outcome – whether that be of perceived victory, the advancement of a national agenda, or increased mutual understanding. From a practical perspective, a connection must be made between a diplomatic actor and the public she intends to reach; and then, at a relational or interpersonal level, an emotional connection must ensue. While the notion of connection is inherent to public diplomacy, few scholars address it explicitly. Ogawa (2013) states that “cultural connections to human emotion make emotion a powerful force in human relations” (p. 129). Zaharna (2012) warns that “if one is unconnected to others, power over, power to, power through as well as inequality, imbalance, competition, and so on, are prime concerns” (p. 42). As a way to understand different outcomes of public diplomacy, Sevin (2015) presents six pathways of

connection, built upon the communication aspect and political nature of diplomacy. Importantly, Zaharna, Arsenault, and Fisher (2013) coin “the connective mindshift,” a change that “recognizes the power of connections and identifies the nature of these relationships as a key unit of analysis for public diplomacy” (p. 1). They suggest that the ability to “forge positive and productive connections to individuals and groups embedded within a network of communication networks” (p. 1) will be the new standard of success within public diplomacy strategies.

While these references reveal the recognition of connection and its importance within public diplomacy, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature; the minutiae and complexity of connection are not examined. Accordingly, scholars have room to investigate further. It may be asked: What settings are most conducive to deep engagement? What conditions might enhance the quality of connection? What nuanced details contribute to the potential of a mutually respectful relationship forming? With these questions comes an invitation to rethink, or recalibrate, the role of connection in public diplomacy.

Background on Public Diplomacy

Following the succession of terrorist attacks that began on September 11, 2001, public diplomacy has become one of the most salient political communication issues of the 21st century (Snow & Taylor, 2009). Understood traditionally as the space where government-sponsored agencies communicate with foreign publics to advance their economic and political agendas, the early wave of public diplomacy emerged from the context of two world wars and the Cold War tension between communism of the East and capitalism of the West (Snow & Taylor, 2009). The contemporary landscape, however, in terms of its definition, objectives, and actors, has evolved over the past two decades and looks markedly different.

A nexus of social, economic, and technological advancements has cultivated an intricate and interconnected arena for public diplomacy. Inclusive of globalization, regionalization (Hocking, 2008), and the rise of the network society (Castells, 2007; Snow & Taylor, 2009), the “new” public diplomacy faces several issues, three of which are foregrounded in this research. First is the changing landscape of actorhood and the increasingly important role of non-state actors. Faced with the recognition that non-state actors conduct and benefit from public diplomacy (Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, & Kendrick, 2013), practitioners and scholars question how best to form alliances between formal and informal entities to optimize impact. Second is the turn from information-centric paradigms to relationship-centric paradigms. Increasingly, public diplomacy literature centers on relational paradigms (Buckle, 2012; Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Cull, 2017; Zaharna, 2013; Santulli, 2011; Ogawa, 2013), but there remains an absence of scholarship that considers the granular, interpersonal, details of relationship-building, of making meaningful connections so that real relationship may follow. Third is the digitalization of diplomacy (Manor, 2017). As the proverbial walls between nations descend, the “expansive global reach of technology is not matched by an equally expansive understanding of communication in a digitally connected and culturally diverse world” (Zaharna, 2017). Accordingly, one must address questions about how to integrate new digital technologies into their efforts (Hocking, 2008; Castells, 2008; Snow & Taylor, 2008). Study of the digitalization of diplomacy is several years underway, and increasingly, notable diplomatic leaders recognize the value of social media (primarily Facebook and Twitter) as effective platforms for messaging information. However, there is a shortage of literature that explores beyond this. What about other applications of 21st century media? To what extent can immersive media be utilized as a diplomatic tool? What practices and precautions should be taken with media use?

These issues provide a framework for the overarching exploration of “connection” and guide the research through its subsequent stages.

Research Questions

This dissertation presents an instrumental case study on Portals as a way to explore the broad and philosophical concept of “connection.” Using grounded theory as methodology, I begin with an expansive inquiry: considering the impending collision of humanity, wherein different cultures, religions, and political ideologies inevitably intersect, how might efforts to build meaningful connections between individuals, communities, and nations be improved? To provide parameters and conceptual scaffolding, I situate this inquiry in the field of public diplomacy, a relevant arena that appears hungry for theoretical revitalization. Through a partial literature review on public diplomacy, three issues – the role of non-state actors, the role of relationship-centric paradigms, and the role of technology – intersect and necessitate a subsequent literature review on 21st century media. From an overview of 21st century media, which includes examples of contemporary applications within the trends of Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech, Portals emerges as an instrumental case. Through the entwined process of data collection and analysis (Strauss & Glaser, 1967; Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990), the guiding research inquiry narrows and transitions into a more concrete exploration: How can Portals be used as a catalyst for better understanding the nature of connection in diplomatic contexts?

As with grounded theory, the primary research exploration should be framed in a way that provides great flexibility and freedom, allowing the phenomenon to be studied in depth (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The question, while broad in the beginning, becomes gradually narrower and focused throughout the research process, influenced by concepts in the literature

and early observations found through data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The principal sequence for this dissertation, though it will be expounded in each stage, is distilled in this research map:

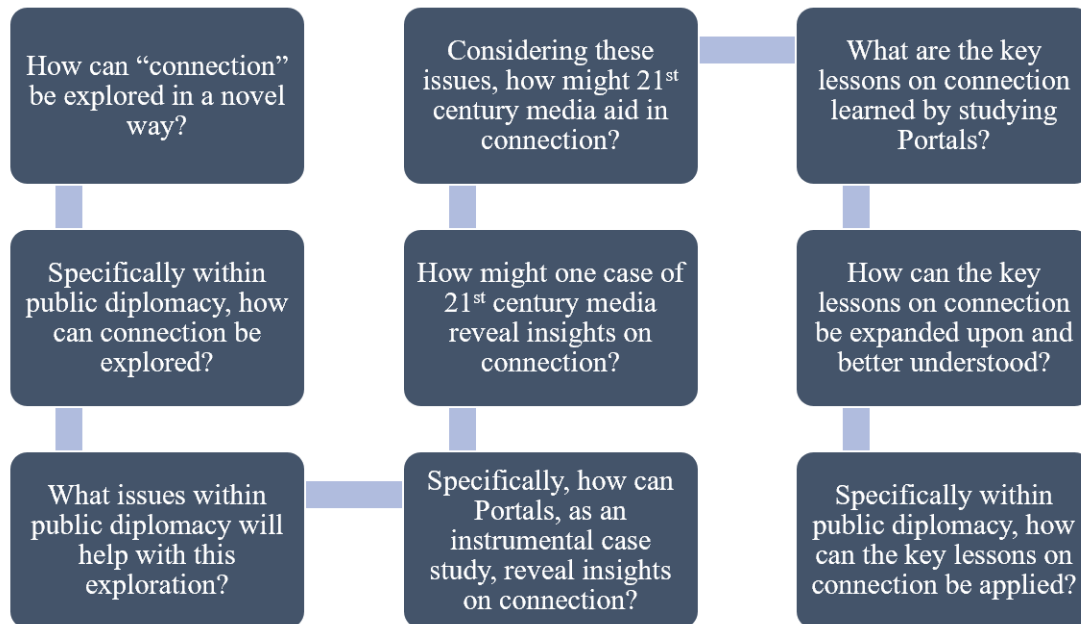


Figure 2. Research Map

Main Concepts

To introduce a theoretical framework at the onset of this research would be to violate the integrity of the methodological process. However, the introduction of key concepts that emerge throughout the literature review and data collection/analysis process will be useful. While grounded theorists differ in their opinions on when, how, and even whether or not to conduct a literature review, most recognize the value in being familiar with relevant scholarship prior to and throughout the process. By drafting a literature review and conceptual framework in relation to grounded theory, the researcher can more easily critique and make comparisons with earlier studies (Charmaz, 2006).

The main concepts utilized and expanded upon in this dissertation are categorized as follows:

From public diplomacy, the primary concepts include the role of the non-state actor (Hocking, 2005; Jonsson, 2017; Porte, 2012), the role of relationship-centric paradigms (Buckle, 2012; Constantinou, 2006b, 2006a; Saunders & Parker, 2015; Zaharna, Arsenault, & Fisher, 2013), the role of technology and new media in diplomatic efforts (Duncombe, 2017; Manor, 2016, 2017; Kedar, 2013), the concept of winning as a diplomatic goal (Cull, 2009; Zaharna, 2003; Snow & Taylor, 2008; Zaharna, 2016), and the concept of soft power (Banai, 2010; Nye 2005, 2011).

From 21st century media, the primary concepts include technological affordances, namely involvement, immersion, and presence (Witmer & Singer, 1998; Boyle & Cook, 2004; Mestre, 2005; Hopkins, 2016; Stogner, 2011; Slater, 1997; Nagy & Neff, 2015); the concept of Impact Storytelling (Blakley, Huang, Grace, Nahm, Sheena, & Shin, Heesung, n.d.); and the concept of PeaceTech (Byrne, 2015; Education, Government, Nonprofit, 2017).

These concepts will be explored in the subsequent literature review chapters as a way to provide an anchor for the study. From this, the aim will be to show how the working theory, or framework, of connection devised through this research “refines, extends, challenges or supersedes extant concepts” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 169). Additionally, to account for explanations of some of the findings, concepts outside the traditional boundaries of public diplomacy and new media will be acknowledged. These concepts include the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954), the sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), and the civic imagination (Jenkins, 2016).

Methodology: Grounded Theory

In this study, the research design evolves alongside the research process, echoing the iterative practice of qualitative work and the grounded theory methodology. Importantly, grounded theory is a misnomer, because it is not a theory but a methodology, or process, for generating theory. Grounded theory strategies “contradict traditional requirements for reporting research” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 164), directing the researcher to prioritize analysis over argument, delay or modify the terms of a conventional literature review, and to construct an original theory (Charmaz, 2006). In contrast to a rigidly structured design, this dissertation begins with something elastic and, concurrent with data collection, gradually concretizes the research agenda, concepts, and objectives.

Additionally, this research incorporates the philosophy expressed by Boehner, Sengers, and Gay (2005) in their study on immersive museum experiences, which emphasizes the role of active interpretation in experience and encourages reflection and meaning-making. Boehner et al. believe that every technology system has “three parties to the interpretation: the users, the system, and the system designers” (p. 81). While participation of all three may not always be equal, they argue that awareness of each is imperative because all parties are involved in the process of co-construction and/or co-interpretation (Gaver, Beaver & Benford, 2003; Fagerberg, Ståhl & Höök, 2004). The scholars also highlight the importance of metrics that extend beyond measures of utility and efficiency; more important than whether a technology is used correctly, or its mechanics made more effective, is the extent to which its users experience “levels of engagement, enjoyment of use, integration with everyday experiences, and the variability of use or capacity for re-appropriation” (Boehner, Sengers, & Gay, 2005, p. 81).

Overview of Grounded Theory

In 1967, sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss published *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Concerned that quantitative and qualitative approaches often failed to account for gaps between theory and empirical research, Glaser and Strauss presented a new type of methodology, one that had the ability to evolve from the systematic collection and analysis of data into the production of a multi-dimensional conceptual theory (Strauss & Glaser, 1967; Glaser, 1965; Howard-Payne, 2016). In grounded theory, the process of data collection, data analysis, and theory development occurs in alternating sequences. Analysis begins with the first observation then continues to drive the remaining data collection, thus creating a circuitous pattern of analysis/collection and “a constant interplay between the researcher and the research act” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 42).

Rather than starting with preconceived theoretical framework(s), the researcher begins with an area of study and allows a theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Glaser, 1967; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This theory, derived from a highly iterative and interrelated process, can be defined as “a set of well-developed concepts related through statements of relationship, which together constitute an integrated framework that can be used to explain or predict phenomena” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 15).

The interplay between inductive and deductive research lies at the heart of theorizing; the researcher simultaneously derives concepts, their properties, and their dimensions from data and makes deductions based on hypotheses about the relationships between concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process requires creativity (Bohm, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998), flexibility, reflexivity, and theoretical sensitivity (Goulding, 1999). While a commitment to rigidity pervades (Myers, 2009), its process “happens sequentially, subsequently, simultaneously, serendipitously, and scheduled” (Glaser, 1998, p.1). The researcher must also have the capacity

to “aptly name categories, ask stimulating questions, make comparisons, and extract an innovative, integrated, realistic scheme from masses of unorganized raw data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13).

The name “grounded theory” refers to the methodology and the desired research result, the emergence of a theory that is grounded in rigorous research (Bohm, 2004). Appropriately, Glaser and Strauss’ initial iteration served two purposes: to prevent theoretical stagnation by providing guidelines for theory generation and to position field research as a source for theory generation when rooted in sound data and analysis (Bohm, 2004; Strauss & Glaser, 1967; Howard-Payne, 2016). Subsequent versions, however, differed significantly, as the two founders discovered variance between their key philosophical and theoretical assumptions. By 1987, two “schools” of grounded theory emerged: the Glaserian and the Straussian. Around the same time, another major player emerged – Kathy Charmaz (1990, 2000, 2002a, 2003, 2005), a former student of Strauss. Charmaz expanded upon and challenged the work of her predecessors, introducing an overtly constructionist approach to grounded theory. She argued that, perhaps the methodology did not lead to the discovery of data or theory. Instead, the methodology constructs data and theory. The researcher becomes part of the world she studies and thereby constructs grounded theories through her “past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 10). For Charmaz, the constructionist approach to grounded theory makes the following assumptions:

- (1) Reality is multiple, processual, and constructed – but constructed under particular conditions; (2) the research process emerges from interaction; (3) it takes into account the researcher’s positionality, as well as that of the research participants; (4) the researcher and researched co-construct the data—data are a

product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it (Charmaz, 2008, p. 402).

Although elements of Glaser and Strauss' original work were considered for this research, the methodology most closely adheres to the Straussian approach, with a strong influence by Charmaz.

The Straussian Approach

Howard-Payne (2016) presents six major differences between the Glaserian and Straussian approach. For several reasons, I elected to pursue the Straussian approach; the two most important reasons are to position myself as an active participatory researcher and to partially familiarize myself with concepts in the literature as a part of the research process. Several descriptions of the Straussian approach follow:

Philosophical Frame

The Straussian approach exists within an epistemology of contextualism and is positioned in a pragmatic relativism. "Fact" in the Straussian model is restricted to the consensus of a particular time or incident, comprised of multiple outlooks regarding the phenomenon in question (Harry et al., 2005; Mills et al., 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Similarly, research findings are constructed by inter-subjective understandings of the phenomenon; the research outcome will be most complete when reached through myriad perspectives and paradigms (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The Role of the Researcher

To understand the world as participants perceive it to be, the Straussian researcher elects to be actively engaged with the subjects under study. Coupled with this personal investment, however, is the expectation of reflexivity and inter-subjectivity between the researcher and the method in use (Howard-Payne, 2016). Throughout the entire process, the researcher must stay active in the interrogation of data collection and analysis (Locke, 1996). She must demonstrate the ability to step back and critically analyze situations, recognize tendencies toward bias, and identify when preconceived assumptions cloud the data. In general, the researcher must enact a sense of absorption and devotion to the work process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) offer techniques to help maintain both objectivity and sensitivity to the data: think comparatively, constantly compare incidents within the data in order to stay grounded in them; search the literature or the personal experience of the researcher to find examples of similar phenomena; and obtain multiple viewpoints and perspectives of the case in study (determine how different stakeholders view it).

Use of Literature

While the Glaserian approach believes the researcher should not have any familiarity with literature before conducting her study, the Straussian approach argues that both technical and nontechnical literature can enhance theory development. In favor of a partial literature review, Strauss suggests that the concepts found in literature, especially those that appear several times, can provide a foundation for making comparisons to new data. Being familiar with relevant literature can enhance the researcher's sensitivity to subtle nuances within the data. It can also, however, block creativity and cause the researcher to be constrained or stifled by a surplus of existing scholarship (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss believes in the value of both

technical and nontechnical literature, noting how they can be used as secondary sources of data, catalysts for stimulating questions during analysis, and a method for confirming or challenging findings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In addition to the literature, the researcher's personal history, experience, and existing theoretical knowledge contribute to their ability to interpret data and generate new theory (McGhee et al., 2007; Howard-Payne, 2016). Further, a thorough but focused literature review often requires the grounded theorist to go across fields and disciplines (Charmaz, 2006).

The Research Question

The Straussian approach advocates for the researcher initiating her process with a guiding research question, one likely influenced by a partial perusal of existing literature (Melia, 1996; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This initial question gets refined and branches into additional questions through various cycles of data gathering and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). With goals and actions to pursue, the research questions and mode of inquiry shape the subsequent data and analysis; thus, it is crucial to both stay self-aware of how and why one collects data and to stay simultaneously engaged with collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2008). While the research may begin with one or several clear questions, these may evolve over time; through data collection and analysis, the researcher may tumble into unforeseen areas with new or altered research questions (Charmaz, 2008).

Coding Process

In general, coding procedures provide researchers with analytical tools for managing raw data. Charmaz (2016) notes that “coding is an heuristic device for engaging with the data and beginning to take them apart analytically” (p. 15). Coding helps distill and sort data; it refers to

the process of attaching labels to segments of data to help describe what is happening in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Simultaneously permitting both systematic and creative approaches, coding helps to “identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 13); from this process, theory is built, not tested. Strauss follows a coding practice that includes three stages of analysis: open, axial, and selective (Kendall, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

In the first stage, open coding, the researcher identifies concepts in the data and captures descriptions of their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This can be done through various levels of analysis, e.g., by line, by paragraph, by interview, etc. With each portion of data, the researcher broadly asks, “What is going on here? What is the major idea brought out in this sentence or paragraph” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 45)? Accordingly, tentative labels or categories are created, initiating the early stages of conceptualization.

In the second stage, axial coding, the goal is to systematically develop and relate categories. The term axial refers to the fact that coding occurs around the axis of a category; it links categories at the level of properties and dimensions, adding more depth and structure to what was presented through the open stage (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this stage, the research investigates questions of why, where, when, and how, thus helping further contextualize the phenomenon. The relationship between structure and process begins to emerge, as categories intersect and interact through different variables. Launching from the open stage, axial coding allows the researcher to engage with the data in a more sophisticated, integrated, and precise way (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Howard-Payne, 2016).

In the third stage, selective coding, categories are organized around a central explanatory concept. Theoretical insights from the first two stages are integrated, refined, and made cohesive within a larger theoretical scheme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Integration occurs throughout the research process, as the researcher stays interactive with the data, but by this stage, no new properties, dimensions, or relationships emerge during analysis; the researcher has reached saturation. A commitment is made to a single core idea and supported through many explanatory statements of relationship. Various techniques can help facilitate this process, such as freewriting, reviewing memos, and using diagrams (Howard-Payne, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Theory Verification

Once the theory emerges, it can be validated in two major ways. First, the researcher returns to the raw data and conducts a high-level comparative analysis, checking to ensure the scheme can explain different elements of the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Second, the researcher shares the theory with participants. Although there will be exceptions and rarities, a theory that is grounded in data should be recognized by most subjects involved in the research process; participants should be able to see themselves in the story of the research. Importantly, while the research yields, or constructs, a theory, such renderings do not offer an exact picture of the studied world but an interpretive portrayal of it (Charmaz, 2008). Accordingly, I position my findings in this dissertation as a “framework” rather than a theory, as a way to demonstrate that my findings must be experimented with further to constitute a true theory. Moving forward, the word framework will be used to define the research results.

While Glaserian researchers have criticized the Straussian approach for its rigidity, Strauss and Corbin (1998) offer clarifications to counter this claim. They underscore the

importance of flexibility and adaptability in the research process, noting how their insights should not be considered commandments but rather guidelines and suggested techniques. They believe the researcher must draw on her own experience and invite the “self” as an instrument in the process of data collection and analysis. Echoing Rew, Bechtel, and Sapp (1993), Strauss and Corbin issue a list of necessary attributes of the researcher: appropriateness, authenticity, credibility, intuitiveness, receptivity, reciprocity, and sensitivity. These qualities, coupled with the descriptions above, directed my decision to utilize the Straussian approach.

Methods

While scholars have varied opinions on the relationship between grounded theory and case study research (Halaweh, Fidler, & McRobb, 2008; Taber, 2000), this dissertation asserts that the two strategies intersect broadly and function as compatible methodologies. Glaser stated that in grounded theory, “all is data,” implying that all relevant means of data collection can support the pursuit toward saturation and codification. According to Ralph, Birks, and Chapman (2014), this includes informal interviews, lectures, seminars, expert group meetings, newspaper articles, Internet mail lists, television shows, conversations with friends, etc. Similarly, for Evans (2013), data may also include questionnaire results; social, structural, and interactional observations; casual comments; global and cultural statements; and historical documents – anything that allows the researcher to explore all aspects of the theory. Accordingly, this research integrates an instrumental case study into the grounded theory design as a way to both test preliminary postulations and further the investigation of initial questions.

Instrumental Case Study

A case is a spatially delimited phenomenon observed at a single point in time or throughout a designated period of time (Gerring, 2006). A comprehensive research strategy (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Halaweh et al., 2008), the case study proves invaluable in the process of concept formation and the formulation of explanatory ideas (Collier, Brady, & Seawright, 2010). An instrumental case study, which is employed here, uses a single case as an instrument to provide greater insight into an issue or to build theory. As explained by Stake (1995), with the instrumental design, the case is not self-contained. Rather, it is used to accomplish and explore something beyond its limits, something larger than the understanding of a particular situation (Stake, 1995; Baxter & Jack, 2008; Halaweh et al., 2008). Though studied in depth as a stand-alone phenomenon, the case serves as a vehicle that facilitates the understanding of something else, something greater or more abstract. Similar to the tenets of grounded theory, in an instrumental case study, data can come from multiple, eclectic, sources. These are “‘braided together’ during the analysis process, with each source contributing to a richer understanding of the case as a whole” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 554).

Case Selection: Shared_Studios’ Portals

As will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, there are several promising examples of 21st century media that could be used as tools for making connections. While it would be valuable to study each one thoroughly, this dissertation focuses on one instrumental case, which provides an emblematic and optimal platform to generate theory: Shared_Studios’ Portals. Founded to foster one-on-one conversations across distances and different cultures, Portals represents a prime example of new media directed at fostering connection.

I chose to study Portals for several reasons, the importance of which will be made clearer in subsequent chapters:

First, Portals embodies the three main issues that emerge in the literature review on public diplomacy. As a medium and company, Portals is a non-state entity that uses 21st century media to pursue relationship-centric goals.

Second, Portals is a unique example of hybrid immersive media. Less complex than most augmented or virtual programs, the technology of Portals is straightforward and simple, though applied in an innovative way.

Third, although most prevalent in the United States, Portals is global in scope. Studying the Portals model, which consciously involves non-western participants and perspectives, offers a counterbalance to the claim that public diplomacy too often is western-centric and lacks cultural diversity (Zaharna, 2012).

Fourth, Portals is still emergent and not extensively researched. At the time of this dissertation, two other scholarly projects on Portals are underway (both of which will be explored later) and a small body of anecdotal literature exists. However, there is no research that specifically considers the medium's capacity to be an effective diplomatic tool.

Fifth, as this research progressed, examples of Portals being coupled with public diplomacy began to surface. The following example of an application of Portals is listed in the University Portals page, in the "History, Culture, and Current Events" section: "Diplomacy: Through Portals, students in Havana, Cuba and Miami, USA have discussed what American-Cuban relations could look like moving forward" ("History, Culture, and Current Events," 2018). Additionally, an excerpt from the Portals site reads, "at the United Nations Headquarters [connecting] diplomats and visitors to IDP [internally displaced persons] and refugee

communities at UNICEF sites in Jordan and Iraq...[where] Diplomats and visitors were able to learn about the situation on the ground directly....” (“Portals for Refugees,” 2018).

Lastly, the practicality of conducting research proved to be feasible with Portals. The founder, Amar Bakshi, was available to meet by phone and in person multiple times to discuss my research agenda and answer preliminary questions about the conception and development of the company. He was helpful and accommodating throughout the process and connected me to relevant contacts in the Portals network, including staff, participants, and fellow researchers. A spirit of willingness by the entire Portals’ leadership team – to be researched and to engage in co-prospection – suggested a manageable research project. All things considered, Portals emerged as a practical and useful case to explore for this dissertation.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this dissertation is an amalgam of content, interviews, participant observation, and co-prospection with the Portals’ organizational leadership. The collection process, which spanned from January 2017 to February 2019, evolved through stages, each of which was characterized by a distinctive style, protocol, and set of objectives. As the structure of the dissertation concretized and took shape within the field of public diplomacy, so too did the analysis adopt more structure and the lenses to be used for examination and understanding formed. From the field of public diplomacy, this included relationship-centric frameworks and discussions of the role of non-state actors and technology in diplomatic efforts. From literature on 21st century media, this included discussions of affordances and related concepts of Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech. In analysis, other relevant concepts emerged, which will be presented below.

The first stage of data collection was fluid, adaptive, and informal, and served as a valuable introductory period for me to familiarize myself with the threads of research that would eventually tie together to make a more structured and cohesive project. I had conversations with mediamakers and curators in my personal network to learn about the innovative projects they were working on or excited by. While deepening my understanding of the tensions and claims that characterize the fields of immersive media and public diplomacy, I kept diligent notes on my questions, ideas, and possible future directions for research. These notes evolved as the research continued, a necessity and benefit in grounded theory and in most qualitative research. Writing notes, or theoretical memos, helped keep me distanced from the data and extended my reflections beyond strict description; it allowed for a combination of immediate observations and more abstract, or philosophical, postulations. The process was consistent and occurred in a variety of settings, allowing me to respond to and capture thoughts and ideas regardless of time and place.

The next stage of data collection involved the open-coding stage of grounded theory. As I engaged more with Portals, data was reviewed continuously and tentatively segmented into categories that summarized observations and insights. Data included observations of, and informal conversations with, participants, interviews with organizational leaders, as well as close reads of related content, including news articles, press releases, social media commentary, my own theoretical memos, and reflections in Gold Books, which are notebooks located at each Portal site wherein participants can write about their experience. Common themes and recurring patterns were identified to more completely describe the case in consideration (Strauss, 1987; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I focused on several kinds of “theory-generating” questions: What are the major issues at play here? What phenomenon is being addressed? What persons or actors are involved? What roles do they play? How, when, and in

what ways do they interact? For what reason? By what means? What methods, tactics, and strategies are used to achieve the goal (Bohm, 2004)?

The tackling of these theory-generating questions led to the first iteration of coding, or the deciphering and interpretation of data, including naming concepts and providing related examples. The concepts emerged as in-vivo codes, which were taken directly from the language of the content under study. Translated to “within the living,” in-vivo codes reflect the various raw interpretations of the phenomena issued in real-time by participants, leaders, and observers (Bohm, 2004). These were segmented into meaningful expressions, from single-word concepts to descriptive phrases.

Examples of codes include:

- Participants feel routinely grateful for their experience
- Opportunity (often feels unexpected or unlike anything else)
- Emotionally rich
- Leaders appear humble and eager to adapt
- Portals can change based on what a community asks for
- Diversity

The next stage involved the breaking down of these core themes, or axial coding. The initial codes (and the categories under which they fall) were refined. Through inductive and deductive thinking, I explored how the categories related to each other and examined the role of cause and effect within those relationships. As an example, with “meaningful engagement through Portals” as the phenomenon, the following could be considered – willingness to participate and enthusiasm about participating (causal conditions); dark, comfortable, ambient

setting within Portal (context and intervening conditions); curator establishes context for engagement (action strategies); emotional high for participants after engagement (consequences).

The final stage included selective coding, or the process of selecting the core category around which the analysis centers and relating it to the other tangential categories. As noted by Bohm (2004), in many cases this category is already present through the formulation of the research question. With this dissertation, that is mostly true – in the introductory stage, I established light theoretical scaffolding through the uniting of 21st century media and public diplomacy literature, which helped inform a general direction for the research agenda. From the beginning, I intended to explore how applications of new media fostered connections and to what extent they could be used to aid in building relationships between individuals and communities. As I progressed through the different stages and levels of intimacy with the data, this question – or core category – was refined.

To help structure the analysis, I used a strategy inspired by the sentiment of Boehner, Sengers, and Gay (2005), that “the system, its creators, and its users” are all important in the study of technology. Accordingly, I separated the data into three categories: observations and descriptions of the Portals system (the physical structure and technology); observations and lessons surrounding the creators of Portals (the origin story and organizational leadership); and observations and reflections regarding the way in which participants use and experience Portals.

The data collected include the following:

- Close reads of entries in Portals’ site-specific Gold Books (35 total)
- Close reads of articles about Portals and the Portals experience (300 total)
- Site visit to Baltimore Portal (exchange with Los Angeles Portal)

- Site visit to Brooklyn Portal (exchanges with Herat, Afghanistan, and Mexico City, Mexico)
- Site visit to Los Angeles Portal
- Site visit to Milwaukee Portal (exchange with Stockholm, Sweden)
- Site visit and tour of the Shared_Studios office in Brooklyn, New York
- Interviews with Amar Bakshi, Founder and Creative Director of Shared_Studios, totaling three and a half hours
- Interview with Jake Levin, Chief Operating Officer of Shared_Studios
- Interview with Emma Saperstein, Global Curator for Shared_Studios
- Interviews with six Community Curators
- Informal conversations with ten participants

Constant comparisons between the data pieces (transcribed interviews, Gold Book entries, field notes, etc.) helped create a diverse collection of data from which I could distill differences and similarities between incidents and perspectives. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) state that the constant comparative method requires the researcher to simultaneously code and analyze data in order to develop concepts; “by continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationships to one another, and integrates them into a coherent explanatory model” (p. 126). This analysis demanded a type of change-building process within the method and the ability to move in a nimble way, letting one piece of data inform another and vice versa. Phenomena are continually changing in response to new or fluctuating conditions, so as the researcher, I had to consistently embrace change and iteration (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The findings of the dissertation can also

be treated by this approach, seen not as conclusive results but rather as working results that should be engaged with further by additional researchers and through different research styles.

Statement of Reflexivity

Malterud (2001) defines reflexivity as systematically attending to the context of knowledge construction, especially to the effect of the researcher, and every step of the research process. Similarly, Hsiung (2010) believes it is the process of examining oneself and the relationship one has to the research. Finlay (2002) believes staying reflexive will help “examine the impact of the position, perspective, and presence of the researcher; promote rich insight through examining personal responses and interpersonal dynamics; empower others by opening up a more radical consciousness; evaluate the research process, method, and outcomes; and enable public scrutiny of the integrity of the research through offering a methodological log of research decisions” (p. 532). To be reflexive means to conduct an ongoing and honest self-assessment, to understand the baseline for the researcher’s assumptions, preconceptions, and hopes, and how these change throughout the research process.

Several scholars highlight how reflexivity is inherent to the grounded theory methodology. Hall and Callery (2001) suggest its presence in theoretical sensitivity, the grounded theory practice of bringing the background of the researcher into the study; they propose using reflexivity during the data collection step to fill a quality gap in the methodology (Gentles, Jack, Nicholas, & McKibbin, 2014). Similarly, Corbin and Strauss (2008) show how the analytical practice of theoretical comparison, where experiences of the researcher are compared to experiences within the data, helps with reflexivity. Importantly, the personal experience of the researcher is only used to help see different variations and interpretations of the

phenomenon in study as a way to test perspectives, refine postulations, and increase sensitivity to things that may have previously been overlooked (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 76).

There are three points regarding reflexivity I want to recognize for this study:

First, my professional experience in the creative, non-profit, sector influenced the decision to embark on this study. After several years of working for film festivals and with socially-minded artists and organizations, I felt compelled to dive deeper into the notion of Impact Storytelling. My personal relationship to, and philosophy towards, media naturally led me to a project that examines the extent to which new media and technology can be positioned as catalysts for connection.

Second, while I am inherently an optimist, I understand the difference between blind optimism and realistic optimism. To ensure I stayed rooted in realistic optimism, I remained diligently self-aware of my hopes and biases. When I decided to proceed fully with Portals as my case study, I felt eager and hopeful about its potential. And while that helped me stay motivated, it also ran the risk of clouding certain evidence, anecdotes, or themes that felt counter to my intuition. To help combat this, I regularly asked myself “how could I be wrong?” I took to heart the grounded theory practice of tackling data from all angles and perspectives, deliberately considering postulations that seemed slightly off, or different. This allowed me to maintain balance and ensure that the findings were tested against alternatives.

Third, I tried to stay aware of my researcher persona, or the image I projected throughout the process, including to participants of Portals and members of the Portals’ leadership team. To achieve an authentic research experience, I aimed to harness attributes of my character that I felt would promote a spirit of comfort and trust. My intent was to concurrently demonstrate professionalism and warmth to create an empathic and comfortable environment. Undoubtedly,

there are ways I could have been more effective or consistent, but I felt the evolution in the overall research process was fruitful. This was due in large part to the openness of the research participants/allies, who were eager to brainstorm and build upon ideas together.

Significance

My hope with this research is to contribute to the fields of 21st century media and public diplomacy, as well as to the multidisciplinary mission to connect seemingly unlikely or conflicting individuals or communities. At its core, this study provides a framework for connection, which suggests that three dimensions must be present and attended to for connection to sustain: agency, emotion, and imagination. This idea, which will be elucidated in subsequent chapters, serves as a tentative model that should be explored further, both in different contextual settings and through different methodological choices.

Conceptually, this research uniquely brings together two bodies of scholarship – public diplomacy and 21st century media – and aims to achieve two goals: The first goal is to expand the conversation of how to incorporate new media in diplomatic efforts (Duncombe, 2017; Kedar, 2013; O’Boyle, 2018) and explore ways that immersive and interactive technologies can be useful. The second goal is to show the benefits that come from deliberately pairing public diplomacy with another field of study/work. Scholars have done this before, aligning diplomacy with public relations (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013; Fitzpatrick, 2007), international relations (Sevin, 2017), even spirituality (Constantinou, 2006a). This dissertation serves as another interpretation, a way to emphasize the value of positioning public diplomacy beside concepts that seem extraneous to or understudied in its typical form, particularly 21st century media.

Within diplomacy, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of scholarship that addresses the increasing relevance of 21st century media in diplomatic initiatives, and the

increasing value of non-state or non-traditional actors in advancing diplomacy (Hocking, Melissen, Riordan, & Sharp, 2012; Brown, 2013b; Barston, 2014). It hopes to offer insight into some of the questions and obstacles that scholars and practitioners of diplomacy face today: How can new media be effectively integrated into diplomatic efforts? To what extent can new media enhance or detract from the mission of cultivating meaningful cross-cultural relationships? And how can innovators and entrepreneurs harness imaginative thinking in the diplomatic sphere?

Within 21st century media, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech. By demonstrating how one case, Portals, can be utilized in a more formal or professional space (diplomacy), the hope is to offer lessons and a working template for how media can be used effectively in building connections and to encourage mediamakers to seek out and be open to alliances with leaders in other industries.

Lastly, from a practical perspective, this research hopes to offer fresh thinking and lessons that can be experimented with and refined by mediamakers and public diplomacy practitioners, including non-state actors. The study offers a new way to understand how innovative applications of 21st century media can contribute to public diplomacy objectives, particularly strategies for making meaningful intergroup connections.

At the 2010 Conference of the Parties to the United Nations, policy advisor Simon Anholt claimed that the only superpower remaining on the planet is public opinion (Cull, 2017). This statement, while vulnerable to criticism, exalts the significance of public diplomacy; the spaces, actors, and objectives that constitute the practice of international relations and the upkeep of an interlocked global public sphere. The future inevitably involves contact wherein seemingly different cultures, races, religions, and ideologies are forced to live together, and in this context, an imaginative approach toward building and sustaining connections should be embraced.

Dissertation Overview

First, regarding the overall writing style, I adopt a meta-perspective on the importance of narrative and storytelling. Given that this research, as well as much of my previous academic and professional work, emphasizes the significance of a well-told or well-written story, I opted for an approach that would create a complete and integrated story. Thus, each chapter will include: 1) a snapshot, a reflection or claim from an individual's experience with Portals, intended to excite the reader and establish the tone for the proceeding content, 2) a concise overview of the chapter, 3) the crux of the chapter, which will cover the main ideas through a lens that is both academic and creative, and finally 4) a brief conclusion, which will summarize the major concepts at play and establish a transition into the next chapter.

This dissertation opens with Chapter 1: Introduction, which aims to establish the mission and overview of the complete research project. This included a statement of the problem, first through a zoomed-out and abstract lens, and then through a refined and focused lens. It introduced my primary research question and the methodology and methods I used to explore that question. Finally, it described why this project is significant and to what extent my reflexivity is important.

Chapter 2: Public Diplomacy presents a partial literature review of public diplomacy, which shows how making connections is an important and foundational pursuit of diplomatic engagement. It addresses three dominant issues of contemporary diplomacy, considers the historical context of connection-making in diplomacy, and suggests 21st century media as a potential catalyst for augmenting or driving connections in diplomacy.

Chapter 3: 21st Century Media presents a partial literature review on new media, including its definition, its primary technological affordances, and an overview on the kinds of

innovative applications that could be positioned as tools for public diplomacy. Portals, the case under study in this dissertation, is introduced.

Chapter 4: Case Profile provides a detailed account of Portals. Utilizing a mixed methodology – content analyses, participant observation, and interviews – this chapter gives a thick description of three dimensions of Portals: the creators of Portals, the system of Portals, and the participants of Portals.

Chapter 5: Case Analysis presents the findings of this research. Based on the case profile and the overriding themes and issues evident in the literature review chapters, this analysis will offer conceptual insights that distill the essence of Portals' ability to impact the pursuit of making meaningful connections. This chapter will mirror the axial coding stage of grounded theory, in which observations begin to cohere to core themes and ideas.

Chapter 6: Discussion serves as an addendum to both the findings of this research and the literature reviews. This chapter will mirror the selective coding stage of grounded theory, in which observations become more refined and integrated, ultimately leading to the final framework. This framework, which is influenced by perspectives within public diplomacy and 21st century media, suggests that connection is malleable and comprised of three components: agency, emotion, and imagination, all of which must be nourished for connection to be deepened and sustained.

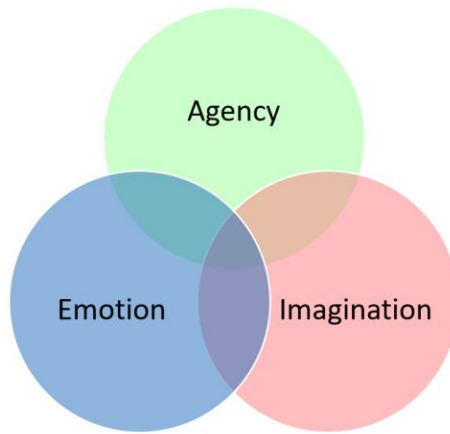


Figure 3. Framework for Connection

This idea offers a springboard from which public diplomacy scholars and practitioners can further experiment, considering 1) the case of Portals itself as a potential tool for diplomacy and 2) lessons from the overall study of Portals, which can be applied to the practice of public diplomacy.

CHAPTER TWO: PUBLIC DIPLOMACY

Snapshot and Overview

"There's a difference between empathy and pity...the difference between empathy and pity for me is that pity is done with a hierarchy—empathy is done with a shared experience...We're looking to make this a permanent Portal system...and we want to do more, because it's not that hard. And I think in some ways if the U.N. can start to get some people we work closely with to actually talk to people all over the world and also talk to decision makers, we can get another sense of how our work is having an impact" (Swant, 2015, para. 4).

This chapter surveys the state of contemporary public diplomacy and establishes a foundation for exploring how 21st century media can serve as a tool to enhance or contribute to diplomatic goals.

First, public diplomacy is contextualized through various definitions and the delineation between “traditional diplomacy” and the “new public diplomacy.”

Second, the current state of public diplomacy is explored, with a focus on three central issues: the role of non-state actors, the role of relationship-centric frameworks, and the role of technology and media in diplomatic efforts.

Third, a brief historical overview of strategies for making connections in public diplomacy is presented. Speculations will be entertained about what can be learned from other industries in the mission to connect seemingly different individuals and communities, particularly through the use of 21st century media.

Contextualizing Public Diplomacy

Definition

The term “public diplomacy,” as most scholars know it today, was coined in 1965 by Edmund Gullion, a career diplomat and former American ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Although the phrase technically originated earlier – as a synonym for civility in an 1856 issue of the London Times – the characterization issued by Gullion is credited for significantly influencing the early workings of the field (Cull, 2013). His definition is comprehensive and remains well-cited:

Public diplomacy...deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies. It encompasses dimensions of international relations beyond traditional diplomacy; the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with another; the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on policy; communication between those whose job is communication, as diplomats and foreign correspondents; and the process of intercultural communications. (“The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy,” n.d.).

Contemporary scholars have expanded upon and refined this definition, emphasizing different potentialities and dimensions of public diplomacy. Some underscore the importance of influence, and the extent to which one nation can advance her own interests by influencing the people and policies of another nation. For example, Waller (2007), describes public diplomacy as “the art of communicating with foreign publics to influence international perceptions, attitudes and policies” (p.19). Similarly, Sharp (2005) believes public diplomacy is “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the

values of those being represented” (p. 106). From a decidedly U.S. perspective, Lord and Dale (2007) suggest public diplomacy is America's "ability to promote its beliefs and ideals to citizens of other nations and societies" (p. 1).

Building upon the precept of influence, scholars also emphasize the significance of intercultural understanding and relations in public diplomacy. Succinctly stated by Manor (2017b), “at its core, diplomacy centers on fostering and managing relationships” (para 2). In a similar but broader way, Gregory (2008) describes public diplomacy as the “ways and means by which states, associations of states, and non-state actors understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance their interests and values” (p. 276). Fisher (2010) understands public diplomacy as a process of collaboration that has the capacity to influence “the likelihood of a community adopting a behavior...about changing the odds of a certain outcome actually happening” (p. 271). For Fisher, collaboration and community are vital to successful diplomatic efforts, for it is through public diplomacy that destructive outcomes can be supplanted by mutually beneficial outcomes.

These are just some of the many interpretations of public diplomacy from which common themes of influence, relations, and mutuality begin to emerge. While not exhaustive, these definitions provide a conceptual foundation from which an important reality can be identified, and a worthwhile path can be pursued. First, public diplomacy, like connection, is vast in scope and vulnerable to many different elucidations; accordingly, to effectively ground this research, the field of public diplomacy must be made less ambiguous through the process of distilling recurring themes within contemporary scholarship. Second, there exists a “new public diplomacy,” which can be distinguished from traditional, or classic diplomacy, and by explicating its common attributes, the exploration of connection will be more soundly positioned.

From Traditional Diplomacy to New Public Diplomacy

Related to the evolving nature of the definition of public diplomacy is the evolution in the field itself, its character shifting from a “traditional diplomacy” to a “new public diplomacy.” Described by Cull (2009), traditional diplomacy can be viewed as the “international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with another international actor” (p. 12); the process appears seemingly transactional and impassive. Predating this, Wright (1963), argued that traditional, or classic, diplomacy, “assumed the coexistence of many sovereign states each respecting the territorial integrity and political independence of the others” (p. 19). In Wright’s model, states strived to stay autonomous while maintaining a balance of power among other nations; they were not concerned with developing deep cultural relationships. Rather, nations upheld emotional distance from one another, depending solely on bilateral negotiations to promote interests and address issues like territorial limits or commercial intercourse. Further, Wright believed that within traditional diplomacy, while nations would verbally adhere to international laws and treaties, leaders under threat would not shy away from subversive, duplicitous, and/or secret behavior (Wright, 1963).

Wright wrote about the eventual decline of this brand of diplomacy, and although his observations were rooted in the mid-20th century, they remain highly relevant today. He observed that the extant approach was not fit to deal with “the problems of a world with more than 110 states of diverse culture and ideology” (p. 24). For stability to be established, Wright believed that “the vision of major decision-makers must not be limited to the parties to a conflict or a negotiation...decision-makers must be aware that the security and progress of each state is dependent upon the security and progress of all states” (p. 24). It was the recognition of a global interconnectivity that impelled Wright to begin conceptualizing a different type of diplomacy, one more reliant on shared efforts and interests.

Similar ideas are captured through Castells' (2008) vision of the new global public sphere. Aware that the problems of today can only be solved through international collaboration, Castells calls for a global civil society that transcends national borders, wherein nongovernmental actors around the world "become the advocates of the needs, interests, and values of people at large" (p. 83). He identifies four features of the new public sphere – local civil society actors, international nongovernmental organizations, social movements that try to control the process of globalization, and the movement of public opinion – and posits that these forces have the capacity to orchestrate a new era of public diplomacy. Theorizations of this "new era" are echoed and expanded upon by several contemporary scholars, contributing to the architecture of a new and interdependent diplomatic environment.

The "new public diplomacy" environment involves novel and rapidly changing demands, with scholars calling attention to transformations in strategies concerning new actors, relations, and communication (Melissen, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2011; Riordan, 2002). Efforts extend beyond traditional governmental actors to include non-governmental and non-traditional actors (Ayhan, 2019; Brown, 2013a; Hocking, 2005). Relational, dialogical, and networked approaches drive the new model, creating a public diplomacy that can be deemed as an open, public, and interactive form of communication in the global arena, wherein the audience has agency and can decide what content to accept (Pamment, 2014; Riordan, 2002; Wang, 2006). Innovations in media and technology offer new platforms for public diplomacy and provide practitioners with new tools for engaging with publics (Manor, 2016, 2018; Martin, Jagla, & Firestone, 2013).

As the new public diplomacy becomes increasingly complex and interconnected (Hocking, 2008; Zaharna, Arsenault, & Fisher, 2013), I argue that, concurrently, the art of connection becomes increasingly important. As new technologies offer what appear to be more

accessible and more frequent opportunities to “connect” with each other, the study of “connection” must be made more rigorous. Similarly, Wright (1963), Castells (2008), and Cull (2007), insinuate that, as innovations in media and technology complicate systems of communication, it becomes ever-important to protect the fundamental building blocks of communication. When a student becomes overwhelmed by too much, too quickly, a teacher may guide her back to the basics; in a similar way, when public diplomacy reels with new challenges and issues, value may be found in studying the basics. Accordingly, this research aims to investigate some of the fundamental building blocks of public diplomacy – the connections, the meeting points, the nuances of interpersonal exchanges.

The study in pursuit honors a simple, yet radical articulation offered by Banai (2010): “diplomacy begins from a decidedly subjective point of view; it is the meeting point of strangers in search of identity and/or difference” (p. 57). The notion of a “meeting point” is not extensively explored in public diplomacy scholarship. Of course, a meeting – whether in person, by phone, or via online platforms – must occur for subsequent exchanges to take place. However, the structure, emotional dynamics, and overall impact of such meetings are often overlooked. A goal of this research then is to place a focused lens on the meeting point between strangers and glean lessons that can be applied to the broader practice of public diplomacy.

With the basic foundation of public diplomacy established, this research turns to three central and recurring issues within contemporary scholarship. Each issue represents a key characteristic of the new public diplomacy and helps further refine the guiding study of connection.

Three Central Issues Related to Connection

In looking at contemporary scholarship on public diplomacy, three relevant and pressing issues emerge. The first considers the significance of non-state actors and the changing role of state actors in the public diplomacy arena. The second addresses the gradual transition from information-centric paradigms to relationship-centric paradigms. The third refers to the digitalization of diplomacy and the integration of 21st century media in diplomatic efforts. Each of these is discussed in turn, revealing both vulnerabilities and opportunities around the potential to more profoundly understand connection within the new public diplomacy.

Non-state Actors

A common belief among public diplomacy scholars is that non-state, non-traditional actors have an important role to play in maintaining relations between nations. Pantoja (2018) argues that the new public diplomacy extends beyond the traditional model in which state actors exclusively impact the international environment; now, she states, non-state actors such as multinational corporations and non-profit organizations play a significant role in promoting ideas and shaping the international political environment. Similarly, Riordan (2004b) believes that public diplomacy will become more effective when diplomats and government officials collaborate with a broad coalition of non-state agents. This same idea is echoed by Leonard (2009), who underscores the importance of working with non-state actors and suggests such alliances are central to communication within civil societies in other countries. Kelley (2014) elaborates on the transformed state of actorhood in public diplomacy, demonstrating the possibility of mutually beneficial outcomes from the collaboration of traditional statesmen and non-state actors. He identifies different factors that impact diplomatic action, including idea entrepreneurship, agenda-setting, mobilization, and gate-keeping, and posits that, for states to be

successful, they must recognize and respond to the power of non-state actors. From more of a philosophical perspective, Cull (2009) issues what could be deemed a new approach to public diplomacy as a whole; he states that “the relationships need not be between [a nation or other international actor] and a foreign audience but could usefully be between two audiences, foreign to each other, whose communication the actor wishes to facilitate” (p. 13).

While non-state actors often lack formal experience, they enjoy certain capabilities not afforded to states. As scholars have noted, traditional diplomats and international civil servants may fall victim to bureaucratic and hierarchical structures/cultures (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Gregory, 2011). However, non-state actors, or non-governmental organizations in particular, may have key resources – credibility, expertise, and appropriate networks – that are not readily available to governments (Leonard, 2009). In his advocacy for genuine dialogue within public diplomacy, Riordan (2004b) contests that participants must be both credible and accessible. Such sources of credibility, he states, may fall outside of the traditional governmental actors; instead, they may be found in non-government organizations, sports clubs, small and medium enterprises. He suggests that these entities may be better positioned than state actors to facilitate genuine dialogue between communities, in which differences are accepted and humility is practiced.

In addition to non-government organizations, other non-state actors – including transnational companies, religious groups, think tanks, and social movements – have the ability to contribute to most of the global issues affecting civil society (Castells, 2008; La Porte, 2012). Considering their autonomy, non-state actors are able to act more effectively than states at times, able to delineate new rules, challenge strong powers, or modify security parameters (La Porte, 2012). In many cases, non-state actors are pioneers of new communication strategies and the establishment of new opportunities for dialogue; they are able to obtain political authority from

their efficacy in advocating human rights, pursuing new regulations, or impacting the agenda of political institutions (La Porte, 2012). Additionally, non-state actors may reinforce their missions through the effective use of new technology (Riordan, 2004b), an issue that remains crucial in public diplomacy.

These voices cohere around a central, underlying belief: for public diplomacy to adapt to contemporary society, its operational reach must expand to include non-state actors; individuals and organizations who are not formally tied to government agencies should be considered as potential diplomatic actors and be invited to work in tandem with states. As detailed subsequently, scholars have different understandings of non-state actors and the changing field of diplomacy, in which non-state and state actors work together.

Boundary-Spanner

Concretizing the role of the non-state actor, Hocking (2008) introduces the term “boundary-spanner” as an alternative image for the diplomat, one that more explicitly interplays with public organizations and policies. Acknowledging the changing role of the public, Hocking (2012) reveals how the forces of globalization and regionalization both challenge national governments and diminish the significance of traditional instruments of diplomacy. Hocking et al. (2012) later postulate that “diplomats will cease to be gatekeepers guarding the borders of the foreign, becoming instead boundary-spanners integrating the different landscapes and actors of the diplomatic environment” (p. 69–70); in the new, integrated setting, the diplomat will reconstitute herself continually, assuming significant roles as a mediator, broker, facilitator, or entrepreneur.

Zaharna (forthcoming) conceptualizes the idea of boundary-spanners further, noting that they could include “non-state actors, civil society, corporations, activists, social entrepreneurs,

and even the lone self-appointed citizen diplomat.” She opens her upcoming book with the admirable focus and promise “to create a league of diplomatic boundary-spanners who are equipped with a global understanding of ‘communication,’ so that they can bridge across national perspectives and cultivate a more global vision of public diplomacy capable of navigating new diplomatic spaces and collaborating on shared global problems.” For Hocking and Zaharna, a boundary-spanner seems to be any entity, from an individual to an enterprise, whose actions challenge the seemingly arbitrary boundaries of geography and culture; an entity whose ideology and/or work contribute to the greater realization of global interdependence.

Citizen Diplomat

The idea of a boundary-spanner is similar to the notion of the citizen diplomat, a private citizen who, either inadvertently or by design, acts as a representative for her country (Bhandari & Belyavina, 2011). Citizen diplomacy, or people’s diplomacy, emerges from the belief that every person has the ability to influence the image, reputation, and relations of a nation (“You Are a Citizen Diplomat,” 2019). Most often unbound by a formal relationship to the state, a citizen diplomat can be a student on exchange, a teacher working in a foreign setting, or any other individual who interacts with foreign publics through travel or work. Motivated by a desire to participate in meaningful, intercultural dialogue, the citizen diplomat seemingly responds to the claim that her behavior and disposition offer impressions of her home country (Mueller, 2008). This type of public diplomacy asserts the importance of the non-state actor, leveraging both the power of the average citizen and the frameworks for cooperation between countries. As stated by Madeline Albright, “in an era of bluster and bombs, citizen diplomacy is a builder of bridges” (“Understanding Citizen Diplomacy,” 2019).

Guerilla Diplomat

The characteristics of a citizen diplomat resemble what Copeland (2009) describes as the guerilla diplomat, a revolutionary type of leader whose worldview is inherently global and intercultural. While not explicitly labeled as a non-state actor, Copeland's portrayal pushes traditional diplomacy into a less state-centric realm and underscores the changing nature of the contemporary diplomat. This type of practitioner is a "high functioning, street-smart, renaissance humanist with well-developed instincts, a Black-Berry [sic], and, when necessary, a Kevlar vest" (p. 259). The guerilla diplomat serves as an agent of transformational change; she practices "agility, adaptability, improvisation, self-sufficiency" (p. 207), is aware of the increasingly interconnected and technology-driven global landscape and responds accordingly. In this description, Copeland brings forth important descriptors for the new type of diplomat: her awareness of technology, her ability to adapt to a changing environment, and her well-rounded outlook that could arguably translate into various intercultural engagements. Guerilla diplomacy, Copeland argues, is a necessary practice in the new "diplomatic ecosystem" (p. xiii) – an interdependent and multifaceted field that contains the foreign ministry, foreign service, individual diplomats, departments and agencies of governments, and non-state actors.

Noopolitik

A similar type of ecosystem is captured by Ronfeldt and Arquilla (2009). The scholars refer to the expansion of the diplomatic playing field as "noopolitiking," an approach to statecraft undertaken by equal parts state and non-state actors. Contrary to realpolitik, which emphasizes the hard, practical, material dimensions of power, noopolitik emphasizes the importance of sharing ideas and values globally. In the current information age, Ronfeldt and Arquilla advocate for new political strategies of information management and believe that the

most critical indicator of success will be “whose story wins”; an emphasis will be on narrative and the ability to effectively share stories. Through the elevation of soft power and international cooperation, state and non-state actors can collaborate in these efforts; by building relationships inclusive not just of facts but also the expression of ideas, values, norms, and ethics, nations can improve their collective capacity to address transnational problems. (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1999; Ronfeldt & Arquilla, 2009).

Most contemporary public diplomacy scholars recognize the value of non-state actors, but few have prescribed specific protocols for how they might be used in diplomatic agendas. As stated by Cull (2009), an unresolved issue of the new public diplomacy is “the relationship between the output of the new players and the interest of the state” (p. 14). There appears to be ambiguity around the ideal engagement between the traditional and non-traditional actors within public diplomacy. Should non-state actors be considered real, practical tools of statecraft? What happens if their missions are deemed subversive to the nation’s guiding diplomatic strategy? How might the traditional governmental actors relate to the non-state actors to most optimally enhance diplomacy? I argue that learning more about the tangible, potential value of non-state actors – as will be done through this dissertation – will help inform the blueprint for collaboration.

Relationship-centric Frameworks

Another common pattern in new public diplomacy is the emphasis on relationship-centric paradigms and goals. Whether framed as “more-than-human-diplomacy” (Dittmer, 2015), “humanity-centric” diplomacy (Zaharna, forthcoming), “relational diplomacy” (Buckle, 2012; Santulli, 2011), “collaborative diplomacy” (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008; Fisher, 2013), or “dialogue-based” diplomacy (Riordan, 2004b), scholars increasingly focus on models that

prioritize building and maintaining relationships. There appears to be a collective paradigm shift underway within the literature, from informational, message-oriented, diplomatic communication to more personal, non-message-oriented, communication. Within this shift, however, there is a need for more robust scholarship that considers holistic and non-politicized views of relationships. To echo a sentiment put forth by Zaharna (2010), "while scholars and practitioners are increasingly calling for more 'relationship-building' in public diplomacy, few have articulated what a relationship approach would entail beyond conducting more exchange programs, more listening or dialogues" (p. 92). To illuminate some of the key themes and gaps surrounding this issue, glimpses into different interpretations of relationship-centric models are provided subsequently. Scholars present varied articulations of "relationships" in diplomacy, and while distinctive boundaries do not necessarily need to be made between these, I offer a speculative categorization for organizational purposes.

A Relational Model

This model includes scholars who engage in the concept of relationships with varying degrees of depth and practice. As examples, Leonard, Fitzpatrick, and Zaharna take theoretical and abstract perspectives, Santulli and Ogawa offer more practice-based insights from their work in the field, and finally, Zaharna and Constantinou incorporate reflective ideas about humanity and spirituality. While these are not exhaustive, the selected examples aim to capture the diversity of perspectives within the relational model; each scholar offers valuable observations and projections that attest to the importance of acknowledging interpersonal relations in public diplomacy.

Underscoring strategy, Leonard (2009) considers the role of media and traditional actors in the relational model. He states that public diplomacy "should be about building relationships,

starting from understanding other countries' needs, cultures, and peoples and then looking for areas to make common cause" (para 8). Governments, he argues, should craft a type of diplomacy that operates in three dimensions: communication on day-to-day issues, or striving to align traditional diplomacy with current events and the news cycle; strategic communication, or aiming to manage the overall perceptions of their country; and finally, with a long-term focus, or development, in lasting relationships with key individuals through various exchanges and access to media channels.

When governments prioritize these three efforts, Leonard (2009) argues that relationships will deepen, and a hierarchy of objectives will be achieved. Publics will develop a sense of increased familiarity and appreciation for the nation in question; more people will become engaged with the culture, ideals, and opportunities of the nation; and the nation will have more leverage to influence other people's behavior, such as getting companies to invest, and persuading politicians to collaborate. In Leonard's relational model, relationships appear to involve genuine exchanges that lead to raw, more authentic, portraits of a country, as well as the achievement of diplomatic goals.

Fitzpatrick et al. (2013) reason that the application of a relational paradigm could provide "both a defining worldview characterized by symmetry and mutuality, and a unifying, holistic framework to support the strategic dimensions of public diplomacy" (p. 3). In this paradigm, the primary purpose of public diplomacy would be relationship management, wherein all diplomatic efforts would be built and assessed based on the extent to which they contribute to the establishment and maintenance of supportive relationships with strategic publics. Here, she argues, relationship activities would serve as the primary objective of engagements, and by-products like policy goals would be secondary.

These ideas are explored by Santulli (2011a), who believes that interpersonal relationships constitute the building blocks for peace. His relational model seeks to suspend conflict and focus instead on the commonalities of individuals and groups. Through a case study on the role of technological innovation in Cyprus, Santulli shows the power of an alternative method of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, one in which intercultural relations can be improved through the strategic creation of relationships. He argues that establishing an interconnectivity based on mutual understanding can lead to a fundamental shift in perception of “the Other”; when an individual realizes what is similar between herself and “the Other,” then “the Other” transitions from something to be feared into something that can be accepted. Santulli’s model underscores the practice of understanding and the elicitation of an appreciation for shared humanity.

From a related perspective of cultural peace-building, Ogawa (2013a) explores the relational approach in Japanese public diplomacy. He emphasizes the potential for relational diplomacy to mitigate the isolation of people affected by conflict or disaster and empower them through people-to-people networking and cultural collaboration. For Ogawa, the combination of “mutual understanding” and “two-way dialogue” provides an effective method for communicating and understanding. He posits this method can lead to deeper international relations wherein nations learn each other’s language, literature, history, and other social sciences, where cultural interconnectedness seemingly breeds intrigue and respect.

A longstanding advocate for centering relationships, Zaharna (2008) shows how public diplomacy is not a product, but rather a process of cultivating connections and coordinating actions. She highlights participation rather than presentation in relational initiatives and offers three tiers for categorizing these efforts:

The first tier includes "familiar fixtures in traditional public diplomacy" (p. 93), such as cultural and educational exchange programs and leadership visits. Due to circumscribed time frames and minimal levels of coordination and participation, the biggest limitation of this tier is that the relationship-building efforts are focused at the individual level, making the success of some diplomatic initiative rest fully on the personalities of its individual participants.

The second tier includes initiatives that expand the participation level from the individual to social groups, like institutions or communities. These activities signal a "graduation in the level of public participation, time frame, partnership coordination, and public diplomacy skill sets" (p. 94) and include work with cultural and language institutes, development aid projects, "twinning" arrangements (i.e., sister cities), relationship-building campaigns, and non-political networking schemes.

The third tier requires the most intensive diplomatic communication skills, the "facilitation and coordination to establish, monitor, and enhance communication among the parties" (p. 96). Through mass networking strategies and coalition building with other countries and non-state actors, these initiatives have the potential to achieve policy objectives.

For Zaharna (2008), relational frameworks seek to find common ground and mutual interests between individuals and communities. Rooted in a ritual view of communication that favors "fellowship" and "communion," relational initiatives aim to establish interactive communication channels that allow direct interaction, create a sense of immediacy, and facilitate involvement among the participants (p. 88). Rather than revolve around key messages, she argues that relational initiatives are "often built around specific actions, even symbolic gestures, which demonstrate reciprocity and mutuality" (p. 92). The focus evolves from messages into a "collectivist/interdependent concern for social cohesion and harmony" (p. 91).

More recently, Zaharna (2019) extends the relational concept in her presentation of three logic models that explain different approaches toward, and understanding of, communication: individual, relational, and holistic. The holistic logic is of particular interest, as it reaches beyond the relational and places human relations as an interconnected and universal whole. This model includes the dynamics of relational logic, such as contact points, co-presence, emotion, perspective taking, and reciprocity, but also encompasses a more nuanced and abstract practice. She highlights five features of the holistic model. First is the dynamic of complete connectivity, which includes inward and outward extension into time and space, for both future and historical relationships. Second is the embracement of diversity, or the viewing of seemingly opposite forces (people, communities, nations) as natural features of one whole. Third is contextual knowledge and sensitivity, which consider the extent to which political and diplomatic environments affect public diplomacy environments. Fourth is adaptation and alignment, the need and ability to constantly adapt and align within an ever-flux state. Fifth is cooperative orientation and the understanding that with an intertwined global public, what happens to one party happens to another; that in the end, there is no victor, either both parties win or both parties lose (2019).

Constantinou (2006b) also extends the relational paradigm with his introduction of the term “homo-diplomacy.” Inching into spiritual territory, homo-diplomacy encapsulates a holistic and philosophical approach to the relationship-centric model. Constantinou highlights two neglected aspects of historical and contemporary diplomacy. First, the “interpersonal dealings of the homo sapiens” (p. 352), or the “experimental and experiential diplomacy of everyday life” (p. 355). And second, the “transformative potential of diplomacy,” a spiritual form that “engages in heterology to revisit and rearticulate homology, whose mission is not only, not just, the

knowledge and control of the Other but fundamentally the knowledge of the Self—and crucially this knowledge of the Self as a more reflective means of dealing with and transforming relations with Others” (p. 352).

Constantinou believes that when homo-diplomacy is effectively practiced, “the Other” and “the Self” become strange sites that must be rediscovered or known anew. Homo-diplomacy extends far beyond the practical realities and objectives of traditional diplomacy and accounts for the complexity and profundity of human-to-human relationships. It is about the mediation of sameness, wherein multidimensionality, creativity, and ambiguity become part of the relationship-building process. Diplomacy here is concerned with the careful mediating of separate Selves, groups, and identities and, importantly, “with the exposition and mediation of conscious or unconscious goals, fears, and needs on the basis of which the mediation of separate Selves takes place” (p. 362).

Perhaps more determinedly than many scholars, Constantinou advocates for the foregrounding of relationships within public diplomacy; his approach appears to call for an experience that transcends logic and considers the spiritual, the unseen, and the mystical. For it is only through this, he believes, that the intricacies of relationships will be known and woven together.

A Dialogic Model

Transitioning from the spiritual into more pragmatic terms, Riordan (2004) contends that the new security agenda requires a collaborative approach to foreign policy and a dialogue-based paradigm for public diplomacy. Through the lens of struggle against international terrorism and nation building, he argues that “a successful public diplomacy must be based not on the assertions of values, but on engaging in a genuine dialogue” (p. 189). The following excerpt

captures his perspective on genuine dialogue, which permits actors to uphold their core values and partake in an “altruistic affair”:

[Genuine dialogue] requires a more open, and perhaps humble, approach, which recognizes that no one has a monopoly of truth or virtue, that other ideas may be valid and that the outcome may be different from the initial message being promoted. If the aim is to convince, rather than just win, and the process is to have credibility, the dialogue must be genuine. This does not amount to abandoning core values. The aim remains to convince other publics of these values. But the effort to convince is set in a context of listening. Just as no individual will long suffer, or be convinced by, an interlocutor who endlessly asserts his views while never listening to those of others, so other governments and societies will not engage in collaboration if they feel that their ideas and values are not taken seriously. (p. 189)

Interestingly, while this excerpt from Riordan advocates for genuine dialogue, it also maintains that the aim of public diplomacy is for an actor to convince others of her values. This idea, however, carries tension and appears contradictory – how can an individual or nation listen genuinely to an audience while simultaneously attempting to persuade that audience? This conflict of values exists in other relationship-centric paradigms and is not necessarily resolved in contemporary scholarship. However, the idea will be addressed in the final discussion chapter of this dissertation.

Continuing with the importance of dialogue, Cowan and Arsenault (2008) consider the benefits of a dialogue-based model in public diplomacy, one inclusive of the "myriad situations in which ideas and information are exchanged and communication is reciprocal and multidirectional" (p. 18). They cite Martin Buber (1958), an influential theorist on dialogic

communication, and his distinction between technical dialogue, wherein ideas and information are exchanged, and true dialogue, in which participants willingly and openly engage in true relationship-building exchanges in which feelings of control and dominance are minimized. Cowan and Arsenault suggest that both true and technical dialogue matter; that both can advance public diplomacy goals because the act of exchanging information can lay the groundwork for deeper attachments. While noting the lack of experimental research on the impact of dialogue on public diplomacy, they also suggest that "a century of communication research demonstrates that the need to be heard represents an almost universal human characteristic" (p. 19).

Cowan and Arsenault (2008) cite examples of projects that highlight dialogic relationships, such as the Talking Drum Project, which hosts interethnic peace-building and reconciliation workshops throughout West Africa, and Seeds of Peace, which brings together youth from hostile or enemy states like India and Pakistan or Israel and Palestine. Ample other examples can be found in cultural and exchange initiatives and include academic conferences, interactive websites/social media platforms, participation in cross-cultural sports, filmmaking, and other art projects.

Also recognizing the power of dialogue, Saunders (2013; 2015) outlines two frameworks for transforming dialogue: the relational paradigm and the sustained dialogue paradigm. He positions the relational paradigm as a political concept that expounds on the idea that "politics is a process of continuous interaction over time engaging significant clusters of citizens in and out of government and the relationships they form to solve public problems in whole bodies politic across permeable borders, either within or between communities or countries" (Saunders & Parker, 2015, p. 34). Sustained dialogue goes one step further; centered on the relational model, sustained dialogue is a carefully designed and implemented process for transforming

dysfunctional and conflicting relationships. Furthermore, sustained dialogue offers a space in which people can experience continuous interaction and discover the capacity to influence the course of events that can be generated through such interaction (Saunders & Parker, 2015).

The dialogue-centric ideas presented by Riordan, Cowan, Arsenault, and Saunders carry profound significance in the study of connection. While the scholars' descriptions may seem intuitive, their vocabulary – listening, humility, mutuality, and the acknowledgement of multiple truths – is still relatively new (and gaining support) in public diplomacy. Like other scholars cited here, who aim to reprioritize relationship within international and intercultural settings, these dialogic insights give credence to the importance of connection; just as Riordan advocates for genuine dialogue, this research aims to explore genuine connection.

A Collaborative Model

The concept of sustained dialogue resembles another frame: collaborative diplomacy. Albrow (2013) suggests that collaborative diplomacy, which emphasizes trust-building through cooperation on mutual objectives around shared values, is now a practical necessity. Given the scarce diplomatic resources and the increase in transboundary geopolitical and scientific problems (e.g., climate change and nanotechnology), countries will benefit when they function in an interconnected, immediate way. Albrow believes that publics have become more connected, assertive, and actively engaged in the construction of their cultural worlds, and as a result, public diplomacy will benefit from a collaborative approach.

The emphasis on collaboration persists through Cowan and Arsenault's (2008) progression of different communication models in public diplomacy. While they validate the importance of monologic and dialogic communication, they elevate the significance of collaboration, a type of engagement they believe is often overlooked by public diplomacy

scholars and practitioners. They define collaboration as initiatives that include any of the following: cross-national participation in a joint venture or project with a clearly defined goal; people work together on a joint venture or project and advocate for the potential of meaningful collaboration to create a sense of trust and mutual respect; and an effort by citizens of different countries to complete a common project or achieve a common goal.

Cowan and Arsenault (2008) advocate for investing in relationship-building at every level of diplomatic engagement. The benefits of collaboration, they argue, are supported by research on social capital and strategies for fostering bonds and bridges between communities and individuals. In collaborative projects, participants learn from each other's skills, develop mutual respect, and have the opportunity to discover common ground. Of course, participants enjoy varied levels of comfort and expertise, but the novelty of a collaborative effort creates a different environment, wherein a relational hierarchy will be less likely to emerge. They state that each of these layers is context-dependent – contingent on needs, the characteristics of the communicator and target audience, and the conditions of their communication. And while some contexts may call for monologic or dialogic efforts, in many instances collaboration may be the most effective public diplomacy technique (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008).

Fisher (2013) explores the changing nature of collaboration in a communication landscape that connects communities through multi-hub, multi-directional networks. He argues that the aim of diplomacy should be to focus on interactions and engagements that stimulate a collaborative process, one that involves listening to a multiplicity of perspectives and ideas. Through an interdisciplinary lens, he identifies factors that can facilitate sustainable collaborative behaviors and highlights the four building blocks on which to develop a collaborative theory of public diplomacy: pathways, or the flow of information through a community; focal points, or

the power of coordination and aggregation; the role of network position in innovation; and actions likely to encourage collaborative behavior.

Fisher (2013) recognizes the capacity for collaboration to heighten the potential for diversity of cognition, experience, and perspective, and decrease the likelihood of communities and/or nations adopting an “us” vs. “them” mentality. He believes groups that collaborate can experience several advantages, such as increased social or cultural capital, the ability to span "structural holes" that limit information flow and innovation, the power to leverage relationships, and the ability to operate effectively and credibly within a community. With collaboration, genuine partnerships can form, in contrast to the "oxymoron of partnership within an assertive strategy” (p. 7).

Citing examples of groups like the Occupy Movement and Anonymous, Fisher demonstrates how collaborative initiatives encourage groups to behave in a way that provides the optimum collective outcome. One of Fisher’s goals is to challenge the notion that public diplomacy occurs when an external authority causes change within an audience. Rather, he aims to reveal the agency and power of the everyday citizen. In the development of collaborative approaches, he considers three elements of complex environments:

- 1) unilateral attempts to redefine relationships through focus on polishing often backfire; everyone in the relationship must be involved, to increase the odds of success; 2) public diplomacy must focus on the most likely means to influence behavior, not just on improving messages and perception, 3) in complex environments, collaboration and connection will be key elements driving innovation. (p. 210)

These characteristics, which can also serve as guidelines, underscore the importance of adapting public diplomacy to the new global context in which it operates. Fisher demonstrates how the calls for collaboration, cooperation, and international teamwork are not idealistic nor aphoristic; rather, they are behavioral necessities for the development and sustainment of healthy diplomatic relationships.

Closely aligned with Fisher's notion of collaborative diplomacy is the concept of collaborative power, or the power of many to do together what no one can do alone. Coined by Anne-Marie Slaughter (2011), a student of Joseph Nye, collaborative power offers a counter to Nye's relational power; it is an "emergent phenomenon – the property of a complex set of interconnections" (para 8) that is not possessed by a single person or place but rather by many, all at once. Slaughter asserts that collaborative power can mobilize individuals and communities through a call to action, build connection by broadening access to power and uniting around a common purpose, and induce adaptation through a willingness to enter into dialogue with others. For Slaughter, collaboration represents a new type of power to be utilized on the global stage, one that comes "from within," not "from above," and involves the orchestration of multiple actors working together to achieve a common goal.

A Networked Model

Zaharna (2013) differentiates collaboration from another term – network – in her relational framework for "network public diplomacy." She posits that networks represent structures, inclusive of culture, internal communication, and relational dynamics, while collaboration represents a process, through which individuals not only connect and share information but generate knowledge, innovation, and synergistic results. The synergy of a

network, she believes, is dictated by three interrelated relational processes: internal relationship building (bonding and team building), external coalition building, and incorporating diversity.

Similarly, this network model of diplomacy – built upon the interconnectivity of relationships – is explored by other scholars. Hocking (2008) suggests that the network model is diverse, collaborative, and nonhierarchical; it includes publics as partners in, and “producers” of, diplomatic processes and recognizes the importance of policy networks in managing policy environments through communication, dialogue, and trust. Metzl (2001) suggests that network public diplomacy is largely based on the flexible nature of networks in opposition to traditional hierarchies, stating that “a shift in conceptual models must also be accompanied by new relationships among government foreign policy actors, as well as between these actors and global constituencies” (p. 6). These types of broad engagements between societies contribute to the development of human relationships and cross-cultural understanding that are key components of networks.

Arsenault (2009) explores the network model specific to the digital sphere and reveals how the rise of connective technologies has garnered the need to focus on “Public Diplomacy 2.0,” a more interactive and holistic public diplomacy. She warns that attempts to exert relational power via connective technologies (e.g., through social media) are linked to attempts by states to exert and maintain power over technological resources; the dynamic is an extension of power relations between governments, Internet users, and private businesses that contribute to the infrastructure of the web.

The different models of relationship-centric paradigms highlighted here reveal common themes and questions in contemporary public diplomacy. While each cited scholar issues her/his own unique rendering, all appear invested in the pressing need to re-evaluate and prioritize the

role of relationships in international engagement. “Relational” models, including homo-diplomacy (Constantinou, 2006) and humanity-centric diplomacy (Zaharna, forthcoming), are anchored in a set of values; at times philosophical and spiritual, these account for the complexity of both intra- and interpersonal dynamics. “Dialogue” models (Cowan & Arsenault, 2008; Riordan, 2004) emphasize a certain kind communication between publics, one that is mutual and inclusive of listening. “Collaboration” models (Fisher, 2013) extend even further to highlight a particular approach and spirit to public diplomacy, one rooted in the belief that working together will be productive and mutually beneficial. And finally, “network” models (Zaharna, 2013; Hocking, 2008; Metzl, 2001) appear descriptive of a particular setting or environment. “Network” refers to the organizational structure of the new public diplomacy, one that includes a multitude of allies operating at many levels of abstraction – between government and non-government entities; between individuals, communities, and nations; between a diversity of state and non-state, boundary-spanning, actors.

Within many of these models, however, there are still limitations. For example, implicit in Riordan’s idea of genuine dialogue and Nye’s notion of soft power is the belief that the underlying aim of engagement is to advance an agenda. While these strategies use “softer” techniques that allow for positive side effects, such as mutual respect and learning, they still contain an agenda; it is about one actor convincing the other of a predetermined outcome. The implications of these strategies will be addressed in Chapter 6.

Although these models do not address connection explicitly, they collectively allude to its importance. The language and concepts offered by scholars elicit a curiosity and need for a granular study of the process of relationship-building; a process that begins with connection. As

a precursor, however, it is worth addressing an attribute related to connection, one that appears more inherent to discussions of diplomacy – the notion of winning.

Abandonment of “Winning” in Relational Goals

In the old paradigm of public diplomacy, it could be argued that “winning” was a desired goal. Embedded in the process of promoting one’s personal agenda (whether individual or national), was the idea that, for public diplomacy to be successful, the entity doing the promoting would see returns. Within that traditional model, diplomatic communication represented a tool for defeating the enemy, a way to control the terrain, practice deception, distort information, and manipulate public emotion (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2006; Zaharna, Arsenault, & Fisher, 2013).

This sentiment saw a revival after the September 11, 2001, attacks, when the United States turned its diplomatic efforts towards winning the hearts and minds of Muslims around the world by investing in educational and alliance-building programs (Golan, 2014). Mosques began conducting more community outreach and interfaith work (Johnson, 2011) and President Bush vowed to turn his administration into an office of global diplomacy, dedicated to combating anti-Americanism and spreading a positive image of the U.S. around the world (Becker & Dao, 2002). Despite presumably good intentions, however, these efforts fell short. Zaharna (2003) suggests that one of the reasons this public diplomacy effort failed is that it reflected a uniquely American cultural style of communicating, and while that method may have been effective with the American public, it failed with Arab and Muslim publics. Even with a focus on soft power, there existed a myopic view of communication and relationship-building.

While the general attitude toward winning has evolved in recent years, some scholars acknowledge that it still has a place. Hocking (2008) notes that some dimensions of public diplomacy will always be competitive because they primarily are intended to serve national

interests and are pursued in predominantly bilateral contexts (e.g., foreign investment, promotion of trade and international tourism, branding, and reputation management). He argues that this competitiveness, however, can be complemented by collaborative strategies through multiparty or multi-stakeholder interaction that are more attuned to the dynamic and demands of the global governance agenda in which government players are not the only ones of importance (Hocking, 2008).

Johnson (2011) argues that diplomats should move away from grandiose goals of winning people over and instead focus on quantifiable SMART – specific, measurable, assignable, relevant, time-bound – objectives that clearly identify target audiences, timeframes, and desired outcomes. In the context of America’s relationship with the Muslim world, Glassman (2009) argues that the U.S. should not strive to win anything, whether that be the war of ideas or the hearts of a people. He argues that a better use of diplomatic resources would be to undercut support for mutual enemies and invest in helping communities rally together to combat the common threat – violent extremists.

Some scholars advocate for the complete abandonment of the winning mindset. Cull (2017) suggests that, as public diplomacy evolves into a more dialogic and collaborative process, notions of victory should be abolished. He posits that diplomacy is all about relationships and that winning and relationships do not go together; he states that “seeking to win your relationships is a definition of a sociopath” (para 4). Cull argues that public diplomacy begins with listening; that the point is “not to advance the independence of one country through public diplomacy, but to build an awareness of our mutual interdependence in an interconnected world, and to work for a common good” (Cull, 2017). Similarly, Leonard (2009), founder and executive director of the European Council on Foreign Relations, states that public diplomacy begins with

understanding other countries' needs, cultures, and peoples and then transitions into identifying areas of common cause.

With the shift to a relational public diplomacy comes a corresponding transition from a victory mindset to one of open communication and mutuality. To a large extent, this transition can be aided by technology and media, a reality that Santulli (2011) articulates well. Santulli (2011a), who documented first-hand the potential of technology to catalyze peacebuilding in a high-conflict region, recognizes the hopeful opportunities of new communication technologies. When dovetailed with the relational approach to public diplomacy, he argues that new technologies can forge and deepen relationships, spark new dialogues, and enable individuals to find common ground. Because the Internet transcends borders, it has the potential to bridge divides in significant ways, but its potential must be exploited to build positive change (Santulli, 2011b).

Accordingly, public diplomacy practitioners increasingly strive to harness technology for productive and positive outcomes. However, the bridges between diplomacy and technology can be made more explicit and abundant. How can new technological applications aid diplomatic efforts? To what extent can 21st century media foster connection and enrich efforts of relationship-building? To echo Santulli (2011), while "surely not a panacea for global conflict, technology still has an important role to play...but the true potential of the technological domain remains untapped" (p. 9).

Media and Technology

The third recurring theme within new public diplomacy is the role of media and technology, an issue that suggests promise for the concept of connection. Noted by Gilboa (2001), "interrelated changes in politics, international relations, and mass communications have

greatly expanded the media's role in diplomacy” (p. 2). Contemporary media has transformed public diplomacy by providing leaders with new tools and bringing new actors into the process; communication distances have shortened, communication times have accelerated, and non-state efforts of communication have focused attention on global issues (Gilboa, 2001). Despite this reality, however, there remains a shortage of analytical tools and literature directed at understanding the complex role between media and diplomacy. To capture some components of this discussion, and to demonstrate ways it could advance, excerpts from scholarship that deal with both the conceptualization and utilization of media are presented.

The Digitalization of Diplomacy

The digitalization of diplomacy, a phrase that “fully captures the temporal and normative influences of digital technologies” (Manor, 2017a, para 19), refers to the impact of digital tools on diplomacy and explains how new media and technology are shaping (and being shaped by) public diplomacy.

As noted by Ross (2011), contemporary diplomacy must grapple with this process of digitalization and consider the limits and potential of technology and its efforts. Through an optimistic lens, new media offers manifold benefits to diplomacy. Some of these benefits include contributing to the reduction of hierarchical relations, promoting transparency and accountability among governments, mobilizing social movements, offering new avenues and strategies for engaging with publics, and creating trans-national networks to collaborate on advocacy campaigns (Ross, 2011; Hocking & Melissen, 2015; Manor, 2018). Digital spaces can serve as new instruments to help understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior more deeply. Through digital initiatives, people can build and manage relationships and exert influence to advance their interests and values (Melissen, 2013).

Social Media

Scholars increasingly engage in discussions of media and technology, but much of the conversation appears limited in scope and inventiveness. Overwhelmingly, the focus stays confined to social media (Harris, 2013; Duncombe, 2017; Kedar, 2013; O’Boyle, 2018). Touted as the two-way communication system that represents the fundamental difference between 20th century public diplomacy and 21st century public diplomacy (Hocking & Melissen, 2015; Manor, 2016), social media and digital platforms offer diplomatic actors new strategies and channels for engaging with publics. However, many leaders fail to treat the platforms as opportunities for real interaction or dialogue. Instead, they employ unidirectional broadcast communication techniques in which information is simply blasted at available users (Bjola, 2015; Manor, 2016).

Several leaders are recognized for adding social media into their public diplomacy toolkit, including President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron, Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau, and President of Argentina Mauricio Macri. These leaders have received praise for their digital savvy and ability to use platforms like Facebook and Twitter to galvanize domestic and international audiences (Portland Communications and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 2017). Macron assigned an “Ambassador for Digital Affairs” to his cabinet, who has jurisdiction over issues of Internet governance, cybersecurity, freedom of expressions, and human rights (McDonald, 2017). Trudeau posts on Twitter almost daily, providing information and photos to his nearly 4.5 million followers (Duttagupta, 2018). His strategic use of playful visual tactics offline also informs his digital presence, providing eye-grabbing moments for other users to capitalize on. One example is the viral commentary on his “sock diplomacy,” which includes photographs of the colorful, unconventional, socks he wears to different meetings and events. For example, during Toronto’s Gay Pride Parade, Trudeau wore rainbow-striped socks

with the words “Eid Mubarak” printed on the sides to recognize the Islamic festival that coincided with the celebration. He honored two communities with one pair of socks, and also recognized the Toronto-based company who made them, a strategic choice that stirred the online community (Friedman, 2017).

Macri and other Argentinian politicians actively use Facebook and Twitter to share their ideas, programs, and measures. Interestingly, as noted in a study by Tarullo (2015), the most popular posts by these leaders are those with emotion. For example, “Macri laughing with his infant daughter; Massa kissing his wife on Saint Valentine’s Day...Scioli watching the Football World Cup with his family...all these have received more posts, likes, and retweets than any other where policy measures were communicated” (para 4); it is emotion that “makes the mouse go ‘round for clicking and liking’” (para 5).

Media Experimentation

Additionally, Manor (2017b) highlights several cases of media experimentation within diplomacy, signaling the movement starting in the field. He cites the practice of Norwegian ambassadors using Skype to engage with university students, the use of Facebook by leaders in Palestine as a platform through which they can make commitments to their Israeli neighbors, and the use of Twitter by Kenya’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to provide emergency consular aid. Additionally, Manor gives examples of states launching more innovative programs through technology: India’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs works to develop video games for children of the Indian diaspora; Georgia’s Ministry of the Diaspora offers online courses in Georgia’s native language; Foreign Affairs Ministries are beginning to use software programmers to analyze large data sets and/or manipulate social media algorithms using bots; Sweden’s Embassy leverages the virtual world of Second Life to expose foreign populations to their national culture; as

demonstrated through The United Kingdom Foreign Office's campaign to End Sexual Violence in Conflicts, a global network of civil society organizations, individuals, and diplomats, aimed to influence policy and prevent sexual violence during times of armed conflict (Manor, 2017b); and finally, many United Nations Ambassadors use WhatsApp to coordinate voting on several resolutions (Manor, 2017b).

Although nations continue to diversify their use of media and technology, the field remains largely untapped. Echoed by Manor (2017), it will take time and energy to adopt and employ new tactics, and though some leaders are making strides, several gaps exist. These gaps include a lack of training and education for diplomats (Shaw, 2017; Cull, 2013; Aharoni, 2015); a narrow focus on social media as the only tool for public diplomacy; and an outdated understanding of the overall job description for political and diplomatic leaders.

Through a cultural lens, Zaharna (2012) suggests that public diplomacy may still view the interplay of culture and social media through a 20th century mass media mindset. She notes how the technology of mass media has limited reach and made distinctions between domestic and foreign publics. Today's technologies, however, offer something different - they are more accessible and expansive and blur the boundaries between foreign and domestic publics, contributing to an overall trend of power diffusion and ambiguity (Gregory, 2014). New technologies are often fostered in environments that favor "network diplomacy," a model that could be more effective than mass communication in creating (as opposed to just wielding) soft power (Manor, 2018).

The scope of digitalization is increasing, evoking more questions around the changing nature of relationships, networks, collaboration, and soft power in online diplomacy. Scholars may debate the credibility of digital platforms, and the frequency and manner with which they

should be used. In a state of pervasive connectivity, some may deem digital diplomacy as a complement to traditional face-to-face diplomacy (Ross, 2011), while others, such as President Trump, opt to use it as a replacement, in an often shortsighted and reckless manner (Liasson, 2017; Sun Sentinel Editorial Board, 2017).

There is no prescription for how to effectively integrate technology into diplomacy. It might be safe, however, to state what seems clear, that technology should be used as a tool for enhancement, not weaponization, and technology should supplement diplomacy's focus on relationship. As stated by Cull, "You can't drive a jet on a highway. Digital platforms were designed to create relationships, not just push messages out...the average U.S. Embassy FaceBook page makes it look like the U.S. government doesn't understand the business of public diplomacy" (Shaw, 2017, para 10). Some may contest this observation, but it does conjure a worthwhile thought: how might diplomacy optimize technology as a vehicle for connection? How might the current efforts be expanded upon to provide new or improved opportunities for diplomatic engagements? Before delving into this, however, it will be useful to consider how connections have been made in the past.

History of Making Connections

Throughout the history of public diplomacy, leaders and practitioners have employed several methods for making connections among nations and communities, including gift exchanges and in-person exchanges.

Gift Exchange

One of the oldest documented practices was the exchange of gifts, a process that fulfills relational recognition and expectations of reciprocity and mutuality (Zaharna et al., 2013).

Historical accounts of gift exchange theories acknowledge that concepts of reciprocity, obligation, and honor have long pervaded diplomatic culture and continue to do so today (Auwers, 2013). When motivated by a sense of competition and prestige in a friendly atmosphere, gift exchanges can effectively communicate symbolic messages of political and cultural power (Auwers, 2013). As strong symbolic gestures, gifts are curated to capture the essence of a nation, its culture, and people; more than a formality, the gift exchange becomes an affirmation of a special alliance between the giver and receiver (“Why do diplomats give gifts?” 2018). The function ascribed to gifts requires learning about another’s rules, values, habits, or tastes, a practice that ultimately increases levels of connection and mutual understanding (Brauner, 2016).

In-person Exchange

Concurrent with the advancement of transportation technologies, the practice of in-person exchanges emerged as hallmark programs of diplomacy. Whether sponsored by academic organizations/institutions, governments, or other cultural organizations, exchanges became important means of promoting peace, mutual understanding, and foreign policy objectives (Wang & Nisbet, 2018). The U.S. underscored the importance of in-person exchanges, recognizing major face-to-face programs, such as Fulbright, Erasmus, AFS Intercultural Programs, Youth for Understanding, and Rotary as tremendous resources for mobilization in support of greater cross-cultural understanding and dialogue (Himelfarb & Idriss, 2011).

Academic exchanges help contribute to the long-term elements of public diplomacy, wherein both parties and countries benefit. They provide an opportunity to expose foreign publics to a nation’s ideals and cultures and to learn from others about how to improve their own quality of life and competitiveness (Trost & Wallin, 2013). The face-to-face contact that occurs

between students and educators can help minimize stereotypes and foster intercultural communication (de Lima Jr, 2007). Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates believed the United States' top diplomatic tool was global education, that "no policy was more successful in making friends for the United States than educating international students at our colleges and universities" (Whitson, 2012). For Gates, connecting students was one of the most effective ways of building understanding across nations.

This sentiment carries over into the realm of cultural diplomacy, which is said to "reveal the soul of a nation" (Evans & Fernandez, 2018, p. 198). The United States and other nations employ various cultural exchange programs to promote international alliances and friendships. Former Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Evan Ryan suggested that cultural diplomacy is part of a long-term investment strategy. She argued that exchange is a foundational part of building relationships between people and states, and although the benefits may not be seen for years, they undoubtedly exist (Asia Society Policy Institute, 2016).

This type of work can be seen as especially important during times of tragedy or an intercultural crisis; for example, former Senator Richard Lugar argued that "it was very important in the aftermath of the 9/11 tragedy in the United States to get to know students in Muslim countries and for them to know us" (Comp, 2012, para 1). Dr. Emil Constantinescu, professor and former President of Romania, describes cultural diplomacy as a "course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, or promote national interests" (Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.). From a different perspective, Zhuge Liang, an ancient Chinese military advisor, told a general that even in war, "above all else

is culture” – a useful axiom for understanding the practice and place of cultural diplomacy in a nation’s political life” (U.S. Department of State, 2005, para 105).

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. State Department offers many culture-oriented programs. For example, CultureConnect brings cultural figures such as Yo-Yo Ma, Wynton Marsalis, and Frank McCourt to foreign audiences to promote cross-cultural understanding; the Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation helps countries preserve historic sites and manuscripts, museum collections, and traditional forms of music, dance, and language; the International Partnerships Among Museums program forms connections between museums in this U.S. and abroad; the Jazz Ambassadors program sends quartets on four-to-six-week tours abroad, featuring performances, workshops, and demonstrations (U.S. Department of State, 2005).

Similarly, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) brings roughly 5,000 leaders from other countries to the U.S. to meet with experts and peers in their areas of specialization and explore areas of personal interest (“IVLP Experience,” n.d.). In promotion of citizen diplomacy, IVLP is the premier professional exchange program in the U.S. in which many distinguished foreign nationals have participated over the years, including more than 200 current and former chiefs of state.

The Consultation on People-to-People Exchange initiative (CPE) is one of the three major pillars that informs the development of bilateral relations between the U.S. and China. Created to deepen ties between citizens of each nation, CPE engages more than 27 million American and Chinese participants in activities, including student exchanges, cultural performances, think tank dialogues, and sports. The aim is to foster connection through culture,

education, science, technology, sports, women's issues, and health (U.S.-China Consultation on People-to-People Exchange, 2016).

One of the earliest examples of a creativity-based exchange was the United States' jazz diplomacy, which was practiced in the Soviet Union and other regions around the world from 1954 to 1968. In an effort to ease political tensions during the Cold War, the government funded well-known jazz artists, such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, to perform and engage with audiences abroad to influence perceptions of the U.S. and democracy (Davenport, 2013).

Ogawa (2013) shares the impact of a more recent theater workshop held by Japanese theatrical art experts for conflict-affected youth in Banda Aceh. According to the facilitator, the workshop lessened the sense of isolation experienced by the Acehnese and allowed the children, in particular, to embrace hope for the future. As a result, the children became more willing to work within and for the identity of their villages and Aceh as a whole (Ogawa, 2013).

Sports diplomacy is also a rapidly growing field. Beyond the realm of practice, wherein organizations like PeacePlayers, Soccer Without Borders, and Coaches Across Continents use sport as a catalyst for forging social bonds between individuals and communities, the emerging Sport, Development, and Peace field of study provides concepts that have already been utilized by international and local governmental and nongovernmental institutions, including the United Nations and The Commonwealth Secretariat. Applied commonly to post-trauma situations and contexts working towards socioeconomic reconstruction, the aim is to use sport as a mediator between cultures and diffuse civic conflict (Hoglund & Sundberg, 2008).

Limitations

In addition to the ample benefits associated with in-person exchange programs, there are downsides and limitations. A major limitation deals with the composition of participants. First,

the programs are limited in size, meaning only a set number of individuals can be active and directly impacted. As expressed by some critics, those who participate tend to be self-selected, already on the path to seeking out and exploring diverse cultures. Second, due to the high cost of many programs, participation is often restricted to those with financial means. Arguably, the participants who could benefit most from exchange experiences are unable to partake; there is a need, therefore, to introduce larger numbers and more diverse groups of people to the lessons of cross-cultural dialogues. Another limitation is representation, or the notion that many programs are geographically concentrated and lack presence in areas that most need deeper understanding and alliance-building. From a communication perspective, there is also a concern that certain government-sponsored cultural exchanges limit or control communications through reliance on one-way propaganda (Ogawa, 2013). And finally, in terms of measuring the impact or success of these programs, it is difficult to quantify results beyond anecdotal evidence (Zaharna, 2008; Albro, 2013).

Considering these limitations, one observable way diplomacy could harness digitalization may be through its management of exchange programs. The United States Institute of Peace emphasizes the need to revitalize international exchanges, which they deem a core pillar of public diplomacy strategy. They highlight the need for "exchange 2.0 initiatives," technology-enabled programs embedded in curricula and with a cross-cultural educational purpose, arguing that such advancements will increase the overall experience as well as the diversity and number of participants (Himelfarb & Idriss, 2011).

By exploiting technology in effective ways, exchanges – or parts of exchange programs – could become virtual and remove the limitations of traditional programs. For example, virtual exchanges should be more scalable, cost-effective, and sustainable than traditional exchanges.

Additionally, virtual exchanges may invite more expansive applicant pools and offer new methods for student preparation, new methods to facilitate partnerships with key institutions abroad, and the ability to extend relationships made during exchanges through ongoing, sustained contact (Himelfarb & Idriss, 2011). Through advancements in communication technologies, nations could host international exchanges focused on fields like entrepreneurship, science, and technology (Walker & Gaynor, 2014), thereby reaping the awards of the information economy.

Many organizations are experimenting with virtual programming, either relying fully on digital exchange or balancing between the digital and in-person. The Youth for Understanding (YFU) Virtual Exchange Initiative aims to reinvent the intercultural exchange for the new age. Historically, the organization facilitated in-person exchanges for students, but in an effort to reach a wider audience and provide more accessible opportunities, YFU seeks to build cross-cultural bridges of understanding among individuals who might typically never travel past the borders of their home communities (“About Virtual Exchange,” n.d.). The virtual exchange provides an alternative to the physical exchange and enables participants to participate in intercultural dialogue and develop global competencies and 21st century skills.

The World Lens Foundation, in which I am involved, uses visual storytelling to help contribute to the next generation of globally-minded citizens. During a year-long season, students from different nations interact weekly through an online classroom in which they interact through stories and photographs from a shared lesson that centers on a social theme, such as empathy, conflict-resolution, or environmental sustainability. At the end of the season, students apply to participate in a Leadership Summit, where they can meet face-to-face and deepen their cross-cultural collaboration.

As noted by Zaharna et al. (2013), new media hold great promise for providing platforms through which relational public diplomacy can be practiced. Similarly, Fitzpatrick (2011) claims that the focus on people-to-people relationships is expanding, and with this comes novel opportunities for leveraging new media tools, increasing educational opportunities for people abroad, creating opportunities for interactions through educational and cultural programs and building relationships with future foreign leaders. Riordan (2004) believes that while more traditional programs for advancing diplomacy may be effective with political elites (e.g., government-sponsored conferences and seminars), new technology offers easier and more affordable techniques for building relationships for all agents of diplomacy. Scholars acknowledge the promise of new media and technology, but the question of how to effectively incorporate the corresponding tools and practices remains largely unexplored.

Conclusion

The new public diplomacy faces several challenges and opportunities. Of these, the ones that emerge as being most relevant to this dissertation are the role of non-state actors, the role of relationship-centric frameworks, and the role of technology and media in diplomatic efforts. Through this literature review, it can be speculated that a closer investigation, particularly of technology and media, might reveal insights on how these issues impact the notion of connection within diplomacy. While the field boasts a rich history of connection-making, there is a shortage of research that thoroughly examines the nuanced nature of connection, including an understanding of the components that foster and detract from meaningful connection.

With this in mind, a rational pivot into another industry can be made. Of particular interest is the realm of 21st century media. In contrast to public diplomacy, which appears in need of innovation, certain facets of media seem to be in this space already. Considered “ever-

changing” (Graber & Dunaway, 2017) and fluid, the media landscape appears steadily abuzz with new opportunities for engaging with content and theorizing its place in society.

As expressed by Appadurai (1996), electronic media has transformed the field of mass mediation and offers new resources and disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds. Accordingly, the field of public diplomacy might look for new opportunities to expand its imagined reach and future. Interestingly, when considering the triad of public diplomacy issues presented here, the importance of non-state actors, the turn to relationship-centric paradigms, and the use of media and technology, an important question arises: given that these represent the most pressing concerns of contemporary public diplomacy, might they also represent a possible solution? Can an approach that embodies and promotes these issues help optimize the field of public diplomacy today?

Questions abound, including – how can diplomacy expand its parameters for new media beyond social media use? How might non-state actors aid in the use of technology? What can diplomats learn from organizations that prioritize relationships and relationship-centric paradigms? How might practitioners collaborate to create a new type of diplomatic exchange through immersive media? With these inquiries in mind, the turn to media is a natural fit.

CHAPTER THREE:

21ST CENTURY MEDIA

Snapshot and Overview

“There are two tracks or visions – the first being for curation, which is an endless track of refinement and improvement; and the second, I think less important but still interesting one is using technology to connect us across different social spaces as opposed to just connect us to people we already know as individual consumers. How do we incorporate technology into the social spaces in a way that we’ve incorporated learning into the social spaces?” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018)

This chapter contextualizes 21st century media, a broad title that captures traditional mass media, and digital media, and explores the affordances and applications relevant to its intersection with public diplomacy. Although the case under study, Portals, is a unique immersive application, it is necessary to survey the wider media landscape from which it emerged. By recognizing the diversity of contemporary media projects, Portals will be optimally positioned for a thorough investigation, as seen through a comparative lens.

First, this chapter discusses a framework for understanding 21st century media as the umbrella term under which “new media,” “digital media,” “emerging media,” and other related concepts fall, and the qualities that set them apart from more traditional media.

Second, the concept of “technological affordances” is explored, focusing specifically on three levels of engagement offered by 21st century media: involvement, immersion, and presence.

Third, several examples of 21st century media will be described. These include augmented, virtual, and hybrid applications that are positioned – or that could be positioned – as tools for social change and public diplomacy.

Fourth, to provide thematic guidelines and support, the concepts of Impact Storytelling, PeaceTech and changemaking through media will be lightly explored, with an emphasis on common themes and objectives.

Contextualizing 21st Century Media

In “A new understanding of ‘New Media’: Online platforms as digital mediums” (2017), McMullen advocates for the study of new platforms – their social adoption and uses, cultural practices, implications and effects – to better understand the present and more effectively guide the future. The motivation is similar here: to understand society more astutely through the careful investigation of new media. Akin to previous innovations, the adoption rates of new media often precede adequate public understanding. For both makers and users, an awareness of potential consequences often remains unknown in the infancy of a new medium (and sometimes through its evolution).

This reality highlights two important points in the mission to contextualize 21st century media: rapid rates of innovation make it difficult to establish cohesion within the intricacies of the media field and the greater societal impacts (e.g., cultural, social, economic and political) of new media are not yet understood. The goal then is one of idealism and irony: to simultaneously stay current with a working definition so that practitioners and scholars can advance within the same framework and to resist attachment to an exclusive definition so as not to preclude further innovation. This chapter aims to present a working definition of 21st century media that can assist in understanding the contemporary media field and, specifically, the case of Portals.

Definition

For many, traditional media refers to any medium prior to digital media, a concept synonymous with popular media from the 20th century (Bryant & Thompson, 2002; Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2017; Manovich, 2002), to include mass media such as print (e.g., newspapers, magazines) and broadcast (e.g., radio, television), as well as books and advertisements (Campbell et al., 2017). Typically distributed through centralized institutions with several gatekeepers, traditional media relies heavily on one-way channels/technologies to communicate with generally anonymous audiences (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2017; Peterson, 2008).

From Traditional Media to New Media

Ample terms help distinguish traditional media from what exists today, including “new media” (Everett & Caldwell, 2003; Zuckerman, 2013; Manovich, 2002); “emerging media” (Smith, 2015; Kawamoto, 2003; Hyer, Herrmann, & Kelly, 2017); “immersive media” (Galloso, Feijóo, & Asunción Santamaría, 2015; Aronson-Rath, Owen, Milward, & Pitt, 2015); “participatory media” (Spurgeon, 2015; Jenkins, 2006; Deuze, 2006); and “interactive media” (Hufp, 2015). While these terms vary, they share similar characteristics. The following categorization focuses on three traits in particular: emerging, digital, and interactive.

Emerging Media

As early as 1991, Neuman offered foretelling insights about the impact of emerging media. Specifically, he predicted they would alter the meaning of geographic distance, increase the volume and speed of communications, allow for more channels of information flow, enable interactive communications, provide more control for individual users, allow forms of communication previously separate to overlap and interconnect, and increasingly displace

general-interest mass-audience media with more specialized narrow-audience media (Smith, 2015; Neuman, 1991).

Today, the term “emerging media” appears to be at home in the private sector, inclusive of non-profit organizations and social enterprises. For example, researchers at IDEO, a global design and innovation company, identified distinct promises of different emerging media. Their work suggests the following: virtual reality has the potential to transport users to different places and give them new abilities; augmented reality integrates relevant information into the physical world and allows people to interact with hidden layers of information; digital assistance helps people access and control information and services through conversation; and ephemeral apps make it easy for people to do what they want when they want (Hyer, Herrmann, & Kelly, 2017).

Additionally, colleges and universities promote “emerging media” programs, signaling the need for and desire to study the changing landscape of contemporary media. New York University stakes its position as a leader in the field, with students and faculty who explore new communication technologies and applications that harness emerging media for art, education, entertainment, business, and human well-being. Their curriculum is inclusive of software design; game design, development, and engineering; digital photography and film; music technology; digital arts; interaction design; digital graphics; media studies; and human-computer interfaces (“Emerging Media,” 2018).

Boston University’s program aims to move “toward an understanding of emerging media, its role in communication and the human processes by which emerging media are developed, marketed, used, and inevitably shaped and reshaped by users” (“Emerging Media,” 2018). Ball State University’s Master of Arts in Emerging Media Design and Development acknowledges the challenge of achieving effective storytelling across the wide range of ever-changing

emerging media environment and teaches students how to plan, develop, deploy, and test communication designs and storytelling across digital platforms (“Master of Arts in Emerging Media Design and Development,” 2018).

Not only do these programs signify a growing institutional investment in the study and practice of emerging media, they also affirm the timeliness of such work. Aware of the pace at which the media sector innovates, universities and organizations aim to offer space to specifically examine the nascent landscape, to explore what is emerging and how it interacts with communication and society.

Digital Media

Few scholars disagree about the significance of digital media technologies as an enduring feature of the global communications landscape (Balkin, 2009; Castells, 2008; boyd, 2010; Kawamoto, 2003; Turkle, 2015; Benkler, 2006). Highlighting their transformative qualities and affordances, Everett and Caldwell state that digital media "are revolutionizing our sensory perceptions and cognitive experiences of being in the world" (2003, p. xi), suggesting that the psychology and social practices of individuals are changed by the digitalization of media. Although this process actually began with the development of computers in the 1940s (Acerbi, 2016), the real digital prevalence and cultural impact took root in the 1990s with the widespread diffusion of personal computers and the Internet (Briggs & Burke, 2009).

At the beginning of the 21st century, Manovich (2002) issued the Language of New Media and stated, “We are in the middle of a new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication” (p. 19). He opined that new media represent a convergence of two separate histories – of media technologies and digital computing – and are shaped by influences from film theory, art history, literary theory,

and computer science. In providing concrete examples, he invoked a definition put forth by the popular press, that new media are cultural objects that use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition, such as the Internet, web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs and DVDs, Virtual Reality, and computer-generated special effects (Manovich, 2002).

For Manovich, new media reflects the post-modern condition wherein “every citizen can construct her own custom lifestyle and select her ideology from a large (but not infinite) number of choices” (Manovich, 1999, p. 15); media users are offered unique and personalized choices. He outlines five criteria for new media, which will be summarized briefly here: numerical representation, which refers to how media can be described mathematically and manipulated by algorithms; modularity, which refers to how independent elements, like pixels, images, text, code, and sound can be combined to form a new media object; automation, which allows users to create or modify media objects using templates or algorithms; variability, which refers to how a new media object can exist in potentially infinite versions, unlike old media which has a more hardwired structure; and transcoding, which refers to the process of blending computer and culture, i.e., how a new media object can translate from one format to another or be adapted for display on a different device (Manovich, 2002). He warns that these criteria should be considered not absolute laws, but rather “general tendencies of a culture undergoing computerization” (p. 27). Importantly, he acknowledges the difficulty in confining “new” media to a static definition because innovation in technology and culture warrants a refinement to the terminology.

Logan (2010) defines new media as “digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing” (p. 4). He recognizes a degree of ease with its functionality, stating it is “easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved,

hyperlinked and, perhaps most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed” (p. 7). Taking an ecological viewpoint, Logan provides an assessment of McLuhan’s (1965) communication theories in the context of a new digital media ecology. Logan advocates for an ecological approach to studying new media, looking at its greater cultural and social contexts and implications, recognizing how media-based communication cuts across multiple domains, and addressing the extent to which media is impacted by identity and individual context. Scolari (2012) echoes this, similarly applying an ecology metaphor to media, stating that the media are species within an environment, interacting with each other as well as with the people who use them.

Interactive Media and Participatory Media

In recent years, interactive and participatory media have become popular notions in gaming and communication studies. Sometimes used interchangeably, these terms represent a type of affordance offered by the media, i.e., new degrees of user engagement, participation, and interactivity. Couched beside terms like connected learning, Web 2.0, the new activism, and fandom culture, interactive media permits users to participate in its creation or manipulation. According to Willis and Bowman (2003), participatory media is where the audience can play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing, and disseminating content.

Ng et al. (2017) define interactive media as the process in which the output from the media comes from the input of the users. Williams et al. (1988) explain interactivity as “the degree to which participants in the communication process have control over and can exchange roles in their mutual discourse” (p. 10). For Dyson (1993), interactivity refers to the user’s ability to develop new means of communication. Zittrain (2008) presents a similar concept called generativity, or the capacity for a technology platform or ecosystem to create, generate, or

produce new output, structure, or behavior without input from the originator of the system.

Generativity comprises four key features: leverage (the extent to which a technology modularizes and makes available routine tasks), adaptability (the space for expressivity or design), learnability, and accessibility. These definitions underscore the malleability of the technology, the availability of features that allow users to modify and/or shape their experience.

With an emphasis on the social context surrounding the technology, Jenkins (2006) explores participatory culture and the way in which new affordances of digital, networked, and mobile technologies have transformed society. He issues the following descriptors, stating participatory culture is one:

- With relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
- With strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
- With some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
- In which members believe that their contributions matter
- In which members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least, they care what other people think about what they have created) (Jenkins, 2006)

Jenkins argues that in such a culture, communities would ideally provide citizens with incentives for creative expression and active participation. The benefits, in turn, would be manifold. Among other benefits, there would be increased opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, a diversification of cultural expression, development of new and relevant skills, and the cultivation of a more empowered and inclusive conception of citizenship.

Harnessing a more technical perspective, Krueger (1977), one of the earliest researchers of virtual and augmented realities, introduced the notion of “responsive aesthetics” in certain media environments, which still holds relevance today. Interested in “exploring more interesting ways for men and machines to relate” (p. 423), Krueger explored the progression of media interactivity through his own project, named VIDEOPLACE. He predicted that media would eventually be controlled by a composition that anticipated the actions and expectations of the participant and highlighted six related observations. Of special interest here are the following three observations:

- To keep the focus on the relationships between the environment and the participants, rather than among participants, only a small number of people should be involved at a time.
- The participants should be aware of how the environment is responding to them.
- The visual responses should not be judged as art, nor the sounds as music. The only aesthetic concern is the quality of the interaction (p. 423-424).

These attributes emphasize the importance of intimacy in a technological interaction, as well as establishing a high level of consciousness among participants. Krueger’s description implies that, to have an optimal engagement with technology, one must do so within a certain environment. This idea will manifest once more in Chapter Five, where findings around the case of Portals are presented; intimacy and interaction within a curated environment are important aspects to the experience of Portals.

Parameters of 21st Century Media

In an effort to synthesize the literature above, I posit that emerging media connote a phase in the evolution of a medium; the early or nascent stage. While it is time-bound, it is also

changing, since emerging media of the 19th century looks very different from emerging media of today. Digital media appear to represent a technical definition, which relates to the use of computer technology in its form. It refers to media encoded in digital format; electronic media that works through digital codes rather than analog signals (Acerbi, 2016; Everett & Caldwell, 2003; Manovich, 2002; Scolari, 2009). This includes computers, the software needed to run them, and the movement and storage of digital information via networks and storage (hard drives, cloud services, and platforms like email, digital audio and video recordings, ebooks, blogs, instant messaging, and social media). Wimmer and Dominick (2013) include the Internet and smart media, such as phones or tablets, in this category, which serve as platforms for users to access other mass media and enable users to communicate with mass amounts of people via Tweets, text messages, and social media posts. Interactive and participatory media seem to embody a quality of engagement in their conceptions, referring to the actions and outcomes made possible through media, both in terms of content creation and consumption (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Dyson, 1993; Jenkins, 2006; Krueger, 1977; Ng, She, Matthias Baldauf, & Jeon, 2017; Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1998; Zittrain, 2006).

Furthermore, I posit that “21st century media” may be best positioned as an umbrella term, or an overarching category, under which tangential concepts fall. Capable of synonymizing with new media, I elect to use the classification of 21st century media as the media that exist within the confines of the 21st century so far, to establish temporal parameters. Since media of a certain kind will always be “new” to someone, this framing helps provide a timestamp for the technologies in discussion. As noted by Park, Jankowski, and Jones (2011), the meaning of “newness” and what is taken to be new should be challenged so as to establish broader and suggestive continuities in the history of communication. Additionally, this nomenclature gains

inspiration from Stogner's (2015) contextualization of media-enhanced immersive storytelling in the 21st century, as well as her anecdotal reflections on appropriate categorization. This chart offers a visualization of the breakdown for categorizing 21st century media:

21st Century Media		
Temporal	Technical	Social
<i>Defined by nascence or emergent quality</i>	<i>Defined by digital/electronic features</i>	<i>Defined by measures of engagement</i>
Emerging	Digital	Interactive
	Augmented, Virtual, Hybrid	Participatory
	Immersive	

Figure 4. Parameters of 21st Century Media

In contrast to traditional media, 21st century media offer increased opportunities for participation and personalization; new degrees of involvement, immersion, and presence; experimental compositions of hybridity; and the balance between machine and human touch. 21st century media contribute to the emergence of a global civil society (Castells, 2008) and create a media ecology markedly different to that of the majority of the 20th century, one that is more fragmented, democratized, and individualized (Balkin, 2004; Campbell et al., 2017; Castells, 2007; Jenkins & Deuze, 2008; Zittrain, 2008).

To synthesize the attributes of 21st century media, they contain a digital component, e.g., the use of computers and binary code (Acerbi, 2016; Manovich, 2002; Scolari, 2009); are time-bound to the 21st century from year 2000 to present day; permit a degree of interactivity with the user, allowing them to participate in the process of manipulating, creating, remixing, and appropriating content (Dyson, 1993; Jenkins, 2006); possess attributes not commonly associated with traditional media, including interactivity, demassification, and asynchronicity (Ruggiero, 2000); are designed to provide a mediated experience that seems natural, immediate, direct, and real (Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

Contemporary examples of such media, several of which will be explored at the end of this chapter, include:

- Virtual reality: an immersive, three-dimensional, computer-generated environment that is experienced through sensory stimuli (such as sights and sounds) provided by a computer; the participant becomes part of the virtual world while there and can manipulate objects and/or activities (“What is Virtual Reality?” 2017).
- Augmented reality: a live direct or indirect view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented by computer-generated sensory input (Grier et al., 2016).
- Videotelephony/video chat: the technologies for the reception and transmission of audio-visual signals by users at different locations, for communication between people in real-time, e.g., Skype or FaceTime (“Videotelephony,” 2002).
- Social Media: digital platforms upon which social interaction occurs, e.g., websites for social networking and microblogging like Facebook and Twitter (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013).

Affordances Related to Connection

New technologies offer new affordances and new possibilities for action by individual users (Evans, Pearce, Vitak, & Treem, 2017). This section highlights key affordances of 21st century media that relate to connection, that elicit an emotional and/or social experience.

Attention will be paid to three broad concepts – involvement, immersion, and presence – and some of the specific feelings and/or behaviors they afford.

Understanding Affordance

Originally introduced by Gibson (1979) in the field of psychology, the concept of affordances remains somewhat elusive in communication studies (Boyle & Cook, 2004; Evans et al., 2017). Gibson used the term to explain how the inherent values of things and/or an environment could be perceived and acted upon. Noting a complementary relationship between the animal and the environment, Gibson believed affordances were relational, limited by physical properties of an object, but actualized in relationship with the user (Gibson, 1979; Hopkins, 2016). He viewed an affordance as what is offered, provided, or furnished by an object; a way to explain how information links to the action possibilities offered by an environment. Gibson suggested that an affordance extends beyond the properties of an environment and is just as much a fact of the environment as a fact of behavior.

In recent years, communication and media scholars have adopted Gibson's notion of affordances. In this context, affordance permits a middle ground between technological determinism and social construction, allowing researchers to address the materiality/functions of technology (e.g., features, qualities) while also acknowledging that such functions are subsumed by the actions of users (Nagy & Neff, 2015). Hogan (2009) suggests that technology affords social action, which can be considered "a nondeterministic way out of these two polar interpretations of technology use" (p. 24).

Hutchby (2001) defines affordances as the interchange between the essential properties of a technology and its socially determined uses, which are based entirely on the interpretation of the individual using the technology. He argues that affordances, or "possibilities," are open to interpretation and negotiation; that the options for use are not infinite, yet they are socially mediated. His four primary points shed light on the concept: there are many different types of affordances that all may interact with each other; affordances are functional and part of the

relational aspect of an object's physical presence in the world; objects and their values can be tied in with complex concepts and rules that govern their use; and affordances can derive from the natural features of an artifact's materiality and can be designed into the artifact (Hutchby, 2001).

Nagy and Neff (2015) reconstruct the term affordance and introduce the theory of "imagined affordance" to holistically address the material, the mediated, and the emotional aspects of human–technology interaction (p. 2). The scholars offer three distinct ways to understand the concept, of which the latter two are especially valuable here. First, they note that communication scholars have inappropriately imagined a consensus around the term "affordance," when in fact there are ambiguities and differences in definition. Second, they refer to how an imagined affordance evokes the imagination of both media users and designers, setting expectations for technology that may not be realized through conscious, rational knowledge, but will be concretized or materialized through socio-technical systems. This borrows from a psychology-based definition of affordance and implies that affordances are, in large part, imagined by users. And third, the framing of imagined intends to challenge the use of affordance as something that is static, and instead emphasize how an affordance is very much dependent upon humans and their actions (Nagy & Neff, 2015).

boyd (2010) explores affordances when she maps out the architecture of networked publics. She demonstrates the nuanced nature of affordances and argues that they do not dictate the behavior of media users but rather configure an environment that shapes the overall engagement of users. According to boyd, the architecture of a networked public, which is simultaneously 1) the space constructed through networked technologies and 2) the imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice, is

formed by its affordances. She implies that social media users, or participants, are implicitly and explicitly contending with affordances as a central part of their experience; they are learning to work within the limits and possibilities of mediated architecture.

Although boyd's (2010) analysis looks specifically at the role of social networking sites, it offers valuable lessons to other examples of 21st century media. She believes understanding the complexities of affordances will help elucidate the patterns of social practices within a particular public. Similarly, Evans et al. (2017) believe that recognizing the multidimensionality and relational nature of affordances can help researchers balance concerns with the social and material influences on technology use and temper overly deterministic logic.

In these definitions is an implicit understanding that for an action to be performed, the individual using the technology must possess a certain level of awareness about the many ways to use the properties of her environment. All technology has certain functions, but the functions are only experienced when users are aware of their existence and know how to use them. Affordances shape the network or environment of a medium, but the catalyst for action and interactivity is the individual within that environment. The individual may be aware of the technological features of the medium, but she is not necessarily aware of the affordances, or what is possible through the use of the technological qualities. Aptly stated by Hyer et al. (2017), "the promise of new technology has always been to expand our abilities as humans – enabling us to do things we weren't able to do before. It's about looking beyond what the technology itself can do, toward what it enables us to do" (para 19). As will be explored throughout this research, 21st century media offers new affordances that change expectations about what is possible and what should be feared.

Affordances in Focus: Involvement, Immersion, Presence

With 21st century media, the stimuli prompted by technological properties create an environment that appears to be more conducive to involvement and, consequently, immersion and presence. The more interactive the media, the less likely it is that the level of involvement is dependent on the psychological state of the user, such as the ability to post a comment on a Facebook wall, the ability to “like” a status, or the ability to chat in real-time with someone in a different part of the world. With virtual, augmented, and hybrid reality applications, however, the features become technically more complex, and users can engage with them more seamlessly.

The Scale of Engagement

Involvement, immersion, and presence are three salient, interrelated, affordances in discussions of 21st century media. While each is independently explored in scholarship, Witmer and Singer (1998) articulate a solid and sensible way to understand them as a spectrum or progression. Involvement is the most basic feeling of engagement with a medium; immersion represents the next step as a more visceral, intimate, all-encompassing type of involvement; and presence implies the most extreme case, creating a feeling of being entirely there, actually in the world created by the medium.



Figure 5. Scale of Engagement

As argued by Evans et al. (2017), simply identifying or listing the purported affordances of a technology limits the theoretical value and empirical space of studying technology. They instead call for a wider breadth of analysis and “questions that cut across features and outcomes” (p. 46). Essentially, the study must expand to include the social structures and behaviors created

in conjunction with, or shaped by, the technical features. The technology must be examined, but so too – and more importantly – must the world surrounding the technology.

Involvement

Feelings of involvement can be experienced by users of all media, such as books, music, movies, or video games. Expressed by Supreme Court Justice Richard Posner in the 2011 case *Brown v. Entertainment Merchants Association*, “all literature...is interactive. The better it is, the more interactive” (*Brown, Governor of California, et al. v Entertainment Merchants Association et al.*, 2011), and new media provide a greater degree of interactivity. Recent scholarship and anecdotal evidence affirm this, suggesting that the technical features of 21st century media permit users more sustained and intense feelings of involvement. Likened to the term “interactivity” or “investment,” involvement refers to the extent a user feels wrapped-up, engaged with, or involved, in a medium.

The definition of involvement has remained relatively static over time, but the technical factors that contribute to involvement, as it pertains to media, have changed. Krugman (1971), who was perhaps most well-known for his research on the impact of television watching, defined involvement as taking place vis-à-vis a media stimulus that requires the respondent to attend to both internal and external stimuli. This means that the viewer must do two jobs at once, both paying attention to the stimulus on page or screen and to the reaction inside her head. For Krugman, involvement was determined by “the number of personal connections between the stimulus and the viewer, the number of thoughts which came spontaneously to mind during exposure and which linked something in the content of the stimulus to something in the content of the viewer's own life (p. 122). This allusion to psychological multitasking is important – it

reveals the interconnected relationship of the media and its user and underscores the significance of the user's emotional state.

For Witmer and Singer (2001), involvement refers to “a psychological state experienced as a consequence of focusing one's energy and attention on a coherent set of stimuli or meaningfully related activities and events” (p. 226); it depends on the degree of significance or meaning the individual attributes to the stimuli, activities, or events. Their theorization implies that at the involvement stage, the psychology of the individual user is of utmost importance. If a user is preoccupied with personal problems, she will consequently be less involved with the medium. Involvement can occur in most environments, but the amount a user feels will depend upon how well the activities within the virtual world can keep the user's attention (Witmer & Singer, 1998).

In a study that explored how an interactive virtual reality environment affected pain cognitions and pain-related measures, researchers concluded that if patients felt barriers to involvement, they could not experience relevant emotions and processes necessary for most psychological treatments (Gutierrez-Maldonado, Gutierrez-Martinez, Loreto, Peñaloza, & Nieto, 2010). In other words, the state of involvement was precursory to the overall experience of emotions and change in psychology.

Immersion

An immersive experience implies a holistic and intensive involvement, focused on one thing to the exclusion of all others. Witmer and Singer define immersion as “a psychological state characterized by perceiving oneself to be enveloped by, included in, and interacting with an environment that provides a continuous stream of stimuli and experiences” (p. 227). They identify the following as factors that promote immersion: the ease of interaction, image realism,

duration of immersion, social factors within the immersion, internal factors unique to the user, and system factors such as equipment sophistication, isolation from the physical environment, perception of self-inclusion in the virtual environment, natural modes of interaction and control, and perception of self-movement (Witmer & Singer, 1998).

Similarly, for Hardee and McHahan (2017), immersion depends on perceiving oneself as a part of the stimulus flow, as part of the environment being experienced. Though their articulation is not as robust or comprehensive as Witmer's and Singer's, they do issue a worthwhile point – that the fundamentals of immersion include aspects of the user's experience, such as body ownership, engagement, and emotion.

For immersion to occur, a user must perceive she is interacting directly with the environment, not remotely or indirectly (Witmer & Singer, 1998). Mestre (2005) believes immersion can be achieved by removing as many real-world sensations as possible and substituting these with the sensations corresponding to the virtual environment. In essence, the feeling arises from the multi-modal nature of the perceptual senses, and also to the interactive aspects of a virtual reality experience.

Some scholars issue a clear distinction between immersion and presence. Many argue that immersion is an objective, technology-related, description (Mestre, 2005; Slater, 1997; Bystrom, Barfield, & Hendrix, 1999), a product of technology that facilitates the production of multimodal sensory “input” to the user (Slater, Linakis, Usoh, & Cooper, 1996), while presence is the psychological, perceptual, and cognitive consequence of immersion. Presence is thought of as the psychological perception of "being in" or "existing in" the virtual environment (VE) in which one is immersed (Heeter, 1992; Draper, Kaber, & Usher, 1998; Sheridan, 1992).

Presence

Through the experience of immersion, the sensation of presence is made possible (Mestre 2005; Ijsselstein & Riva, 2003). Presence is a complex, multifaceted, concept that includes measures of how involved an individual becomes in a situation or environment and how much control the individual has within that environment (Witmer & Singer, 1998). Formed through an interplay of raw multi-sensory data and various cognitive processes, presence refers to the subjective experience of “being” in one place (virtual/simulated space) while physically situated in another (non-virtual space/actual physical location). It implies that an individual is fully present in a virtual environment while transiently unaware of her real location and surroundings and of the technology that delivers virtual input to her senses (Vorderer et al., 2004; Wirth et al., 2007). Presence theory suggests that when feeling a sense of “being there” in a virtual environment, the same reactions, attitudes, and behaviors should be expected as if the user were in a real, non-virtual, environment (Beck, Fishwick, Kamhawi, Coffey, & Henderson, 2011; Heeter, 1992; Lessiter, Freeman, Keogh, & Davidoff, 2001; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Usoh & Slater, 1995; Witmer & Singer, 1998).

For Witmer and Singer (1998), presence depends on four factors – control factors, sensory factors, distraction factors, and realism factors – and varies as a function of individual differences and the characteristics of the virtual environment. They argue that the ability to achieve presence ties to both the psychological state of the user and the environment in which she interacts; it arises when the technology enables, not forces or artificially creates, agency. Lombart (2000) explains presence as a psychological state or the ability to have a subjective perception in which a part or a totality of the individual’s perception fails to recognize the role of technology at the time of the virtual experience; the technology essentially fades into the background as the person more fully understands her position in the virtual environment.

Lombard and Ditton (1997) describe presence as the perceptual illusion of nonmediation, indicating that the phenomenon involves continuous (real time) responses of the human sensory, cognitive, and affective processing systems to objects and entities in a person's environment. The illusion of nonmediation is experienced when the individual fails to perceive or acknowledge the existence of a medium and responds as if the medium were not there. It refers to a level of experience in which the technology and the external physical environment disappear from the user's awareness.

Factors that Affect Presence

Presence occurs from a mixture of interactions between sensory stimulation, environmental factors that encourage involvement and enable immersion, and internal psychological tendencies (Witmer & Singer, 1998). The more natural the interaction in the virtual environment is, the more likely it is that immersion and, consequently, presence will be experienced.

The capability for a technology to function as seamless, fluid, and organic contributes to a user's ability to feel presence. When the medium presents the user with social cues that are normally reserved for human-to-human interaction (such as hand motions, gestures, or conversation), the user is more likely to lose herself in the experience; she will then deem the medium as an independent social entity, a medium transformed. In this, some of the users' perceptions, thought processes, and emotional responses are similar or identical to those employed in real-life interactions; the psychological effects within the virtual environment are potentially as diverse as the psychological effects generated by non-mediated social interaction (Lombard & Ditton, 1997).

To enhance presence, a technology must minimize outside distractions and increase active participation through perceived control over events in the virtual environment; the user must have the ability to learn and perform without obstruction (Witmer & Singer, 1998). Furthermore, scholarship suggests that the greater the number of human senses for which a medium provides stimulation, the greater the capability of the medium to produce presence (Anderson & Casey, 1997; Barfield & Weghorst, 1993; Kim, 1996; Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976; Steuer, 1995). Therefore, media that provide both audio and visual stimuli can be assumed to produce a greater sense of presence than media that provide only audio or only visual stimuli. Accordingly, film and television should more easily produce presence than radio and/or literature (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976). In general, the visual and aural senses dominate perception and are most often identified with presence (Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Short et al., 1976).

Different Types of Presence

Heeter (1992) presents three types of presence: environmental presence, or the extent to which a virtual environment responds to its user's actions and reactions; personal presence, which corresponds to the feelings of being present in a virtual environment, as well as to the reasons invoked by the individual to explain such feelings (i.e., the emotional, reflective, response); and social presence, the type that exists when many people co-exist in the same virtual environment. The existence of others contributes to the overall perception that the environment truly "exists," thereby contributing to a stronger sense of presence.

Social presence resembles shared space presence, a "we are together" feeling found in video conferencing as well as virtual reality, literature has found. Muhlbach, Bocker, and Prussog (1995) defined telepresence in video communications as "the degree to which participants of a telemeeting get the impression of sharing space with interlocutors who are at a

remote physical site” (p. 301). They measured this by asking participants to report the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements such as “[It felt] as if we were all in the same room” and “[It felt] like a real face-to-face meeting” (p. 301). Advocates of immersive media suggest that this type of presence is one of its greatest potentialities; that the media may serve as a virtual gathering place in which people from around the block or around the world will be able to gather in a shared virtual space that is different from any of the individuals' “real” environments (Lanier & Biocca, 1992).

Argyle and Dean (1965) relate presence to social richness, referring to how a medium is perceived by users as sociable, warm, sensitive, personal, or intimate when used to interact with other people. This intimacy varies due to factors such as physical proximity, eye contact, type of conversation topic, amount of smiling, posture and arm position, trunk and body orientation, gestures, facial expressions, body relations, touching, laughter, speech duration, voice quality, laughter, olfactory cues, and other behaviors that help optimize connection (Argyle & Dean, 1965; Lombard & Ditton, 1997; Williams & Mehrabian, 1969). This finding underscores the importance of intimacy and immediacy, two popular concepts in literature on interpersonal communication and computer-mediated communication.

A related concept is that of affective presence, as described by Boehner, Sengers, and Gay (2005) in their research on interactive museum experiences and immersive storytelling techniques. They state that affective presence “incorporates the ineffable but inescapable qualities of lived experience including emotions, spirituality, social communion, and creative inspiration” (p. 81). Influenced by constructionist approaches, which suggest that knowledge and meaning are created through social action and interaction, they propose a new perspective on experience design. Affective computing, whether for augmented reality or virtual reality, should

“approach emotions not as some ‘thing’ to be transferred and decoded but as an activity of jointly constructed meaning-making” (p. 80); technology systems could then be used for reflecting, enhancing, and evoking non-formalizable aspects of experience, or affective presence.

The authors are part of an international consortium to develop theories, strategies, and methods for affective presence and the role of active interpretation in experience, which has led to design practices that encourage reflection and meaning-making. A relevant example of this includes the research of Gaver, Beaver, and Benford (2003) on ambiguity, exaggeration, and defamiliarization in human-computer interaction. Gaver et al. demonstrate how ambiguity in systems can entice and intrigue users, allowing them to project their own meanings and interpretations. Exaggeration in design features and style can raise issues around variable constructions and uses of technology. And defamiliarization, or taking objects out of context, proves useful for opening-up, or expanding, the design space.

Riva et al. (2007) similarly analyzed the possibility of using virtual reality as an affective medium, one able to elicit different emotions through interaction with its content. Researchers used three virtual environments with the same structure and layout but with different aesthetic manipulations of sound, music, shadows, lights, and textures. Their results suggest that virtual reality can function as an effective mood induction medium and that presence is influenced by both the technological features (graphic realism, display dimension, etc.) and emotional characteristics of the experience.

Ferderer (2018), whose research on Portals helped refine this dissertation’s case research, explores the role of affect in his work. Pulling from several interpretations, he most closely follows a Spinozan-Deleuzian notion of affect as an emergent quality, an experience not defined by its form, organs, or functions, but rather as moments of speed, slowness, momentum, and rest

(Deleuze, 1988). This perspective attends to the “emergent intensities between and amongst bodies and other bodies, between bodies and things” (Ferderer, 2018, p. 4) that occur before intensities are actually acknowledged as emotions. Echoing the ideas of Massumi (2002), Ferderer suggests that the autonomy of affect lies in its openness, the degree to which it escapes confinement of a particular body and optimizes the potential for vitality and interaction. The presence then, occurs through the raw and immediate affect exchanged between users of, or participants in, technology.

While it can be difficult to measure presence, common approaches are generally followed: post-test questionnaires, rating scales that assess subjective presence experience (Witmer & Singer, 1998), and continuous monitoring of physiological bodily changes experienced throughout exposure to the virtual environment, e.g., changes in heart rate, skin conductance, respiration rate, and peripheral skin temperature (Baumgartner, Esslen, & Jancke, 2006). Observable physical activity during a virtual experience, such as changes in posture in response to spatial cues and full-body movement is also considered an indicator of presence (Ijsselstein, de Ridder, & Freeman, 2000). An alternative strategy is based on identifying “breaks in presence,” which occur when users noticeably disengage from the virtual display in response to an external or internal stimulus (Slater & Steed, 2000).

In summary, involvement, immersion, and presence are largely shaped by two simultaneous forces: the technical features of a medium and the psychosocial state of its participant, including her willingness and ability to stay focused and engaged. These forces influence each other; for example, if a user feels distracted or overwhelmed, and the technical properties do nothing to mitigate/overcome that, the capacity for presence will be impeded. If, on the contrary, a user feels excited and safe, and the technical properties enhance her level of

comfort and involvement, she will be positioned nicely to experience presence. And when this happens, a wide range of emotional and affective responses can occur. Considering this, I turn to an industry overview, in order to more concretely explore how these affordances intersect with public diplomacy initiatives and to what extent contemporary media applications could be useful in diplomatic efforts.

Industry Overview: Concepts and Initiatives Related to Connection

Armed with more insight into the scale of engagement – involvement, immersion, and presence – it is worth exploring if and to what extent new applications of media strive to capitalize on the affective possibilities of such affordances. Scholars and practitioners in the field appear motivated by questions that suggest untapped potential with immersive technology: How can people use virtual reality to change the minds of important policy makers and politicians (Milk, 2015; Fink, Zagoria, Drye, & Warren, 2017)? How can cities utilize augmented reality to revitalize a community (Stokes, Dols, & Hill, 2018; Devlin, 2017)? How can virtual reality contribute to peacekeeping in volatile conflict zones (Byrne, 2015; Education, Government, Nonprofit, 2017)? These inquiries reveal a shared ambition to use technology for productive change. Two trends in particular capture such objectives: Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech, recent names for categories of mediamaking that prioritize social justice and positive social values.

To dive deeper into this media arena, this section provides an overview of Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech, as well as several contemporary projects and initiatives that use immersive media for the betterment of humanity. These examples were selected based on research, consultation with various mediamakers and media entities, and sources within my personal network whose experience permits them to speak to the “pulse” of the industry. Though

not explicitly positioned in the field of public diplomacy, these trends and applications offer valuable lessons.

Impact Storytelling

While many different types of stories and storytelling have impact, this research demarcates an explicit “Impact Storytelling” that considers the intentionality and results-oriented production by mediamakers. Parameters are offered here, but the term should be considered fluid and evolving, with myriad players in the industry continuing to contribute to its meaning.

Impact Storytelling reveres the union of art and impact and explores to what extent spaces or environments for storytelling can influence and inspire new perspectives (Napoli & Norman Lear Center, 2014). Leveraging everything from engagement campaigns and grassroots organizing to the cultivation of community and corporate partners, strategies for impact often strive to raise public awareness or change the conversation around a particular set of issues. Though the field currently focuses primarily on documentaries as instruments for social, political, and legal change, work is increasingly being done on new iterations of 21st century media, such as virtual and augmented reality.

Different from outcomes, which refer to immediate and short-term effects like educating, engaging, and mobilizing target audiences (Napoli & Norman Lear Center, 2014), and distinct from effects, which often have strong micro orientations (Napoli & Norman Lear Center, 2014), the concept of impact extends further. Its scope is macro, inclusive of individual changes in attitudes, behaviors, cognitions, and beliefs, but also of broader systemic swings at the organizational level. Impact is concerned with more lasting change; long-term, far-reaching transformations (Harmony Institute, 2013; Inagaki, 2007; Napoli & Norman Lear Center, 2014), like paradigmatic shifts in behavior, policies, and relations within the public sphere.

The notion of Impact Storytelling refers to the capacity for a narrative – whether delivered through film or a virtual environment – to transcend beyond its original form and incite positive change. It explores the capacity for media to evoke empathy and encourage the practice of perspective-taking. With Impact Storytelling, the concern is not about the media product, it is about the wider social effects of the process and consumption of the media product; the mediamakers are often motivated by a social value perspective, which accounts for the extent to which media improve the well-being of individuals and communities, social capital, and the environment (Eurodiaconia, 2014).

Several notable entities are paving the way in the mission to concretize media impact, such as the Gates Foundation, the Harmony Institute, the Knight Foundation, the Norman Lear Center, the Pew Research Center, and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism. Additionally, colleges and universities have developed likeminded academic programs, such as Georgetown University's Center for Impact Communication and Certificate in Social Impact Storytelling, American University's Center for Media and Social Impact, and the University of Pennsylvania's Executive Program for Social Impact Strategy. Relatedly, many governmental and non-governmental institutions produce criteria for assessing social impact. In an effort to identify the best practices and approaches for leading change, the social-sector works to devise methods for increasing the value of programs to the people they serve. Some sources from this area include literature issued by the World Bank, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and the Wallace Foundation.

This trend reveals important changes in the media landscape. First, while the role of the mediamaker has always mattered to some degree, it appears to carry a different, arguably more significant, weight today. Similar to the increasing power of corporate social responsibility in the

business world, socially responsible artists are gaining authority and credibility. There is a new consciousness around the power of storytelling, which provides mediamakers and consumers with a new sense of responsibility. Intentionality, concerns of consequence and desired social impact motivate many media projects, and accordingly, transparency and visibility are demanded from audiences/consumers. In some ways, this resembles the conversations about non-state or civic actors in public diplomacy. No longer reserved for a select few, the ability to cause real, tangible change broadens – so, the filmmaker, app-creator, or everyday citizen can now make impact; she can be an agent for change, perceived by herself and others as a diplomat or impact storyteller.

Second, the field becomes more enticing and accessible for other industries. Whether driven by altruistic or superficial reasons, more companies and leaders are capitalizing on the network of media for good to complement or advance their own work.

PeaceTech

In 2014, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) created an entity called the PeaceTech Lab, which works at the intersection of technology, media, and data to tackle common drivers of global conflict, such as inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions, gender violence, and land disputes. Recognizing that the spread of technology is producing a transformation in conflict management and peacebuilding, the lab is a collaborative space in which experts from these different sectors, alongside fellows from the conflict zones themselves, “imagine, develop, and deploy new tools for the field” (United States Institute of Peace, 2018, para 1). They engage people in early warning and response strategies and run workshops to help empower peacebuilders with low-cost, accessible technology (Byrne, 2015). Aiming to create a

more deliberate model that incorporates actors from many industries, the lab focuses on three goals of peacebuilding:

- Technology: Developing technology tools that are customized to meet the needs of citizens and organizations working for peace and positive social change in conflict zones around the world.
- Media: Producing curriculum-based radio, television, and other multimedia content to inspire changes in attitudes and behavior.
- Data: Using new methods of data collection, analysis, and visualization to improve peacebuilders' decision-making and collaboration capabilities (United States Institute of Peace, 2018).

To challenge the traditional top-down strategy for peace-building, PeaceTech foregrounds bottom-up activity. As stated by USIP Chairman Steve Hadley, "Peace is a problem that you need to solve from the bottom up, the top down, and the inside out. Everyone has to play in this" (Gallagher, 2018). PeaceTech focuses on the local people and communities who are most impacted by conflict and experiments with technological solutions to increase their ability to access information, engage in dialogue with others, develop and distribute solutions, and practice large-scale collaborative problem-solving.

PeaceTech aims to harness the humane and beneficial uses of technology. Concerned that "technologies that Silicon Valley has created are being exploited by people that benefit from conflict and repression," Board member Colin Rule believes that the solution "is more tech that promotes cooperation, conflict resolution, understanding, and freedom" (Gallagher, 2018, para 14). PeaceTech believes that virtual reality can function as a vehicle to "generate empathy by creating brief but powerful immersive experiences" (Education, Government, Nonprofit, 2017,

para. 3). The initiative posits that the use of data analytics aids in assessing cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions related to conflict, and that the use of platforms like Skype help “connect people worldwide with tutors to teach new languages, while providing empowering work opportunities to refugees” (Education, Government, Nonprofit, 2017, para. 3).

In collaboration with C5 Accelerate, Amazon with a Smile, and National Security Services, PeaceTech offers the PeaceTech Accelerator, an eight-week program in Washington, D.C., that provides mentorship and training for peace-oriented start-ups with a particular emphasis on cloud technology. Their mission is to aid organizations in improving and scaling their ability to “produce innovative technology that manages, mitigates, predicts, or prevents conflicts” (Education, Government, Nonprofit, 2017, para. 4). PeaceTech’s ambition is captured by PeaceTech Lab CEO Sheldon Himelfarb:

Today, people can send pictures, money, and information around the world with the click of a button. Even in places experiencing some of the worst violence on earth, I see cell phones charging and air time selling. It’s up to each and every one of us to decide whether we use these tools to prolong conflict or build peace. The Accelerator is the embodiment of our commitment to support entrepreneurs who are dedicated to using their talents and technology for good (Himelfarb & Idriss, 2011).

Companies and Organizational Initiatives

From these interrelated trends emerge several examples of media organizations, initiatives, and projects that aim to create positive impact. Following are just a few examples that highlight the diversity of missions and strategies in the contemporary landscape:

Founded in 2012, RYOT is a cause-oriented media company that produces immersive content about global and social issues. Whether through 360-degree videos, documentaries, or

virtual and augmented reality, the company aims to tell stories “that move the world.” As described in their manifesto, they are a “citizen, not an enterprise,” they do not “pretend to hide behind neutrality,” and they “care about what happens to the world” (“RYOT About”, 2017). From a technological perspective, Chief Marketing Officer Molly Swenson said, "We've never wanted to be the hardware space [for virtual reality headsets]...it [has] been wonderful but it [has] also been a roadblock to getting those experiences out there. So with AR we are working with the scalability of it" (Sandler, 2016, para. 10).

Strivr uses virtual reality to enhance training programs and improve the performance of individuals, corporations, and sports teams (STRIVR, 2018). While the company's services are used by several prominent organizations, one case is of particular interest: In collaboration with the National Football League (NFL), Strivr created a custom-built immersive race and body swapping experience to help with diversity and race relations. By transporting users into unfamiliar and unsettling realms, the NFL hopes to help staffers and players better understand bias, and ultimately, more firmly confront issues of racism and sexism.

Tarjimly is an app that connects volunteer interpreters to 23 million refugees worldwide. Launched by co-founders Aziz Alghunaim and Atif Javed, who wanted to use their engineering experience to help refugees at scale, Tarjimly responds to the shortage of translators in times of need. Stated by Alghunaim, “interpreters are a scarce resource and extremely expensive” (Coldewey, 2018, para. 6) and this app helps provide immediate, real-time, service that helps bridge the gap between the refugee and the service provider. While not designed to guide people through major processes like immigration, the app handles time-sensitive matters like distribution of food and water or explaining an event or injury to a healthcare provider (Coldewey, 2018).

Sundance's New Frontier Program, launched in 2007, is a convergence of film, art, media, live performance, music, and technology. Since 2007, the New Frontier exhibition at the Sundance Film Festival has provided the highest level of curation in the emerging field, incorporating fiction, non-fiction, and hybrid projects to showcase transmedia storytelling, multi-media installations, performances, and films. Their team aims to offer "opportunities within the newest technologies to push the edges of story conception and craft, and to invite the audience to experience stories as never before" (Sundance New Frontier, n.d.).

In 2018, Tribeca Film Festival's immersive lineup included 20 virtual reality and augmented reality experiences in the Virtual Arcade. The festival also created a component called Cinema360, in which participants experienced several virtual reality pieces together. Programmer Loren Hammonds said this was an attempt to break through the occasionally isolating effect of virtual reality, stating, "I think this goes back to what festivals do best ... Those 20 people who have seen all of the same pieces within the same timeframe will have the opportunity to step outside and talk to each other about it" (Ha, 2018, para. 6).

2167 is an indigenous-conceived, indigenous-led, virtual reality project launched by the Toronto International Film Festival, imagineNATIVE, Pinnguaq, and the Initiative for Indigenous Futures. In celebration of Canada's 150th anniversary, indigenous people created virtual reality experiences that convey their visions of life in Canada for the next 150 years (Skura, 2016).

Created by a member of the Muscowpetung First Nation in Saskatchewan, Canada, Wikiupedia is a location-based augmented reality Indigenous Knowledge Network. The app encourages users to walk through their city and discover the multimedia indigenous stories embedded in the structures and geography. Named after a traditional Indigenous hut called a

"wikiup," it includes content in the form of videos, images, audio, and augmented reality, and is positioned as a tool for reconciliation and healing among First Nations and non-First Nations Canadians (Devlin, 2017). The app maker says, "it is another way that just allows people to access traditional knowledge that isn't really readily available" (Devlin, 2017, para. 4); the app allows users to experience the Indigenous history of their city.

The Enemy is an app that uses augmented and virtual reality to bring users face-to-face with combatants from conflict zones in El Salvador, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Israel, and Palestine, to hear testimonies from both sides of the same conflict. Stated on The Enemy's homepage, "By giving voice to those who carry violence within themselves, by letting them introduce themselves and explain their motives and dreams, this project not only confronts us with the perspectives of combatants, it also causes us to confront our own [perspectives]" ("The Enemy: About," 2018, para. 2). The content offers something different from the media's usual war imagery to provide a more personal and balanced perspective of conflict.

Oscar-winning director Alejandro Iñárritu created "Carne y Arena" ("Flesh and Sand") to replicate the experience of migrants journeying across the Sonoran Desert to America. He stated, "We read horrific news almost every day about another boat with hundreds of people on board sinking and we just dismiss it.... This is an attempt to convey something that I think we have lost the ability to feel" (R.L., 2017, para. 3). In the experience, users are placed among digitally-rendered migrants and experience their journey through border control. Attesting to the level of immersion induced by the simulation, Iñárritu said that when the migrants are told to get down at gunpoint, most users join them (R.L., 2017).

Harnessing a hybrid approach, Shared_Studios' Portals connects a global network of repurposed shipping containers equipped with immersive audiovisual equipment. Stationed at

various locations around the world, from universities to refugee camps to art museums, the mission of Portals is to connect strangers who would otherwise not have the opportunity to connect, to transcend geography and offer people the chance to engage in live, full-body, exchanges with others.

Conclusion

21st century media encompasses a broad field of applications and trends, inclusive of digital, augmented, virtual, and hybrid technologies. Though debatable, many believe that new media affords participants with an unparalleled opportunity to engage with content. Through immersive technologies that create the sensation of presence, participants can experience feelings of empathy and intimacy more profoundly than through traditional media or even social media. As Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech gain in popularity, an increasing number of creators push the agenda of using media for good, for committing to positive social value outcomes in process and product.

Of the many examples of immersive media, there is one in particular that presents a compelling case worthy of investigation: Shared_Studios' Portals. As noted in the beginning of this dissertation, Portals was selected for several reasons, both for its technology and its alignment with public diplomacy. As a reminder, Portals:

- represents a unique example of hybrid media and explicitly emphasizes the balance between the technological and social components of its program
- represents a non-state actor (though it could have relations or activities with governmental organizations)
- makes connections between different cultures and communities
- is global in scope (although its presence is most prevalent in the United States)

- is emergent, still not extensively researched, and logistically feasible as a research case

The next chapter provides a profile analysis of Portals, an illustration of the technology and the ecosystem.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CASE PROFILE ON SHARED_STUDIOS' PORTALS

Snapshot and Overview

“By conversing through a Portal, participants step out of their daily routines and their comfort zones... [they] swiftly connect across distances, real and imagined. They share a quiet moment. In these encounters, people learn about the “Other” and about their own values, beliefs, and assumptions” (“Kickstarter, Portals by Shared_Studios,” 2015, para. 20).

The fastest and most effective way to understand Portals is to visit one of the shipping containers in person. In lieu of a visit, however, this chapter presents an alternative path, a granular deconstruction of Portals from an historical, social, and technical perspective so that a more complete portrait of the medium can be painted.

As cited in Chapter One, Boehner et al. (2005a) offer a holistic approach for understanding technology, noting that each technology system has “three parties to the interpretation: the users, the system, and the system designers” (p. 81). Echoing their method, while purposefully modifying the order, this case analysis strives to be aware of each party, “for all parties are involved in the process of co-construction and/or co-interpretation (Gaver, Beaver & Benford 2003, Fagerberg, Ståhl & Höök 2004). This chapter will address the following:

First, I establish a foundation for Portals, inclusive of the Shared_Studios company profile, the Portals origin story, and Portals’ early organizational evolution.

Second, I introduce the system’s creators, or the leadership team of Portals. This includes the company’s intended purpose/vision as articulated by different members of the leadership team, brief profiles of the main actors, and descriptions of the expectations and responsibilities of Community Curators.

Third, I describe the system itself, or Portals as an ecosystem and technology. The exterior and interior of Portals will be detailed, as well the logistics of establishing and managing Portals (the site selection process, who operates the sites, and which Portals engage together).

And finally, I address the system's users, or participants. This includes discussion of recruitment, the overall experience of visiting a Portal, and the types of engagements possible through Portals, inclusive of both top-down and bottom-up suggestions.

Foundation

Basic Idea

Portals refers to a network of media that connects people from different parts of the world, or different parts of the same country, through live digital interaction. It is one of three spaces offered by Shared_Studios, a multidisciplinary art, design, and technology collective that creates interconnected environments that feel spatially continuous, providing people with the opportunity to have encounters with others from a seemingly disparate environment. Through collaborations with artists, engineers, and architects, Shared_Studios aims to “ground the connective potential of new technology in physical spaces to create more accessible, secure, and sacred encounters between diverse populations” (“Kickstarter, Portals by Shared_Studios,” 2015, para. 20). By using connective technologies, participants can have unmediated conversations that transcend the geographical, political, and cultural borders they often encounter (Mulani, 2017). Described as an “Internet you can walk through,” the spaces offered by Portals allow people to engage naturally, making eye contact, and conversing in real-time with life-size images of

themselves and the Other(s).



Figure 6. A collage of various images from the Portals experience.

As described on the Shared_Studios' website, Portals are gold spaces outfitted with immersive audiovisual technology. Upon entering a Portal, an individual comes face-to-face with someone in a distant Portal live and full-body, as if in the same room; as many participants have explained, it feels as if they are “breathing the same air” (Cohen, 2017). Portals are located around the globe at diverse sites including public squares; community, performance, and art centers; educational institutions; and refugee and displaced persons' camps.

While the number of Portal sites fluctuates, at any given time, there are anywhere from 20 – 50 sites operating; some are long-term fixtures in the community, and others are temporary, or project-based. Each Portal is run by a Community Curator, a representative of the local community, who oversees the organization of dialogues, classes, performances, and events.

Portals come in many forms, including the Portal_Container, Portal_Screen, Portal_Inflatable, and Portal_Bus. The Portal_Container is the original, and most popular, version and will be most closely studied in this research.

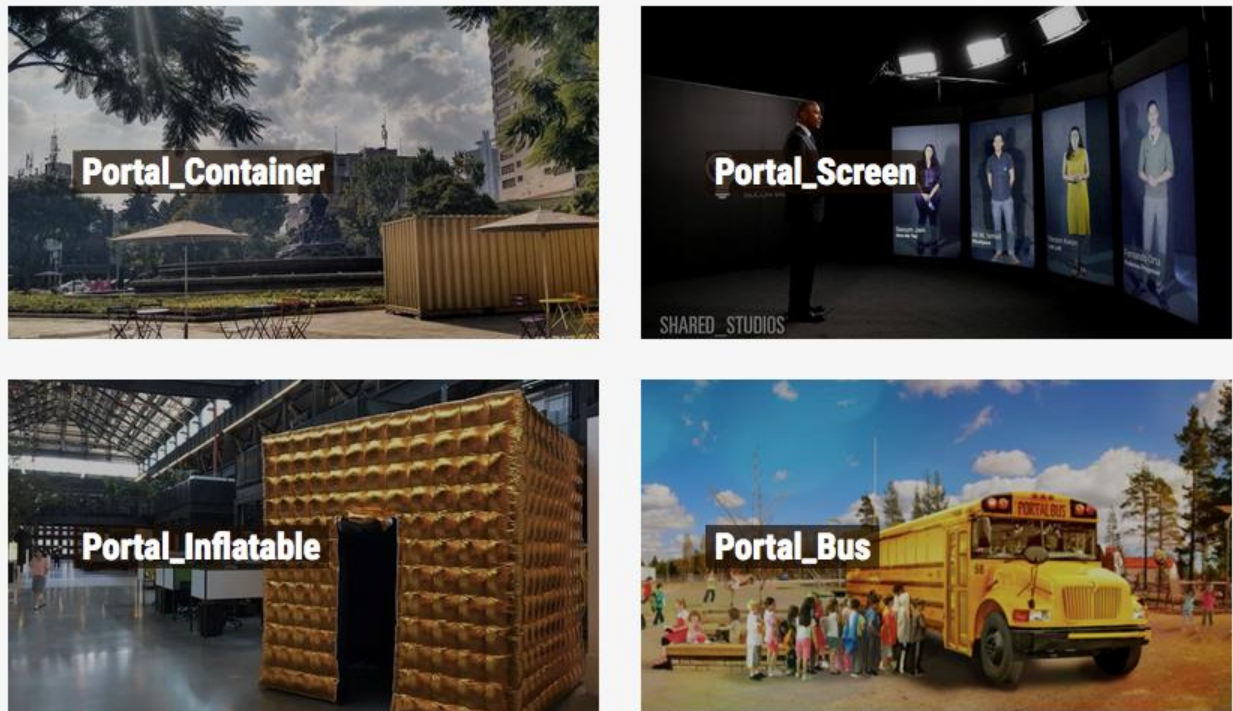


Figure 7. The four dominant Portal types

Through the repurposing of old shipping containers, Portals (the Portal_Container) create interconnected environments that feel spatially continuous and enable participants to engage naturally with others, through life-size interactions, making eye contact and having real time conversations. Founded to foster one-on-one conversations across distances and different cultures, Portals represents a prime example of an immersive medium directed at inducing positive social values, such as increasing intergroup dialogue and positive social change; it is part of a “new public infrastructure devoted to providing intentional, curated, and facilitated connections between people who would otherwise never meet” (Meares & Weaver, 2018, p. 14).

Origin Story

Exploring the authorship of a new concept or product is important (Boehner et al., 2005). Especially pertinent for nascent products/organizations, studying the experience of the founder

makes the story of the product more complete. Understanding the origin story reveals if/how the product acts as an extension of the founder's ideology, and it underscores the importance of representation, the idea that it matters who creates a story (content/media) and has it validated or heard. As noted by Boczkowski (2004), "actors engaged in the innovation process simultaneously pursue interdependent technological and social transformations. That is, they do not concentrate on either shaping the artifact or influencing decisions to adopt it but undertake both sets of actions at the same time" (p. 257). This is where co-prospection becomes important; while Portals does not explicitly position itself as a tool for diplomacy, its leadership founded the organization with clear goals for positive change. Understanding these goals, as articulated by the founder and other early partners, a researcher is given a lens with which she can astutely conduct research. A more holistic interpretation of the case can be presented, influenced by its conception, setbacks, growth, and the myriad people and circumstances that have shaped it along the way.

The idea for Portals was conceived by Amar C. Bakshi, a former reporter, law student, and artist, whose work focused on integrating technology "into environments and across pronounced distance to create new forms of digital-physical public spaces that challenge and subvert existing norms" (Bakshi, 2018a, para. 1). Bakshi worked as a reporter at *The Washington Post*, an editor at CNN, and as Special Assistant to the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard University, a Master of Arts degree from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and a Juris Doctor degree from Yale Law School (Bakshi, 2018a).

As a result of a series of encounters and inspirations during his career, Bakshi created the first Portals exchange. These experiences include his relationship with his grandmother, his unique global assignment at *The Washington Post*, and his personal longing for connection. Bakshi's grandmother fled Lahore, Pakistan, during partition and never had the chance to return home. For sixty years she lived in India with a longstanding desire to reconnect to her community in Lahore; "she wanted to know what her old neighborhood looked like, what life was like for her childhood friends..." (Bakshi, 2016, para. 2). Bakshi told his grandmother to be patient, predicting that between all the technology giants, soon she would be able to connect seamlessly with whomever she wanted, whenever she wanted. Together they "imagined a future where she could touch down as a hologram on the streets of Lahore and interact with passersby" (Bakshi, 2016, para. 3). Although she passed away in 2009, Bakshi remained motivated to make that vision a reality.

In his work with *The Washington Post*, Bakshi edited an international affairs blog that connected seventy-five renowned international journalists in discussion about current issues and events. As part of this role, he pitched an idea to travel the world for a year and capture the unique stories of individuals – from farmers and rappers to imams and entrepreneurs – and how they view America (Bakshi, 2016). He received funding in 2007 and, with just a backpack and video camera, visited twelve countries to connect with, and interview, members of local communities.

After returning from his journalistic adventure, Bakshi longed for the kinds of connections he forged with strangers while traveling. He notes:

I missed the long bus and train rides I would take on the road where my laptop would die, I had no smartphone, and there wasn't enough light to read a book, so,

to pass the time, I would strike up a conversation with the stranger riding next to me – someone far different from myself. I missed talking to a father trying to find a distant daughter in the Philippines, a young man in Pakistan heading to madrassa, keen on becoming a computer scientist, an aging revolutionary in Mexico on pilgrimage, preparing for his final days (Bakshi, 2016, para. 5).

Bakshi describes this engagement as “de-instrumentalized” or “purposeless,” a type of social interaction that contrasted from what he was used to in the United States. First, it involved an element of novelty by encountering someone completely new, which he states was a rare event in his experience at law school, networking, dating, and socializing. And second, it involved a certain abandonment of one’s agenda, a conversation guided not by the desire for a specific outcome, e.g., to land a job or a date, but instead shaped by a degree of unpredictability and no particular purpose (Bakshi, 2016).

These threads of influence – the curiosity of his grandmother, his enriching interactions with strangers abroad, and his personal desire for connection – inspired Bakshi to create Portals. He wanted to create a “wormhole” from one part of the world to another (“A Golden Portal,” n.d.; Kozłowska, 2015); he wanted to replicate a certain type of communication by manufacturing a medium and set of social parameters that would be conducive to the type of serendipitous encounters he had while traveling abroad. Bakshi wondered, “What if you could enter a door at the back of your local coffee shop in the morning and see live into Lahore, Pakistan? What if you could share your morning coffee with people sipping their evening tea across the world, as if in the same room” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 12)?

And so, he started to create. In the early stages of ideation, Bakshi collaborated with a partner and architect, John Farrace. They considered connecting existing spaces (i.e., coffee

shops) or building different types of spaces, like tents or sheds, but ultimately decided on a standard intermodal shipping container for several reasons. From a practical perspective, they felt the container was affordable, omnipresent, and securable. More symbolically, they appreciated the rich symbolism, that “etched in each old container are the markings of its movements across time through ports around the world” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 14). As reflected eloquently by a fellow Portals researcher, there are additional practical and philosophical benefits to the shipping container – it is relatively inexpensive, readymade, and uniform, which allows for the reimagining of the space as a place for human interaction. The shipping container is already recognized as a medium that connects people across the globe, thus giving “agency to the Portal as an affective architecture regardless of its placement within a specific geographic area or the participants acting within” (Ferderer, 2018, p. 6).

In August 2014, Bakshi utilized the space in his parent’s backyard in Washington, D.C. to tinker with Portals’ first 6-meter-long shipping container. The neighbors immediately issued a complaint to the local police, stating it was an eyesore and speculating that Bakshi was in fact living inside. As a response, to “dull their rage and spark their imagination” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 16), Bakshi experimented with different paint colors for the exterior of the container. He felt white was too artsy, black too scary, silver too precious, but dark gold ideal. The gold of choice “connoted more of the sacred than the commercial...it had a reflective sheen to it, in which passersby [could] see themselves, but imperfectly” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 16).

Finally, he put a stencil on the outside of the container that read, “A Portal to Iran.” With this, the skepticism of the neighbors heightened, and they ended up calling the FBI to report a potential terrorist cell. After a few days of investigation and interrogation, Bakshi was cleared and free to pursue the next stages of development. He made more modifications to the design

(which will be outlined in the section on physical structure) and the planned parameters of participant exchange and proceeded to pilot the initiative through a partnership between the U.S. and Iraq (Bakshi, 2016).

Pilot Exchange

After experimenting with the structure in his parents' backyard, Bakshi worked to establish the first locations to partner in an official Portals exchange. He envisioned connecting an arts space in the U.S. to the Middle East or South Asia, a gesture to honor his grandmother. Although he did not have a specific place in mind, one of his early collaborators, Michelle Moghtader, did – Tehran, Iran. Bakshi affirmed this decision, stating the goal “was to bridge a division that is very powerful in the American and the Iranian psyche but perhaps even the global psyche. To show that if we can do it in Iran, we can do it anywhere” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018). Moghtader, an Iranian-American, worked as a journalist on issues of nuclear negotiations and oil, which kept her moving in and out of Tehran. She was frustrated by the narrow ways the Iranian press covered the U.S., and vice versa, and felt that Portals could be a gateway to expose more accurately the culture and people of each nation. So, while Bakshi prepared the first Portal in an experimental arts space in New York City's Lower East Side, Moghtader leveraged her network in Iran and worked with a local artist, Sohrab Kashani, to build an identical Portal in Tehran.

By December 2014, the two Portals were finished and ready to interact during a two-week pilot period. The guidelines for the first Portal experience were simple: participants were invited to enter the Portal for an eight-minute one-on-one conversation and respond to the prompt: "what would make today a good day for you?" Interpreters were available on both sides, if needed. While foot traffic was slow at first, Bakshi recounts an early exchange that left a

monumental impression. He describes a nearly two-hour conversation between a man in New York and a man in Tehran:

[The] conversation began with a discussion of getting to work – how minimal traffic would make his day a good one. A march protesting the death of an African American man named Eric Garner at the hands of the police had snarled Manhattan streets. Meanwhile, in Tehran, the pollution was so terrible that it was virtually impossible to walk outside. The city was at a standstill. The personal and mundane – trying to get to work – instantly tied in the political. And the political instantly implicated the personal, as the men talked about sexuality, marriage equality, and ailing parents. They stopped [talking] only because the Internet in Tehran, which is not the most reliable, cut out (Bakshi, 2016, para. 26).

Based on the behavior and feedback of participants during the pilot period, Bakshi and his team modified their model. They made two changes that would impact the future of Portals significantly: first, they increased the allotted base time in the Portals to twenty minutes, and second, the Portals leadership invested in a deeply dialogic relationship with participants. Many people who experienced Portals in both New York and Iran offered ideas for ways they wanted to use the medium. Rather than ignoring this, Bakshi listened – and responded. Four hours each day stayed dedicated to one-on-one conversations, but the remainder allowed for “people to take ownership of the space” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 29). And people filled this time in a variety of ways: an Iranian American dancer performed a live show for his family in Tehran; school groups in New York enjoyed a guest lecture from a substitute teacher in Iran; a NY-based jazz musician collaborated with a classic Persian, Iran-based, musician to create a new piece; film directors in

both countries talked about the challenges of working through economic, political, and social obstacles.

After the two-week pilot, Bakshi and his team decided to commit fully to the vision. They started outreach through their personal networks and began responding to people around the world who were reaching out in hopes of bringing Portals to their communities (Bakshi, 2016). They also began fundraising and building a team.

The Growth of Portals

Shortly after the conclusion of the pilot, Bakshi received an email from Omid Habibi, a computer science professor based in Herat, Afghanistan. Habibi heard about Portals on BBC Persian and wanted to discuss the possibility of establishing a container at his university. After a few conversations via Skype, Bakshi gave the green light, empowering Habibi to construct a Portal, adhering to structural and aesthetic protocols. Within weeks, Habibi hosted an opening ceremony to launch the Herat Portal, making it the network's first permanent site (Bakshi, 2016).

Subsequently, Bakshi and his team attempted to open two new locations per month for the remainder of that year, some becoming permanent fixtures, others only temporary. As of May 2018, over 75,000 people had experienced one-on-one conversations through Portals and “tens of thousands more ... engaged in group events including classes, artistic collaborations, and performances. The Portals have existed in “wildly diverse locations from modern art museums to refugee camps, from inner cities in the U.S. to a technology hub in Gaza City” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 36). At the time of this dissertation, the Shared Studio's website lists 16 sites in North America, two sites in Europe, five sites in Africa, four sites in the Middle East, seven sites in Asia and Australia, and four sites in South and Central America. The following countries have hosted Portals so far: Iraq, Palestine, Rwanda, Mexico, Afghanistan, Cuba,

Germany, Honduras, Jordan, India, Kenya, Myanmar, Pakistan, South Korea, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States (Roff, 2018).

The main mission for the Portals exchange is to connect communities from different countries that otherwise might not have the opportunity to connect with each other. As a result, the inclusion of diverse international sites has remained a high priority throughout the company's expansion. As a complementary effort, however, the network has started facilitating more domestic dialogues, or exchanges between two Portals within the same country. These domestic dialogues emphasize that communication between different neighborhoods within a city is rare, but that such connectivity could be fruitful (Bakshi, 2016).

The System's Creators: The Leadership of Portals

Organizational Vision

Bakshi's earliest vision for Portals arose from his travels as a journalist for *The Washington Post*. He notes:

As I listened to peoples' stories from Lahore, Pakistan, to Mindanao, Philippines, I dreamed of connecting the people I met directly to one another, so they could learn from each other, rather than just through TV clips and press articles. I also wanted people to have a space to talk about the things that do not make the news, but that make us human – family, art, food, love, life aspirations (“Kickstarter, Portals by Shared_Studios,” 2015, para. 25).

When it finally came time to execute this dream, he piloted and modified Portals to best fit the desires of local artists, educators, and activists around the globe. Stunned by the deeply emotional responses to the first Portal exchanges, he and his team ventured into new territory.

Bakshi articulates many definitions and purposes for Portals. To cite just a few: Portals aims to “connect members of diverse communities who would likely not otherwise meet in intimate environments to create their own meanings” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, January 2018); Portals is “very much about two individuals meeting in an identical interior environment even though their exterior environment and their backgrounds, their context, couldn’t be more different” (Kozlowska, 2015, para. 12); through Portals, “[we] wanted to create the illusion that you’re walking through the Internet” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, October 2017); “Portals then is not about great geographies. Rather, it is about creating a space, context, and moment for a certain kind of dialogue” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 45); the goal of Portals is “to bridge ‘psychic’ distance more than physical distance. You could gather similar insights by placing Portals in two different D.C. neighborhoods” (Wang, 2015, para. 11). Portals is “about communities really showing, telling, and sharing their surroundings...at root, this project is about the power and depth of encounters between strangers” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018).

Other members of the leadership team, as well as participants and researchers, have offered different conceptualizations of Portals. Chief of Staff Jake Levin says that through Portals, “we want people to re-examine how space is shared globally” (Powers, 2016, para. 3), and that a primary objective is to break down stereotypes because “it’s very hard to hate someone when you’re looking them in the eye” (Powers, 2016, para. 13). Filmmaker Gabo Arora, who created the virtual reality film “Clouds Over Sidra,” noted that with Portals, “there will be an element of spontaneity, an element of direct conversation that is not planned,” as opposed to “high level proceedings that are very curated, very controlled” (Kozlowska, 2015, para. 20).

While the project is still in its infancy, Bakshi has offered thoughtful articulations of his hope for the future. His idea is to create a “global network of these publicly accessible one-on-one booths” to encourage people to focus on the “everydayness of life in very different places” (Murphy, 2014, para. 3). He hopes “that Portals not only connects public spaces around the world but revitalizes public spaces at home. Even more specifically, we hope it prompts all of us to seek out those moments to converse with strangers unlike ourselves – to put down the iPhone or laptop on the bus or the train and engage the person next to us” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 44). His long-term mission is to make a new mode of communication for the 21st century, one that is not led by a big technology giant but instead by people who come together in a simple way. He wants Portals to “be a permanent infrastructural reality of the new century...[a] new global community, where people can meet each other, talk, learn, debate, collaborate, and play” (progrss Newsroom, 2017, para. 7).

During an interview in late 2018, Bakshi was asked if Portals has plans to combat the current political and ideological divide we see in the United States. He stated that his team is aiming to place a Portal in every state in 2019, with the help of a strong coalition of community partners and supporters (Barlow, 2018). The goal is to start connecting diverse parts of the U.S. together to probe into what “we, as a group, a network, a community, are curious about” (Barlow, 2018, para. 31). He wonders “what happens when Americans who would not likely encounter one another do so? From Native American reservations to Aspen ski lodges, Manhattan sidewalks to a Portal Barge traveling down the Mississippi, we aim to create Portal connections across America” (Barlow, 2018, para. 31).

Bakshi’s optimism, adaptability, and command of his own narrative have, in many ways, paved the path to success. As he reflects, the spirit that went into fostering the philosophy of

Portals manifested in its model and development. He ruminates on how the gold color on the exterior of Portals is the same color as the small statues of Hindu gods and goddesses his grandmother kept on her dresser; the grey carpet that lines the interior of Portals resembles the color and texture of the movie hall he went to with his grandmother when he was a child; and the bare bones idea of Portals – “the idea of looking at another human being in isolation, worthy of appreciation just by virtue of existing” – reminds him of his grandmother’s faith and the ethos of “Namaste,” recognizing and loving the divine in every other human being (Bakshi, 2016, para. 51). Fittingly, the personal connection he felt to his grandmother is what most profoundly inspired his commitment to provide others with the opportunity to connect in meaningful ways.

As conveyed by Bakshi and his team, Portals is deeply rooted in values of community and person-to-person collaboration. He argues that “more important than the technology, is the shared context” between Portals, the shared understanding of the space being collectively created by participants (Bakshi, 2016, para. 47). Early on, Bakshi was aware and attentive to the tenuous relationship between technology and the ability to connect with another person. In his experience traveling, it was the absence of technology that allowed for connection; only when he was not able to consume media through one of his usual devices (laptop, phone, or iPad), was he willing and able to engage with somebody else, to “exit [his] world...and lose [himself] in the vastness of our human experience...listening attentively to the stories of another” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 8). He claims he never felt “lost” without his devices, but alludes to the limitations of that feeling – importantly, his experience suggests that it is through feelings of “lostness” that interpersonal connection can ensue. While the depth of the human experience with Portals will be analyzed more deeply in the next chapter, two components will be presented here: the role of the core

organizational leadership, the role of the Community Curator, and the baseline experience of a participant.

Core Leadership

The Portals Leadership Team has grown since its founding, bringing together leaders with a diverse range of experiences and perspectives. At the time of this research, the team is comprised of the following roles:

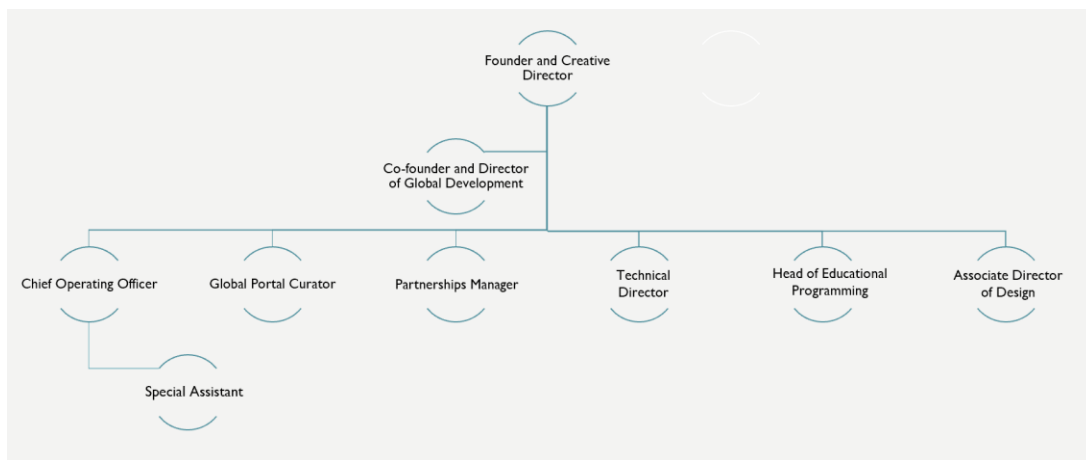


Figure 8. Organizational Structure of Portals

- Founder and Creative Director
- Co-founder and Director of Global Development
- Chief Operating Officer; manages all staff, operations, and public activations.
- Global Portal Curator
- Partnerships Manager; oversees the building of partnerships, sales, and business development activities, and guides work in smart cities, community development, and placemaking for Portals.

- Technical Director
- Head of Educational Programming
- Associate Director of Design
- Special Assistant

Bakshi and his colleagues exerted minimal effort in traditional recruiting and hiring strategies. Bakshi knew his co-founder, Moghtader, from their time working at *The Washington Post*, and their relationship evolved into a strong working partnership. Two other leaders heard about Portals and personally reached out to Bakshi to explore possibilities for involvement. “People grew themselves into their roles,” Bakshi stated (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018). Often people would visit a Portal, feel inspired, and offer to help. “It’s not normal...we didn’t really have a strategy, we just followed our noses...we were opportunistic” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018). In late 2018, however, Bakshi hired the first member of his team with a business background. The goal is to become an effective, sustainable, scalable operation; for many years Portals was “a project, a paid labor of love,” but after witnessing its real power, Bakshi wants to transform the idea into “something that is deeply enduring” (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018).

Community Curators

Beyond the core leadership team, a network of roughly 40 Community Curators work part-time or full-time for the organization in paid positions. Each Community Curator is hired for a specific Portal location, where they oversee the local day-to-day operations and long-term vision of the site. Articulated by the Portals Leadership team and affirmed through personal

observation and interviewing, the curators are “the glue that holds our global network together,” functioning “a bit like global concierges or program managers [that] help to locally community organize the world” (Bakshi, 2016, para. 48).

Curators have several responsibilities, including but not limited to: engaging their broader community through local outreach; programming the space with dialogues, classes, and special events; fielding requests and helping people brainstorm ideas for unique engagements; providing live language interpretation if/when needed; seeking and securing local support to ensure the durability of their Portal over time (i.e., financial, organizational support). Curators are in constant contact with their peer curators around the world; they aim to program conversations, events, play dates, and performances (Barlow, 2018).

At the time of this research, the Shared_Studio’s website lists twenty-nine Community Curator profiles, a diverse group of leaders with experiences ranging from art and architecture to medicine and international development. There are also seven open positions for curators for part-time contracts in various locations worldwide. The common job description for a Community Curator reads as follows:

Responsibilities

- Operate the Portal, including opening and closing the Portal, mastering technology and troubleshooting, ushering individuals into and out of the Portal every 20 or 30-minutes, talking to passersby, and explaining the Portals initiative
- Program Dialogues and Events, including coordinating and scheduling special events, artist collaborations, classroom visits, and performances, and overseeing backend scheduling software

- Outreach in the Community, including emailing and calling local organizations, liaising with press organizations, coordinating videographers and social media elements, and occasionally shooting iPhone video

Requirements

- Excellent interpersonal skills, including the ability to engage people from diverse backgrounds
- Attention to detail, particularly around scheduling and logistics
- Responsible, results-oriented, and self-motivated
- Flexible schedule since we work across various time zones: sometimes the Portal will be open very early in the day or late in the evening
- Comfort with computers, VOIP [voice over internet protocol] systems, and social media appreciated
- Fluency in English, Spanish, Swahili (or another relevant language). (“Nairobi_Portals Curator”, 2018)

The Community Curator role calls for an individual with a certain disposition and set of skills. Most often, the Curator is someone who was born and raised in the community or someone who has extensive work as an activist or voice of the community. This local connection gives them the trust and reach needed to facilitate conversation and keep foot-traffic high. Bakshi underscores the importance of Curator selection and notes that they are “hardworking, dedicated,

[and] extraordinarily social-minded. They aren't in it for the money, they just believe it. They have ownership over it" (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018).

Ambassadors

While Curators oversee overall programming and day-to-day operations, Ambassadors function more like dedicated advocates for the mission of Portals. An Ambassador typically is the person who reaches out to Shared_Studios about bringing a Portal to their community. Their role is to garner support (i.e., promote the brand, raise awareness, get local press, engage with peers, and recruit sponsors to help with funding). At the time of this research, sixteen Ambassadors are listed on Portals' website.

The System: The Technology and Ecosystem of Portals

Establishing a Portal in a Community

For those interested in joining the Portals network, the leadership team invites the individual or institution to use their general inquiry email address or choose from a category of applications, including Cities and Communities, Events and Brands, Education and Research, or Improving Internal Communication. Because this list is not exhaustive, visitors are encouraged to propose their own ideas (Portals FAQ, 2018).

Cost

The options are to rent or purchase a Portal. The purchase price is \$25,000, plus an additional \$3,000 monthly operating cost to help fund the Community Curator(s). The rental price varies depending on how long the Portal is rented and how many days a week the Portal is open. There is a one-time transportation and installation fee of \$1,500, a one-time rental fee of

\$1,500, and a weekly operating cost of \$2,500. Shared_Studios oversees the hiring and training of Community Curators and manages public relations, social media, and community outreach (Minutes, Regular Meeting, 2015).

If a community cannot afford a Portal, other options are available. In some cases, the cost is offset by payments from other locations that can afford the staff and technology. Additionally, Portals can be funded by partner institutions, which includes cities, universities, museums, nongovernmental organizations, galleries, and corporations. For example, the Portal in Irbil, Iraq, gets assistance from UNICEF (Kravarik & Elam, 2017). Some Portals across the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, which are often utilized for engagements at sites for refugees and internally displaced peoples, are supported by the United Nations, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, a network of global universities, and local partners from Jordan to Germany. While Portals are free for the public to use (a standard that Bakshi is committed to upholding), they are often rented out for special events to help offset the costs. Bakshi states:

We survive, and grow, with payments from a wide range of institutions...we think deeply about the economic structure underpinning Portals as a global public artwork. We consider these economic considerations as part of the work itself and as a rich domain for artistic exploration. Money is a vital part of the definition of art we take advantage of – as a fuel for its creation, a site for its contestation, a mechanism for its proliferation. But money as a measure of art's value kills that earnest definition and undermines the public understanding of the definition of art that Portals relies on (Barlow, 2018, para. 22).

Building Partnerships

Portals cultivate a strong and interconnected ecosystem of community partners and allies, a task that Community Curators seem both excited by and committed to supporting. Part of the

ongoing job of a curator is to identify new partners and cultivate synergy among the different organizations that can benefit from and/or add value to the Portal. Here are just a few examples of the partnerships that sustain Portals in different locations:

- In Kigali, Rwanda, the Portal is operated by an organization called Kurema, Kureba, Kwiga (“To Create, To See, To Learn”), a public arts social enterprise using street-arts and art-actions to involve civil society in positive social change (“Kigali_Portal,” 2018).
- In San Pedro Sula, Honduras, the Portal is run by the Organization for Youth Empowerment, a youth development non-government organization located in the nearby city of El Progreso, which is dedicated to educating, empowering, and engaging with disadvantaged youth to break the cycle of poverty and become agents of change in their homes, schools, and communities (“San Pedro Sula_Portal,” 2018).
- In Mexico City, Mexico, the Portal is operated in partnership with TimeOut Mexico, the largest arts, culture, and entertainment guide in Mexico (Mexico City_Portal,” 2018).
- In Nairobi, Kenya, the Portal is run by partnership with the library at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), whose mission is to provide resources for the acquisition, organization, preservation, dissemination, and application of knowledge (“Nairobi_Portal,” 2018).
- In Colorado Springs, Colorado, the Portal is co-hosted by the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, the Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative, and Imagination Celebration (“Colorado Springs_Portal,” 2018).

- In Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the Portal is run by the Milwaukee Fatherhood Initiative and numerous other local partners working on issues ranging from police-community relations to job training (“Milwaukee_Portal,” 2018).
- In Detroit, the Portal is supported by a partnership between the Quicken Loans Family of companies and the Grandmont Rosedale Development Corporation, a non-profit community-based organization (“Detroit_Portal,” 2018).

The Portal can become a destination for one-time visitors or a regular hang-out spot for frequent participants. A Community Curator in Milwaukee, which houses one of the longest-standing Portals in the zip code with the highest incarceration rate of black men in America, notes that the Portal evolved into a center of healing community engagement: “People who lived in the suburbs started to come into our neighborhoods...I was so proud that they came to our neighborhood for something positive” (Nelson, 2017, para. 6).

Another Curator voiced the personal value of having the Portal in a single, fixed place. As a resident of a different neighborhood in the city, she enjoyed going to the Portal location each day, “seeing the same bus drivers, observing the rhythms and patterns and people....” She cited several relationships that she formed “just because [she was in] a place,” stating, “I think that’s when Portals works in a really meaningful way, when they can become embedded in communities...it’s an incredible opportunity for people who work for Portals to actually learn about the city they live in” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018).

Physical Structure

The physical structure includes both the exterior and the interior of the Portal. The goal will be to provide a clear picture of the architecture of a Portal so that its features and

affordances can be better assessed in the next chapter. These descriptions are the result of my direct observation and the synthesis of secondary sources.

Exterior Features and Design

The Portal is a steel shipping container. All four of its sides are corrugated and one side (which can be referred to as the front) is used as an entrance, with two doors meeting to close via a swivel lock. With the dimensions of a standard shipping container, it is 8 feet wide, 8.5 feet high, and 20 feet long. Regardless of location, its color is always the same signature gold, a shade that feels warm and alluring. Its tone is reminiscent of antique jewelry, bold but not overly shiny or lavish. On the front is typically an arrangement of neat, black, stenciled text that provides information ranging from logistical details about that specific Portal (e.g., the times and dates it is open, the location(s) it connects to, etc.), to information about Shared_Studios in general (i.e., its website).

As shown below, this Portal in New Haven, Connecticut, provides additional details, which range from the instructional to the philosophical: “reserve a time at sharedstudios.com/rsvp,” “open for conversation,” “please do not open this door unaccompanied,” “if you are waiting for your portal appointment, join us across the street at the Atticus Bookstore and Café.” Although this information varies by site, it usually offers barebones instructions and insights to add to the intrigue of the container.



Figure 9. Portal in New Haven, Connecticut

Often the Portal is supported with supplemental signage, either near its entrance or further away on the lot where the Portal sits. Community Curators at each site help with this design, ultimately providing more information when and where they deem necessary. Also outside the Portals is a space for housing Gold Books and pens, for participants to write about their experience. The notebooks are gold, and often the pens are gold; while they can be kept inside the Portal, most often they rest on a small table outside, beside a chair, so that participants can feel comfortable and unrushed while writing.

The Portal is immediately compelling; its presence is often an unexpected or unusual aesthetic contrast to its surroundings. As described by one visitor, “it’s not quite a wardrobe to Narnia or Harry Potter’s Platform 9¾...but the Portal will be hard to miss...spray-painted gold on the outside...it’s a used shipping container that has continued to bridge distances long past its expiration date” (Wang, 2015, para. 4). The mere fact that it is a shipping container creates intrigue, but that it is artfully positioned and painted gold is even more compelling. The gold, as

stated by Portals' leadership, is symbolically rich – representative of global currency, the exchange of global capital, and the sacred. The “evocation of the sacred highlights the experience the project expects users to have while engaging strangers in the Portal, contributes to the affective atmosphere of the Portal itself, and the conversations participants might have inside” (Ferderer, 2018, p. 7).

In most cases, when an interaction is taking place inside the Portal, the doors remain closed to preserve intimacy and quiet. For some group exchanges, such as musical performances or jam sessions, however, Curators elect to open the doors and extend the experience to passersby. They have even set up monitors outside of a Portal to broadcast the activity occurring inside; this serves to intrigue others and eventually increase the number of overall participants.



Figure 10. Portal in Erbil, Iraq



Figure 11. Portal in Baltimore, Maryland

Interior Features and Technological Components

The interior of the Portal is slightly more complex, but still reliant on minimal materials and criteria: insulation, drywall, basic camera and computer equipment, and Internet connectivity (“Kickstarter, Portals by Shared_Studios,” 2015). Bakshi collaborated with his uncle, an optical engineer, on the design to address perspective-distortion and the overall aesthetic.



Figure 12. Bakshi and Delaney working on the first Portal, 2014

The walls and ceilings are covered in dark grey carpet to both optimize the audio experience and create a sense of safety and protection, a cushioning more conducive to feelings of comfort and privacy. At the far end of the container from the door is a floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall screen that projects the image from the connecting Portal.



Figure 13. Baltimore Community Curator shows technology behind the wall

Except for the dim lighting, all of the technology for Portals hides behind the screen. A laptop computer, an NEC short-throw projector, Community Professional Loudspeakers, and

Biamp Devio microphones are tactfully embedded into the environment (Mitchell, 2018). A small camera sits in a door, which has been especially designed to balance out the fish-eye effect (and limited visual scope) typically caused by webcams. Instead, it offers a full-body “virtual hologram” of participants.

Important to note, however, is that this experience, while facilitated through Skype or Zoom videoconferencing, offers a much different experience than the typical videoconference exchange. Ample evidence from participants and curators supports the claim that “it's more than a glorified use of Skype...the floor-to-ceiling screen inside the dimly-lit container gives users the feeling they're talking to someone in the same room (Kravarik & Elam, 2017, para. 8); “the experience is nothing like a Skype call, which only focuses on the head/shoulders. The Portal feels like you’re in a room with someone who [actually] happens to be on the other side of the world” (Bode, 2018, para. 3); different from Skype, “this is full body, and that is really effective. Something happens, your mind is really tricked into thinking you’re in the same space, because the interiors of the Portals are identical; it’s a seamless space, and this creates potential for intimacy; because you walk in and there are just two chairs and a big screen, I think you’re not distracted by anything...it’s kind of like the Wizard of Oz, you don’t really know what’s going on...it’s kind of magical in a way” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018); “for anyone familiar with video chat, the idea of speaking face to face with someone over great distances is not necessarily novel or inspiring. However, stepping into the Shared_Studios Portal chamber, a darkened, ambient room free of external distractions, is akin to entering a sacred space. The standing person that appears before the viewer, as if in the same room, is both a stranger and a mirror of shared humanity” (Sepulveda, 2015, para. 5). As stated by researchers Weaver and Meares, Portals is unlike other forms of video communication; it is intended to be “a

highly intimate, secure space in which participants can be fully present in real time, without cropped images or curated personas” (Meares & Weaver, 2018, p. 8).



Figure 14. Community Curator logs online



Figure 15. Musicians in Herat, Afghanistan perform



Figure 16. Herat, Afghanistan connects to San Francisco

The System's Users: The Participant Experience

The Typical Exchange

While all Portals look identical and there is a degree of uniformity among all exchanges, the actual experience varies based on the participants. Most commonly, an individual in one Portal will engage with an individual in another Portal for roughly 20 minutes, guided initially by an introduction or prompt issued by the Community Curator. Standard practice is to emphasize informal, everyday talk, not complex or politically charged topics. The recommended starter for all Portal conversations is, “What would make today a good day for you?” an accessible question that participants can evolve into weightier issues if they desire. Bakshi believes “the conversation pair does not need to be super-charged...one day you might have Moscow and Ukraine, but it

could also be two parts of D.C. The idea is having two groups engage across varying forms of distance” (Che, 2015, para. 18).

Participants find themselves at Portals through a variety of means, including word of mouth, often from friends, colleagues, or a representative from a partner organization; online search/research; or just by being in the area and either engaging by choice or after being recruited by a Curator. People can make reservations for a particular time-slot on the Portals’ website or simply show up. Noted by Moghtader, “there are two ways of doing outreach. You can either send an email, or plop a thing down in a crowded area and see who wants to come in and participate” (Cohen, 2017, para. 9). At the close of an interaction, participants are invited to contribute to a Gold Book outside the Portal, a notebook in which people write about their experiences and reflections.

Types of Interactions

While most interactions are on-on-one conversations, group engagements are also common, whether in the form of two classrooms connecting, groups of musicians jamming together, or family reunions (Wang, 2015). Portals are used for a variety of purposes, for everything from language immersion and international conversations for educational purposes to random conversations with strangers. The leadership believes that by letting people push the boundaries of what is possible inside the Portal, the intercultural exchanges stay vibrant and exciting. Bakshi and his team recognize that Portals can be a space for people to use how they want, a versatile platform that can be harnessed in a variety of different ways.

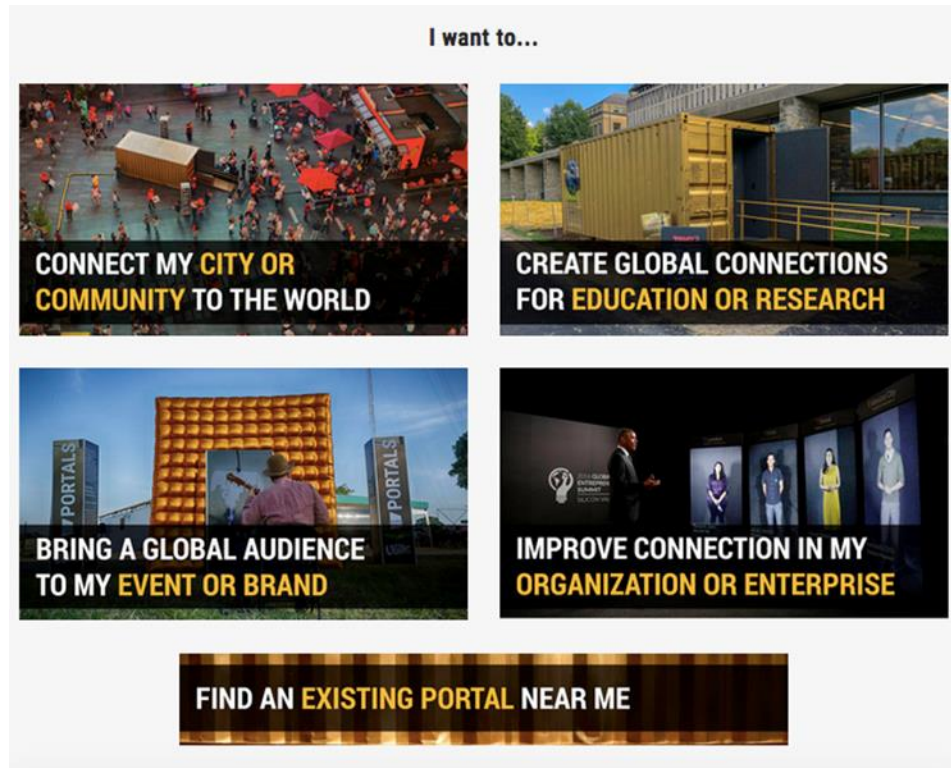


Figure 17. A selection of potential uses for Portals

On the Shared_Studios website, visitors can select one of four categories for using Portals: "Cities and Communities," "Events and Brands," "Education and Research," "Improving Internal Communication." Some of these categories offer subcategories. For example, under the "Events and Brands" page are more specific options for event types, including "Festival or performance," "Conference or industry event," "Internal corporate event," "Brand activation or marketing event," "Fundraiser or dinner," and "Other." There are also additional choices under the "Improving Internal Communication" page, including "Improving working relationships across distributed teams," "Reducing staff travel," "Full body immersive communications," "Improving virtual collaboration and increasing team efficiency," "Conducting team-building activities," and "Other."

In my visits to the different Portals sites, I experienced a range of experiences and people; each location seemed to have its own unique character. Several elements contributed to this: the

personality, background, and passion of the Community Curator(s); the strategy for securing participants (whether by recruiting passersby or using online reservations); the physical surroundings outside of the Portal container (e.g., a city backdrop, a public park); the type of interaction programmed for the day (e.g., one-on-one, group, thematic and more structured, open and unstructured); and the experience immediately following the interaction.

The Los Angeles visit was sunny and fueled by impassioned Curators with extensive backgrounds in social advocacy. The Baltimore visit was colored by the Curator's playful outreach to pedestrians; he successfully recruited several people to enter the Portal and spent time sharing his own ideas with each individual about the potential for Portals to connect the world. The Brooklyn visit was clean and seamless, led softly by a member of the Shared_Studios' leadership team; this site also had what seemed like the most comfortable setting for writing in the Gold Book. The Milwaukee visit was alive with spirit and inspiration; here the longtime Community Curator, Lewis Lee, spent hours speaking about how Portals has changed his life and provided many local residents with a newfound sense of purpose.

More specifically, here are some examples that help illuminate the scope of interaction possible with Portals:

Creative Engagements

During the pilot period in New York City, an Iranian-American man performed a dance for his family in Iran whom he had not seen or been connected to in a long time (Bakshi, 2016). During an exchange between Portals in Washington, D.C., and Herat, an American hip-hop artist collaborated with rappers in Afghanistan, exchanging and harmonizing through beats and lyrics (Kozłowska, 2015). As part of the NextNOW Festival at the University of Maryland, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center connected and collaborated with individuals in Afghanistan, Iran,

Honduras, and Mexico. Artists in Maryland were paired with artists overseas to collaborate on projects that would then be streamed to audiences at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (Artist Partner Program, 2015). As part of the Chicago Ideas Week Festival, visitors were invited to watch curated Portals experiences that focused on particular interests or activities. For example, a high school world history class connected with teenagers in Gaza City, a Chicago-based hip-hop artist performed for a crowd in Mexico City, and local blues musicians performed a concert for an audience in Kigali, Rwanda (Jackson, 2016). And finally, on the campus of New York's Baruch College, participants were encouraged to visit the Portal before or after performances of William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, reimaged by director Jessica Bauman, with an international cast and crew (Serratore, 2018). Bauman positioned the classic story as a mediation on immigrants and refugees (Brantley, 2017) and incorporated real voices from the Portal on campus into the overall storytelling and production experience.

Educational Purposes

Teachers increasingly use Portals as a tool for education and learning. For example, Professor James Riker used Portals to help students understand the international perspective on America's elections, stating, "This is the next best thing I can do for the students without giving them a plane ticket and a passport" (Powers, 2016, para. 6). Riker required his students to conduct interviews with individuals using Portals in other countries in hopes that they would expand their global understanding of the effects of U.S. politics. Similarly, Georgetown University's Laboratory for Global Performance and Politics hosted a Portal to help complement a larger initiative and performance entitled "Generation (Why) Y," which created intimate exchanges between Washington, D.C.-based students and students from Egypt, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Qatar, and Iraq, among other countries.

Lab Co-Founder and Co-Director Cynthia Schneider, distinguished professor in the practice of diplomacy, saw the Portal as an invaluable chance to foster deeper cross-cultural understanding. With a focus on Afghanistan, she noted how common news stories highlighted continued violence, endemic poverty, and other challenges, but with the Portal, people have “the chance to understand how ordinary Afghans view their lives and their future” (Che, 2015, para. 10).

Cultural Gatherings

A wide range of cultural activities have occurred during Portals exchanges, including shared meals, cultural “show-and-tells,” and curated conversations that strive to uncover similar cultural practices and/or artifacts. In November 2017, eight participants in New York City were invited to share a meal with six participants in Kigali, Rwanda. They discussed the food at their respective tables, as well as the weather, driving, the role of women in society, and cultural expectations and assumptions (“Shared Meals in Portals by Shared_Studios”, 2018). Chefs from Stockholm and Mexico City engaged through a Portal to share best practices of cooking and stories centered on food and the cultural act of dining (Community Curator, personal communication, March 2019).

A film collective in Los Angeles interacted with a film collective in Brooklyn through Portals and discussed how to make a film collective sustainable. They exchanged ideas around longevity, strategies for gaining new members, and past and upcoming programming. One Community Curator described the experience as a mentoring session and explained how the conversation helped garner ideas and challenge stereotypes. As she noted, “people tend to paint us with a broad brush here in LA, [thinking] that everything is vapid and about celebrity and fame, but it was amazing to have a different representation...a Latino person from a queer, radical, scrappy film collective in LA meeting with an Indian writer, Turkish filmmaker, and two

white American men from a collective in New York...this is where the Portal really shines” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018).

A Portal in Palestine connected with a Portal in Los Angeles for an embroidery exchange, where women from each community shared local fabrics, patterns, and practices. A Community Curator states, “we had a woman who was a domestic worker during the day but had this incredible wealth of knowledge and was a guardian of a collection of Oaxacan culture. [She] brought in more clothes and textiles than you could ever imagine...it was the most fabulous and meaningful connection between these women” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018).

One last example comes from Nate Abel, a rock-climbing instructor, who connected with a young Iranian artist. Abel expected to talk about the cultural differences between Iran and the United States, but instead bonded with the young artist over a mutual interest in mountaineering. “It was very natural,” Abel said with a smile and a shrug, “just like having a conversation with anyone else” (Wang, 2015, para. 16).

Research Engagements

Different from the typical Portals experience, the research-oriented exchange follows a more structured protocol. Through the guidance of researchers at Yale University, who will be named in the following section, participants willingly signed up to be part of a wider research project on community/police relations. Before interacting with individuals in other Portals, participants completed brief surveys on an iPad or phone. The survey included questions pertaining to race, levels of confidence in local police, and experiences of being stopped or questioned by police. Once completed, the Curators from the paired sites would exit the Portal

and participants would engage in a twenty-minute conversation started by the question “How do you feel about police in your community?” (Kirk, 2017)

While the original model of Portals involved a one-on-one conversation driven by a simple question, the format has evolved and adapted over time as Bakshi and his team have responded to the feedback and ideas of participants. The Shared_Studios site offers a helpful visual categorization of the different ways people can use Portals:

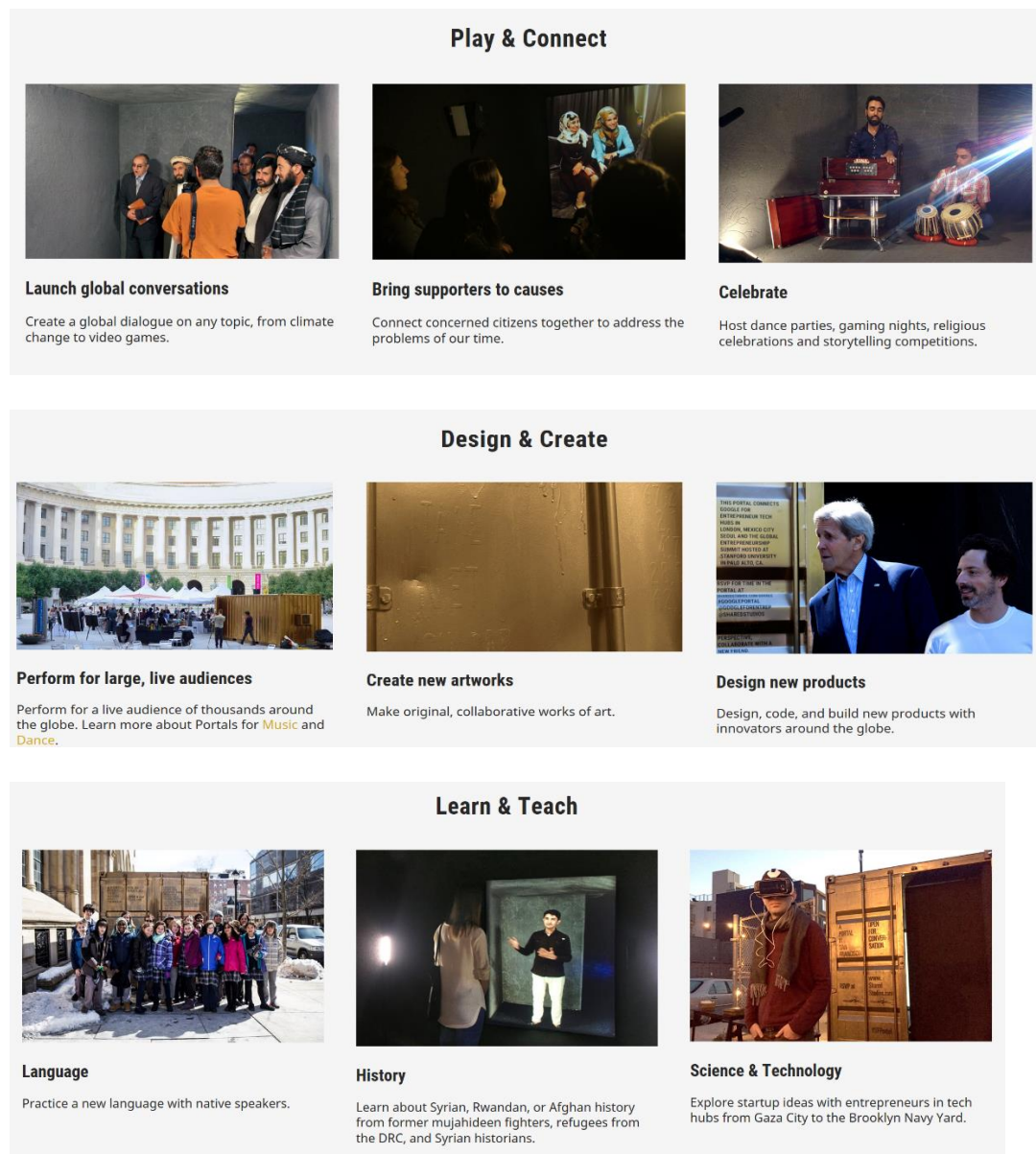


Figure 18. Usage opportunities for Portals

Diplomatic and Political Cases

As noted in the Introduction, there are a few examples of state and non-state actors using Portals for strategic political and/or diplomatic exchanges. While these exchanges were short in duration and not overtly promoted as diplomatic communication, they provide the foundation for a guiding question in this research about the extent to which a Portal could be used as a medium for public diplomacy. Here are some examples:

The U.N. General Assembly used Portals to engage with people living in the Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan. In congruence with the U.N.-commissioned virtual reality film, “Clouds Over Sidra,” which immerses viewers in the camp through the eyes of Sidra, a 12-year-old Syrian refugee, the aim was to eliminate the power distance and create empathy (Westcott, 2015). According to Mitchell Toomey, director of the UN Millennium Campaign, “It isn’t possible to physically transport the diplomats to a refugee camp, but this comes pretty close” (Kozłowska, 2015, para. 4).

Google for Entrepreneurs hosted Portals at the 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Summit at Stanford University, placing temporary sites in Seoul and London. As part of this effort, Portals participants included Secretary of State John Kerry, Google co-founder Sergey Brin, Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker, and Shark Tank’s Raymond John. All engaged with entrepreneurs from different parts of the world to discuss the government’s role in growing innovation and social entrepreneurship (Shared_Studios Dispatches, 2016). Also as part of the 2016 Global Entrepreneurship Summit, President Obama engaged with Ali Ismail, a young entrepreneur from Baghdad. Ismail was living in Harsham Camp, a displacement camp on the outskirts of Erbil, and spoke to Obama about his start-up company. He explained how Iraqi entrepreneurs were eager to connect with the outside world and how it would be helpful to have role models from other countries who face security risks. Ismail said, “I see Baghdad as an open and dynamic city

with a lot of young people who want to start their own business and who deserve the attention of foreign investors” (Niles & Bates, 2016, para. 18). Recalled by UNICEF Iraq Chief of Communications Jeffrey Bates, "We were on a knife edge. This was a unique opportunity to showcase some exciting and positive news from Iraq for a global forum” (Niles & Bates, 2016, para. 9).

Other Research on Portals

At the time of this dissertation, I am aware of two other academic projects underway on Portals. The first is a domestic Portal pairing that invites participants to privately engage with each other in dialogues about the criminal justice system in the United States. Co-led by scholars from Yale Law School, political scientist Vesla Weaver and law professor Tracy Meares, this study records conversations between residents of Milwaukee, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Baltimore. Participants answer questions related to their personal views on criminal justice, race, and community relations with the police; they include individuals who have been incarcerated numerous times, their families, community members, and police. The goal is to produce 2,000 transcripts about policing and incarceration among low-income black and Latino communities in U.S. cities (Kirk, 2017).

Recognizing that the nature of conversation in a Portal might elicit more authentic commentary than a traditional survey, Weaver and Meares set out to experiment with Portals as a new method. Meares visited a Portal herself and saw how the medium could potentially aid in understanding how people construct their narratives of the police and the experiences they have endured. After the case of Michael Brown, Meares said, “we were frustrated that journalists kept

saying, ‘this is what people in Ferguson are saying about the shooting,’ without really knowing or studying people who live in those places in a systematic way” (Kirk, 2017, para. 3).

For three years, Weaver and Meares worked with Community Curators in eleven neighborhoods and five cities across the U.S. (and one in Mexico City) to capture first-hand accounts of people who experience problems of crime in their communities and problems with the legal authorities who address crime. Their aim was manifold: they wanted to conduct a large scale qualitative study (with hundreds of people from multiple cities) to understand how police authority is experienced, and how policing shapes political thought and action within communities, and to identify patterns across different civic and ecological contexts (Meares & Weaver, 2018). Their aim was to situate their research as an intervention “geared towards advancing justice, empowerment, and creative ways to dismantle incarceration from the ground up...[making individuals in these communities] the center of the national conversation on the deleterious effects of incarceration and policing”; they wanted to focus on intimate interpersonal interaction and deliberation instead of shallow individual communication with survey researchers in apolitical settings” (Meares & Weaver, 2016, para. 11).

Weaver and Meares have achieved significant success through their research, stating that Portals is different from anything they have seen in the research community and beyond (Meares & Weaver, 2018). In contrast to the traditional survey methods, Portals “enabled a fuller understanding of the thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and resistance of the urban poor...in several neighborhoods around the country that are sites of concentrated policing...” (Meares & Weaver, 2018, para. 6). Some of the key features they found compelling include mobility (the opportunity to place the Portals wherever they desire); interactivity (people have face-to-face conversations

instead of responding to predesignated questions); depth (in contrast to surveys, which are often shallow); transcending of space (people can have conversations with others in very different places...these individuals are complete strangers, are able to dialogue and connect in real time despite their geographical distances) (Bakshi et al., 2017). Based on their substantial findings regarding the state of police-community relations in America, they argue that the nuanced nature of Portals should “alert policymakers to the more complicated story of policing happening on the grounds of race class subjugated communities” and reveal who is missing from the policymaking process (Meares & Weaver, 2018, p. 57).

The second research venture is being conducted by Brandon Ferderer, a doctoral student at Arizona State University. Ferderer is working on a paper titled, “Affective Elsewheres: Technology and Everyday Talk as Mediators for Human Connection,” in which he argues that Portals creates “unique affective elsewheres that foster human connection across geographic locations,” and that “the use of everyday conversation is an especially effective form of communication for fostering human connection especially when mediated by new communication technologies” (Ferderer, 2018, p. 1). Through a participatory rhetorical analysis of Portals’ press and participant reflections, participant observation, and interviews, Ferderer analyzed the affective gestures of Portal participants’ ordinary, phatic utterances to determine the potential of these to create human connection in the space of the shipping container. He uses theories of affect and technology as they converge around literatures of everyday talk to assess how the affective gestures of participant talk demonstrate how everyday vocabulary or phatic utterances create a feeling of human connection and the role of the Portal in supporting these affective architectures.

Conclusion

Shared_Studios' Portals provides an immersive experience through the strategic blend of audio-visual technology and sound aesthetic design. As stated by Ferderer, its readymade form allows for the “reimagining of the shipping container as a place for human interaction” (Ferderer, 2018, p. 6); the architecture and symbolism of the Portal allow for myriad uses, interpretations, and experiences by participants and Community Curators. The following chapter will provide a closer investigation of the exchanges that occur in Portals and important lessons for connection-making, as understood through the lens of 21st century media and public diplomacy.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE ANALYSIS

Snapshot and Overview

"These Curators take the connective technology we have — which too often isolates us in like-minded bubbles — and redeploy it to connect people who might otherwise never meet. We're creating a purposeful, human-led network to push against the forces driving us into insular groups" (Bakshi & Moghtader, 2018, para. 4).

As expressed by Strauss and Glaser (1967), grounded theory is a process, an imperfect and ever-developing product. While it demands creativity and artfulness on the part of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Bohm 2004), it also requires systemization, a process for including “both propositions and the richness of information leading to them” (Strauss & Glaser, 1967, p. 8). This chapter aims to provide insight into the grounded theory process and lay out a path to my primary finding on connection: a framework that positions connection on a spectrum and as an outcome of the alchemy of three components: agency, emotion, and imagination.

First, a concise review of this dissertation’s mission and methodological process will be provided.

Second, to reflect the structure of the previous chapter, key observations and insights on Portals will be categorized based on the system’s creators (the leadership of Portals), the system itself (Portals as a technology and network of physical sites), and the users (participants of Portals).

Each insight includes a narrative with the following: an example from the Case Profile, inclusive of description and analysis; a reference(s) to my field research, inclusive of observations, interviews, close reads, and participation; and, where relevant, a reference to

scholarship presented in the previous chapters on public diplomacy and 21st century media. In some cases, scholarship that extends beyond these two fields is mentioned, as a way to bolster the insights and promote an approach that is interdisciplinary and expansive.

Third, a summary will be presented to lay the groundwork for the following chapter.

Methodological Review

As a refresher, this dissertation started with a mission to explore the concept of connection and the extent to which new media can help foster connection within public diplomacy. Conceptual frameworks and recurring themes from two areas of scholarship were relied upon to help guide the study: from public diplomacy, the role of non-state actors, relationship-centric paradigms, and technology were foregrounded; from 21st century media, the concepts of Impact Storytelling, PeaceTech, and technological affordances, namely presence, were foregrounded.

Through a grounded theory methodology, an instrumental case study on Portals was conducted, which included the collection and analysis of a mix of data: close reads of entries in Portals' site-specific Gold Books; close reads of articles about Portals and the Portals experience; site visit to the Baltimore Portal (exchange with Los Angeles Portal); site visit to the Brooklyn Portal (exchange with Herat, Afghanistan and Mexico City, Mexico); site visit to the Los Angeles Portal; site visit to the Milwaukee Portal; site visit and tour of the Shared_Studios office in Brooklyn, New York; interviews with Amar Bakshi, Founder and Creative Director of Shared_Studios; interview with Jake Levin, Chief Operating Officer of Shared_Studios; interview with Emma Saperstein, Global Curator for Shared_Studios; interviews with six Community Curators; informal conversations with ten Portals participants.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) note that, in addition to the systematic approach of assessing data, researchers may be susceptible to “occasional flashes of insight, of seminal ideas, garnered from sources outside the data. But the generation of theory from such insights must then be brought into relation to the data, or there is great danger that theory and [the] empirical world will mismatch” (Strauss & Glaser, 1967, p. 6). I experienced a so-called “flash of insight” as a result of my relationship to the data. Throughout the intertwined process of data collection and analysis, I practiced a certain pattern of engagement – I shifted back and forth between periods of extreme closeness with the data and periods of deliberate distance from the data. This strategy, reminiscent of literature on the value of being unfocused (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2015; Pillay, 2017; Simmons, 2014), allowed for my early insights to percolate and, ultimately, provided more mental space for critical and thoughtful assessment. The complete process resulted in a series of observations, which are presented here.

The observations also reveal part of the coding process, an integral part of the grounded theory methodology. In the Straussian approach, data categorization progresses through three stages: open, which involves identifying and categorizing data; axial, which involves relating codes to each other, and/or tying the categorizing to common axes; and selective, which involves narrowing even further to one single category, or finding the driver that coheres the ideas together and impels them forward. This chapter offers concise reflections from the axial stage of coding, while the next and final chapter offers a reflection on the selective stage of coding.

The System's Creators: How the Leadership of Portals Fosters Connection

Through Simple and Organic Communication

The first way leadership fosters connection is through the strategic promotion of simple and organic communication among participants. Most typically, Community Curators prompt participants with the question, “What would make today a good day for you?” This innocuous inquiry serves to disarm participants and allows space for conversation to evolve into something more complex (if desired). When asked how Portals can sustain constructive conversations, co-founder Moghtader replied, “By telling people to start with a very simple question...we give them this simple, almost mundane prompt, but it's very personal” (Bakshi & Moghtader, 2018, para. 14). She cites an example from one Portal exchange:

I remember this young woman in Iran answered, “If it rains! Rain would make this a good day,” and a girl in the U.S. asked, “Why rain? It’s terrible when it rains,” and in Iran she said, “Well, the city is really polluted and it’s worsened over the years because of sanctions, and we can’t get the proper refined oil in the country, so what we put in our cars makes it really hard to breathe. But when it rains, it finally clears up a little. (Bakshi & Moghtader, 2018, para. 14)

Moghtader illustrates how a simple prompt can catalyze natural conversation and lead to the discussion of complex issues in a personal way. Importantly, the leadership strives to spark conversation, not dictate it; they activate interaction with a simple prompt and then give agency to the participants, letting them construct their own unique engagements. This practice resembles some of the precepts explored by scholars who advocate for relationship-centric models of public diplomacy. Most profoundly, it aligns with Riordan’s (2004) description of genuine dialogue:

[Genuine dialogue] requires a more open, and perhaps humble, approach, which recognizes that no one has a monopoly of truth or virtue, that other ideas may be valid and that the outcome may be different from the initial message being promoted. If the aim is to convince, rather than just win, and the process is to have credibility, the dialogue must be genuine. This does not amount to abandoning core values. The aim remains to convince other publics of these values. But the effort to convince is set in a context of listening. Just as no individual will long suffer, or be convinced by, an interlocutor who endlessly asserts his views while never listening to those of others, so other governments and societies will not engage in collaboration if they feel that their ideas and values are not taken seriously (p. 189).

The experience within Portals allows for genuine dialogue. Most often between non-state actors, this dialogue involves humility and openness among participants, flowing from a place that feels natural and authentic. While there are often prompts issued by the Community Curator, the participants have agency within the experience. They have the freedom to explore the prompt in a multitude of ways, discussing and reacting to matters with which they feel comfortable. Outside of the prompts, the participants can ask questions and share stories freely; they are unfiltered.

From a technological perspective, the technology of Portals permits agency for participants through its seamless and embedded nature. Because the technology is part of the structure, participants can stand and move autonomously, remaining physically untethered (not inhibited or restrained by technology). Additionally, they have the option to leave at any time. Noted by leadership, “I think people feel comfortable and are able to open up in a really meaningful way...and they know there’s a door behind them, [so] if they feel challenged, they

can leave. That’s a really valuable structural component” (J. Levin, personal communication, January 2019). From both a social and technological perspective, the participants have a high degree of agency in their decision to enter, exit and participate within the Portal.

Through a Strong Internal Culture

The second way leadership fosters connection is by cultivating a strong and electric internal culture. Beginning with the core leadership, the internal culture of Shared_Studios promotes and is fueled by learning, adaptability, and future-oriented thinking. These qualities are apparent in interviews with and observations of Community Curators and organizational leaders. Additionally, there appears to be a widespread commitment to, and enthusiasm for, the mission of Shared_Studios. Bakshi has a deep intrinsic motivation and views himself not as an influencer, but as part of an entity that facilitates new channels of communication and understanding (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018). He is unbound to diplomatic goals or political agendas, but is driven by a certain set of ideals. Stated by another leader, “everyone would probably say this, but the work we do is deeply mission-driven. Amar articulates it much better than anyone...we want diversity to show how diversity is inherently good, we’re connecting people in new contexts that can heal wounds, we’re developing new cultural products, new pieces of art, bringing educators together. There is something in here that drives all of us” (J. Levin, personal communication, January 2019).

The Community Curators adopt a similar mindset and function as informal diplomats. Through interviews and observations, a certain personality emerges among the curators, including a predisposition to social justice issues, experience as an activist, and caring deeply about the goal to “make the world a better place.” In many cases, curators heard about Portals via word-of-mouth and reached out to see how she/he might get involved. The same is true of the

Portals staff/leadership; only recently are formal human resource strategies being used to hire employees. Early on, the brand carried a magnetism that drew in talent of a certain kind. While this draw continues, the organization is becoming more formalized and structured in their recruitment efforts.

The Curators are seen as “the most important people on [the] team,” without whom “nothing would be possible” (Levin, 2019). Their significance in the participant experience of Portals is known and cared about by the leadership. Regarding the Curators in Afghanistan, one leader said, “I’ve been working with the team there, they’re friends as much as colleagues. I’ve been working with them for a few years now, we talk every week, I trust them implicitly” (Levin, 2019). In return, most Curators find great value in their work. Milwaukee resident and Curator Lee states, “It’s the ultimate tool to learn about different cultures and the way things work in different parts of the world” (Cohen, 2017, para. 5). Lee also claims the Portal experience “educated me on the truth about culture. That’s what I got out of it the most. Being able to learn the truth from a person in Iraq, a person in Germany – a lot of times I was misled by just not knowing simple facts. It’s the ultimate education on life” (Nelson, 2017, para. 14).

In addition to feeling great pride with Portals’ current state, the leadership and curators practice future-orientated thinking, always actively imagining the potential reach and impact of Portals. This is evidenced by the many iterations and articulations of Portals’ possibilities, stated by Bakshi and others (noted in the previous chapter). Every person I interviewed, regardless of their current level of involvement or activity, appeared enthusiastic about the prospect of Portals’ future.

While not a direct comparison, the attributes of Shared_Studio’s internal culture can be likened to some of the sentiments of contemporary public diplomacy scholars. For example,

Cull's (2017) belief in the abandonment of the winning mindset, emphasis on listening, and the mission to work for a common good can all be found in the culture of Shared_Studios.

Additionally, Riordan's (2004) understanding of genuine dialogue can be subtly observed among the leadership: "[Genuine dialogue] requires a more open, and perhaps humble, approach, which recognizes that no one has a monopoly of truth or virtue, that other ideas may be valid and that the outcome may be different from the initial message being promoted" (p. 189).

Through an Expanding Network of Allies

The third way leadership fosters connection is by investing in an ever-expanding network of partners and participants. Extending from the internal culture of Portals, the leadership invests in building a wider, ever-expanding, network of Portal participants and supporters. A global ecosystem is being constructed, creating what Bakshi refers to as a human library (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018). Portals builds an integrated network that creates a sense of belonging similar to that of a special club, alumni network, or sister-city arrangement. A level of credibility and trust is inherent to those that have "Portaled" (A. Bakshi, personal communication, December 2018), a term used by Bakshi to describe those who have participated in a Portals exchange; the spirit feels infectious, with employees and curators ready to discuss their work, motivation, and plans for the future.

This model of intentional expansion echoes a few concepts in public diplomacy. First, it summons the holistic logic model presented by Zaharna (2019), which acknowledges the universal, interconnected nature of human relations. This model extends beyond the tenets of the relational model – contact points, co-presence, emotion, perspective taking, and reciprocity – to include several ideals that Portals aims to satisfy. The most notable of these are the idea of complete connectivity for both future and historical relationships, and the embracement of

diversity, adaptation, and alignment. The ethos and work of Portals echoes this holistic logic, gradually creating a pop-up network of sister, brother, and cousin cities, all of which are interconnected and cooperative.

Further, the growth of Portals speaks to the concept of network or networked public diplomacy, which is diverse, collaborative, and nonhierarchical (Hocking, 2008) and dictated by three interrelated relational processes: internal relationship building (bonding and team building), external coalition building, and incorporating diversity (Zaharna, 2013).

The very model of Portals as an organization is a lesson for diplomacy. All at once, it collaborates with many different cities and partner organizations, functioning more as a facilitator or guide than a leader. While this type of model is not always appropriate to diplomacy, its investment in the network and its pursuit of holistic logic dynamics could be emulated.

Through Cultural Accompaniment

The fourth way leadership fosters connection is through the practice of what I denote as “cultural accompaniment” in their process of cultivating relationships with participating communities. Cultural accompaniment refers to the willingness and commitment of the Portals team to learn alongside local communities; rather than enter a new location with the mission to teach or lead, they engage as an equal partner. Essentially, it means that the organization of Shared_Studios does not enter a community with a rigid formula and agenda; rather it adapts its formula and co-constructs its agenda based on the local community it enters. It accompanies the population of each city or town, deferring to its unique culture and social language.

Portals offers its participants the freedom to manipulate affordances, posing the question, “What do you want this medium to afford you?” and accordingly adapts to local needs and

wants. This is similar to the idea of agency presented in the first insight; that rather than guide or dictate the program, Portals avows participating communities with a sense of shared agency. Leadership accompanies each community while honoring the system's ethos and value system. Noted by Levin, whose role is transitioning into one more focused on community engagement, this commitment is becoming more central to organizational mission:

I'll be doing more client and partner relationship-management and engaging on the growth and partnership side and working on programming, so [I am] thinking about the value that Portals generates for communities. [It is] important to make sure that every member of the Portals network both receives and gives value. I think there is an enormous amount of value we could gain by investing in the communities where Portals are located...figuring out what content is important to them (Levin, 2019).

The practice of cultural accompaniment is similar to Fisher's (2013) conceptualization of collaborative public diplomacy. He argues that in collaborative approaches, the involvement of individuals and groups in diplomatic initiatives helps create a sense of ownership, "which allows a project to draw on the more powerful autonomous motivation and resulting stronger adherence to group norms and shared-group goals" (p. 198). True collaboration, he believes, extends beyond the "show of listening; communities must feel they are involved and are genuinely heard" (p. 198). Portals becomes a hyperlocalized initiative with each community involved in an integral way, from the process of hiring of curator, to building partnerships with local organizations, and the programming of content.

Another relevant concept can be found in 21st century literature, such as Nagy and Neff's (2015) imagined affordance. An imagined affordance evokes the imagination of both media users and designers, setting expectations for technology that may not be realized through

conscious, rational, knowledge but will be concretized or materialized through socio-technical systems; an affordance is very much dependent upon humans and their actions. In this way, through cultural accompaniment, the leadership of Shared_Studios enables communities and individuals to imagine how they want to use Portals. Rather than issue a rigid prescription, they defer to, and collaborate with, participants to determine the most optimal affordances for each case. The leadership provides a medium and encourages the community to imagine how it might be used.

The System: How the System of Portals Impacts Connection

By Creating Feelings of Presence

The first way the system of Portals impacts connection is through the technology's ability to evoke feelings of presence in participants. Several elements of the interior of Portals contribute to the experience of presence. First, the seamless nature of the technology provides participants with the freedom to move and interact with one another. The technology (computer, small camera, wifi, power generator in some cases) of Portals is woven into the interior of the shipping container to invisibly facilitate an experience; it is embedded into the environment so as not to be obvious or obtrusive to participants. Only through the occasional technical difficulty, such as an issue with connectivity or power, is one made aware of the technology.

Different from virtual reality, where the technology is noticeably outside of the user, or augmented reality, where the technology is layered onto an existing physical image/environment, Portals provides a contained immersive space. The technology is essentially hidden in the walls, creating a setting that feels natural and organic. This seamlessness guides the participant into the

process immediately and therefore precludes prolonged distraction or inquisition about the technological aspects of the experience.

Additionally, with Portals, technological use is essentially outsourced: it requires no specialized knowledge or skills from the user; if an issue does arise, it is managed by the curator. From the user perspective, the technology of Portals is not seen or tinkered with, it merely enhances the overall experience, which feels easy, inviting and unintimidating.

Second, the interior of every Portal is largely identical, outfitted with dark grey carpet, dim lighting, and the same arrangement of technology. As stated by leadership, “there is something very powerful about building interiors to be identical; it decontextualizes the space and implies equality” (J. Levin, personal communication, January 2019). This equality between spaces is extremely valuable in creating intimacy. From a purely aesthetic standpoint, it makes people feel like they are truly sharing the same space, a darkened and comfortable room that feels spatially continuous. From a philosophical perspective, the equality in spaces symbolizes equality between participating individuals, communities, and nations.

While power dynamics are inherent to all relationships, Portals presents a tactile way to lessen this; regardless of location or socioeconomic status, every participant exists in the same space. Through a traditional Skype or FaceTime call, consider the Queen of England chatting with a young student from an impoverished region of the United States. The Queen chats from an opulently decorated room of Buckingham Palace, while the student chats from the crowded room of a dilapidated home. Whether overt or subliminal, the settings from which the two engage reinforce stereotypes and cultural/historical power dynamics. In Portals, however, the Queen and the student exist against the same backdrop: the dark interior of the shipping

container. This equalizing of participants mitigates the possibility of hierarchical thinking, in which one speaker is superior to the other.

Third, the internal environment of Portals focuses attention on the interaction itself, thereby sustaining feelings of presence. With other media, users/participants often have difficulty staying present, as their attention splits between the physical world and the mental or imaginary world (Witmer & Singer, 1998). The technological cues within Portals, however, elicit a response in which participant focus is deepened and extended. Different from other videoconferencing applications like Skype or Facetime, in which a participant can be unfocused (distracted, multitasking), or a platform like social media, where an individual has time and space to construct/modify her identity, Portals eliminates peripheral barriers and demands a highly engaged interaction between users.

There is no “selfie” view, the full body of each participant is presented, and the camera is placed at eye level so eye contact can easily be made. Noted by Bakshi, “there’s so many ways in which we perform online and with strangers,” but with Portals, “there’s less pressure ... the usual performativity is stripped away” (Wang, 2015, para. 13). Additionally, former curator Kristen Erickson observed, “I think our kids are constantly communicating, but at a very superficial level, and the Portal really changes that up and forces you to engage...there’s something about committing to dialogue...our students leaving behind their phones and their own context and just kind of entering this space that requires their full attention” (Villarreal, 2018, para. 17).

The physicality of Portals replicates a real-life conversation, in which two people face one another in the same room. Participants see the “Other” from head to toe in full body, full scale, real time. In this setting, the participants are unlikely to find distractions (e.g., picking up

their cell phone, looking at themselves in the selfie screen), and instead focus on the nuances of the person who stands before them. This experience aligns with two important facets of what Carmigniani et al. (2011) describe as markers of socially acceptable technology, namely the Portal does not distract the participant from being present with those in the same room (or other Portal), and the Portal allows for a natural interaction between participants.

The measuring of presence is commonly based on physical or physiological cues. These include changes in posture (Freeman et al., 2000), heart rate, skin conductance, respiration rate, and peripheral skin temperature. While my methods did not assess these granular cues, proxy evidence was apparent in the data. Through Gold Books and articles, numerous participants expressed the idea of being in the same room as the participant in the partnering Portal. For example, participants reflected, “it felt like we were standing in the same room,” “it felt like we were breathing the same air,” “it feels like you’re standing right there...I want to go up and shake your hand,” “the same room, breathing the same air, feeling like a real-life conversation.” These physical observations, coupled with the emotionally rich reflections of participants, reveal feelings of presence and co-presence. This aligns most naturally with Heeter’s (1992) social presence, the type that exists when people co-exist in the same virtual environment, and Muhlbach, Bocker, and Prussog’s (1995) shared space presence, or the extent to which participants in a teleconnection get the impression of actually sharing space with each other, despite not being in the same physical location.

Through its Position as a Phenomenon of Art

The second way the system of Portals impacts connection among participants is through its positioning as a phenomenon of art, not of technology or public diplomacy. As an important disclaimer, the Portals leaders do not share a unified definition of the system. Each leader I spoke

with articulated the same idea, always with enthusiasm, but in a different way, some emphasizing the unique artistic or aesthetic quality, others alluding to its network-like structure. A common sentiment among them, however, is that the technology is secondary – essential, but tributary to the role of the Curator or the community in which the Portal is located. This idea, which is more evaluative of the social side of Portals is also reflected in its seamless technology. As one participant observed, in contrast to Internet communications that have allowed people to interact across space/time for years, “Portals invents a purer experience” (Gold Books, 2018). Removed from the context of the Internet, which often invites profanity, Portals is positioned as “art” in a physical space, thus creating a much different type of engagement. The technology appears to recede into the background, and what takes over is an artistic experience, rich with emotion, and at its best, a sense of wonder, surprise, and synchronicity. Bakshi articulates an important perspective on the relationship between Portals and art:

The context of art is critical to Portals...Portals is a global public artwork that can exist only because there is a common global understanding of at least one definition of art that positions art as de-instrumentalized, without purpose, without objective measure of its worth. This vision has been nurtured by museums, galleries, art schools, collectors, fairs, public art institutions, and others. Now, because of their work, Portals can exist as art outside the art world institutions as long as participants understand it as such. So we position Portals as art around the world very consciously, as an organizer might—by building our internal culture, developing compelling partnerships, and deploying external messaging with an eye toward its reception (Barlow, 2018, para. 18-19).

When positioned as art, the experience of Portals – like the experience of art – is vulnerable to ample interpretations. The participant feels a level of autonomy and empowerment

in her experience, the freedom to make of it what she desires. This differs from the experience afforded by many programs that overtly aim to connect people. For example, consider the “hard” policies outlined in the Introduction, those that aim to force integration or connectivity. Whether in the form of a structured diplomatic exchange between two leaders of a nation or formal diversity and inclusion training, the hard strategies involve explicitness in their missions, a desire for a certain outcome.

While there is a place for these hard strategies, the role of Portals presents an interesting alternative. By foregrounding the human experience and omitting quantitative markers of impact/outcomes, Portals create a more organic and emotionally-interpretive experience for participants.

The mission of Portals, as stated on its website and other public-facing content is to give people everywhere a chance to tell their own story; to explore the diversity of the human experience; to connect people separated by distance and difference in encounters that are humanizing and real (“Home,” 2019). It ends there, however. Portals does not state goals of increasing understanding, increasing awareness, or learning about another culture; their mission does not, per say, hit the user over the head with their intentions and hopes.

For public diplomacy, this could mean several things. Most authentically, practitioners might consider how to disguise diplomatic exchanges in an activity or interaction that feels more organic and less obvious about its outcome. This approach should not lead to manipulation, but rather experimentation with the presentation of diplomacy – can it be art, can it be play, can it be celebratory? There may be value in not labeling an entity or exchange as diplomatic, to break away from the formal and stereotypically “diplomatic” approaches in the traditional spaces and pursue informal approaches.

Through its Position as a Special Destination

Similar to the previous observation, the third way the system of Portals impacts connection for participants is through its positioning as a special destination, which elicits a reverent response from participants. In many Gold Books, participants use emotive language to describe their visits to Portals, using terms like alluring, magical, sacred, special, like a sanctuary, like a safe haven, like a fireside chat, hygge (roughly translated from Danish to mean a form of everyday togetherness, or a psychological state that is cozy, convivial, contributing to personal wholeness and wellbeing).

Although captured after participation, these rich adjectives reveal a common understanding of the experience – the Portal extends beyond its functionalities as a technology, medium, or venue for communication and embodies an experience akin to visiting a special destination (or partaking in a special event). Consequently, participants often have heightened levels of awareness, focus, and excitement. In some cases, participants may also have increased expectations, a desire for the experience to be worthwhile and rewarding. The Portal itself is positioned as an almost museum-like place, one that elicits an intense emotional and participatory response.

This comparison is worth expanding on, particularly when considering the similarities between the immersive interior of Portals and many contemporary museum installations. Initially alluded to by Bakshi, when situated in relevant literature, the idea becomes ever-more valuable and hits on two salient insights about what Portals, as a special destination, can produce: an increased capacity to experience emotion, and an increased capacity to participate with civility.

From the literature on 21st century media, Stogner (2011a) sees immersive experiences as “a welcome catalyst for engaging a broader range of people in deeper and richer ways” (p. 197). She advocates for the potential of new technology to heighten sensory engagement and

observes how “immersive experiences that engage the senses create a heightened emotional and cognitive connection that ignites the imagination” (Stogner, 2011b, p. 119).

Similarly, Galani and Chalmers (2004) show how ambient museum displays offer a device for drawing attention and influencing patterns in physical spaces. In the museum space, people attend to the presence of others without any formal training or direction, meaning that the features of immersive displays can prompt feelings of presence among participants and thereby change the typical ways in which they interact with and relate to each other. Relational dynamics can soften and become more civil.

Supported further by Bochner et al. (2005), “museums serve not only as a place for information gathering but they also serve social and liminal or spiritual needs as well” (p. 82). This idea is echoed by a Portals curator, who states that the “immersive aspect becomes a functional part of mindfulness...you’re demanding to be present in a different way. If you’re not interested, the other person knows. So both people have to enter into this completely unspoken contract where they agree to pay attention to each other. That has to be the ground zero of the interaction” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018).

The positioning of Portals – its physical place in the community and its brand online – has gradually created a protocol for the participant experience. Similar to attending a museum, where visitors assume a certain demeanor, one of deference, respect, and quiet, Portals participants agree to stay open to and honor the experience. When the protocol is violated, the curator is available to intervene or pivot the engagement into new territory, if deemed necessary.

From public diplomacy, this notion resembles Constantinou’s (2006b) homo-diplomacy, which encapsulates a holistic and philosophical approach to the relational paradigm. He highlights the “experimental and experiential diplomacy of everyday life” (p. 355), and the

“transformative potential of diplomacy,” a spiritual form that “engages in heterology to revisit and rearticulate homology, whose mission is not only, not just, the knowledge and control of the Other but fundamentally the knowledge of the Self—and crucially this knowledge of the Self as a more reflective means of dealing with and transforming relations with Others” (p. 352). In this way, Portals represents an example of a system that does not shy away from striving to create experiences that are spiritual, magical, or sacred. These descriptors may feel pious and foreign to the realm of diplomacy, but as the field becomes increasingly comfortable with the notion of relationship-centric frameworks, I believe the field will also discover a place for the deeply emotional and human experiences that feed connection. These feelings have the ability to transcend and subdue obstacles to diplomacy; they exist on a higher plane than the commonplace conflicts that make interpersonal relationships seem impossible. When diplomatic actors, whether governmental or non-state, engage with one another in a setting that feels sacrosanct, they are poised to communicate with civility and fresh perspectives.

Regarding the potential for sacrosanct connections within Portals, a member of the leadership team states, “people don’t get angry or upset...we have found that when you come face to face with someone in an environment like this, it kind of tones your energy down in a way. It’s hard to keep the contentiousness” (J. Levin, personal communication, 2019). Similarly, a curator muses, “there is this situationist aspect...you’re not expecting this, and I think this inherently disarming aspect actually goes a long way towards facilitating kindness. [The experience] lends itself to go beyond bipartisanship...in dialogue with a stranger, you are going to be a little more thoughtful with what you’re going to share...there is a mutual respect that is required for the exchange ...the set-up facilitates being more mindful. And I think that mindfulness sets up getting into the nitty-gritty. If that container is acknowledged by the group or

individuals participating in exchange, I think it ends up being a considerate and kind dialogue” (Community Curator, personal communication, November 2018).

By Acting as a Community Anchor

The fourth way the system of Portals impacts connection among participants is by serving as a local community anchor. For many communities, Portals has become a valuable anchor in the neighborhood, an entity folded into the local sociocultural fabric, where people can gather, learn, and deliberate. This is especially true of places like Chicago, Milwaukee, Herat, and Mexico City, where Portals have operated long-term and consistently. As expressed by curator Lee, “Since we started a year ago, crime went down in our neighborhood by 21 percent...the Portal gave our community a sense of something to call their own—something to feel proud of. It brought the residents back, and gave us something to rally around” (Cohen, 2017, para. 7).

Several Community Curators expressed the significance of Portals to the community and the extent to which it has become a favorite landmark for locals. One Curator from the Los Angeles Portal shared a story about some of the regulars that visit from the neighboring shelters and homeless encampments, stating “it is very rare in a city like Los Angeles to feel embedded in a community the way we were able to...people started to know us, people who weren’t as interested at first eventually popped their heads in and considered joining activities. That was really amazing” (A. Bakhle, personal communication, November 2018). Similarly, a Community Curator from the Portal in Herat, Afghanistan, shared how several of his friends visited the Portal several times each week; they looked forward to connecting with new locations and would often chat for hours.

In the same way that the technology is embedded into the interior of the gold box, Portals – as a network – is embedded into the public infrastructure of participating communities. This positioning could be similar to cultural exchanges or programs that offer regular opportunities for engaging in diplomacy-focused activities. Importantly, Portals provides a prolonged channel for activity. It establishes itself as an integral part of the community and invites its neighbors to visit if and when they would like. By situating itself as an entity that provides continual exposure to other cultures, ideologies, and values, the experience becomes less intimidating and more natural; the Portal and everything it represents extends into the sociocultural composition of the community.

As an extension of public diplomacy literature, a fellow Portals’ researcher, Ferderer (2018) offers a worthy explanation of Portals’ role in the community, noting that at its best, Portals extends into a community to become a kind of “third place,” a location outside of work and home where people gather, and where political deliberation has the potential to emerge from everyday conversation. Citing Papacharissi (2015) and her articulation of electronic elsewhere as “social spaces sustained through digitally enable affective structures that support meaning-making” (p. 24), Ferderer posits that Portals is a “space in-between, an informal meeting space wherein participants can share their concerns” (p. 7). To build upon this point, part of what makes Portals an impactful third place is its responsiveness to the community in which it lives. While every Portal shares an identical interior, every Portal has a unique personality that has been carefully shaped by and for its local community. As an anchor, Portals provides a space that represents the identity of its local community and a space that offers safe and consistent opportunities for engagement with foreign communities.

By Providing a Novel Experience

The fifth way the system of Portals impacts connection is by providing participants with a novel or foreign experience. As noted in the Case Profile, the early inspiration for Portals came from Bakshi experiencing novel types of social interactions with people while traveling. De-instrumentalized and purposeless, these interactions contrasted his typical engagements in the United States – they were unexpected and unplanned and new; the novelty created some of the magic.

In a similar sense, the novelty of the Portals experience is part of what contributes to its success and increases the level of connection and impact experienced by participants. In Gold Book responses from participants and from conversations with Community Curators it becomes clear that, for most people, Portals is unlike anything they have experienced before. It is different from what is normal or “everyday” for participants, and that matters for several reasons:

First, novelty invites a mindset conducive to connection. The strangeness or uniqueness of the Portal (a gold shipping container) set against a backdrop that, in many cases, is familiar to the participant (e.g., a local park, a high-traffic/high-visibility area of the city or community, a university campus), triggers intrigue. And with this intrigue comes a certain internal state from which emotion and connection may emerge.

This idea can be backed by some of the scholarship on 21st century media. As noted by Fontaine (1992), the role of the user’s internal state is critical when it comes to presence and focus, the ability to direct one’s attention toward something fully. In a new environment, focus is generally heightened; the novelty, immediacy, and uniqueness of the experience requires intense and broad focus. Similarly, one of the four virtual reality factors that produces an emotional effect, as summarized by Lessiter et al. (2018), is the newness of the technique, or the mere fact that the novelty of something causes people to be excited. The capacity to pay attention is

particularly sensitive to novelty (Evaluating Immersive User Experience and Audience Impact, 2018).

Second, novelty can prompt changes in perception and imagination. To support this idea, literature beyond public diplomacy and media must be explored; a turn must be made to scholarship that spans psychology, creativity, and neuroscience. Noted by Berns (2008), novel stimuli jolt attentional systems; whether through a new piece of information or an unfamiliar environment, newness unleashes the imagination and forces the brain's perceptual system out of categorization. Rather than relying on the typical neuro-shortcuts, when faced with a never-before-encountered stimulus the brain cannot predict what will happen next. As a result, the networks that govern perception and imagination are forced to reprogram and reorganize. By deploying attention in a way that is different, the frontal cortex can reconfigure neural networks to reveal things that were unseen before, and the "more radical the change, the greater the likelihood of fresh insights" (Berns, 2008, para. 12). The surest way to provoke imagination, and the consequent perceptual shifts, is to seek out novel environments, situations with which one has no prior experience.

Third, novelty relates to impact. While there is minimal scholarship to support this claim, the hypothesis emerges from the responses issued by Portals participants. Many Gold Books are filled with expressions worth acknowledging: first, that the experience itself is new and foreign, and second, that the experience is one that will not be forgotten, one that will leave a lasting impact. The "stickiness" of an immersive experience, which may hold potential for cumulative impact, can be measured by participants being glad they had the experience and expressing the desire to experience the same or similar content again (Evaluating Immersive User Experience

and Audience Impact, 2018). Evident in the feedback, Portals provides a sticky experience, one that disrupts the ordinary worlds of its participants.

Though this study did not focus on the long-term impact of Portals, such impact can be presumed through various examples, including the production of reflections in Gold Books, the growing network of Portals via word-of-mouth and social media platforms, the number of repeat participants, and examples of people who connected in Portals staying in contact and even meeting up in real life. There is ample evidence that reveals participants' efforts of continued connection and suggests that the experience of Portals, even if subtly, creates curiosity about the world and "the Other."

This insight raises a challenging question for public diplomacy practitioners – how can novelty be sustained? In terms of content and product, this is difficult, but in terms of process and way of thought, novelty can certainly be pursued. Practitioners (and scholars) who call for more imaginative solutions to public diplomacy might consider immediate and practical ways for adopting novelty; they might proactively integrate exercises into their daily lives that aim to augment creativity and innovation.

The System's Users: How the Participants of Portals Build Connection

By Co-Creating a Shared Narrative and Reality

The first way the participants of Portals build connection is by co-creating a shared, albeit temporary, narrative and reality. As stated by co-founder Moghtader, "we wanted to create a space where people can create their own understanding of one another" (Babcock, 2018, para. 5). Bakshi agrees, stating that Portals "carves out a space and time in which, potentially, people can

create their own private meanings” (Barlow, 2018, para. 27). This sentiment captures several important features of Portals and its capacity to connect people.

First, participants, not system creators, dominate content. Portals is different from many other applications of 21st century media, in which the content is created by an artist or team of artists and then distributed to users. Although the physical space has been constructed by a team, the communicative infrastructure of Portals functions as a vehicle of facilitation between participants in identical environments. In this space, participants work together in the process of storytelling.

Although often prompted by a question or input from the Curator, the bulk of content and interaction is co-created by participants; it is driven from within the participant and community and not from an external source. This echoes important features of the relationship-centric paradigm within public diplomacy, wherein two-way communication and mutuality are revered (Fitzpatrick, 2011; Melissen, 2005a; Ogawa, 2013b) and diplomacy becomes an open, public, and interactive form of communication in the global arena, wherein the audience has agency and can decide what content to accept (Pamment, 2014; Riordan, 2002; Wang, 2006).

More directly, Scott (2010) places similar value on the role of story in public diplomacy. She argues that a “winning” story might be a compelling narrative that draws in listeners and “accommodates other stories, even contradictory ones, within its embrace. It adapts as it unfolds, rather than offering a fixed narrative which proclaims itself king of the castle after it has defeated all other contestants” (p. 234). Portals could be considered a space in which limitless stories are accommodated. Relatedly, in literature on 21st century media, the concept of narrative holds great weight. In evaluation of immersive user experience and audience impact, it is noted that “storytelling, narrative, and creative expression are more primary drivers of impact than the

technical affordances of immersive technology,” and that some cases of new media can cause a “paradigm shift in the production of cultural content” (Evaluating Immersive User Experience and Audience Impact, 2018, p. 22).

Second, the participants of Portals appear to see themselves as active contributors in the experience, not as viewers or passersby but as deeply important parts of the engagement. This idea is supported, once again, through comparisons to the immersive museum experience. Stogner (2011) makes an important differentiation between interactive immersion, which involves action and reaction, and participatory immersion, which involves a more complete, full, and self-directed exploration, one in which the participant contributes to something larger than herself. Similarly, Simon’s (2010) model of “co-produced experiences” resonates. In this model, museums and their visitors work congruently to experience content, transforming the museum into a platform that connects different users who act as content creators and collaborators. In this model, visitors contribute to the formulation of a story, based on observations within the exhibit and based on her own life experiences, perspectives, and biases. Similarly, the structure and spirit of Portals creates an environment that evokes a certain type of emotion and participation, a type that effectively prepares its participants for connection. Even though the experience itself is temporary, an interaction in Portals provides participants with the opportunity to share their own narrative, to tell their own story and to learn about another person.

Through Ritual Communication

The second way participants of Portals build connection is through the practice of ritual-based communication, rather than transmission-based communication.

This is the type of communication that occurs regularly in Portals. While curators provided conversational prompts or guidelines at times, there seemed to be an innate

understanding from participants that ritual communication, in the form of self-expression, creativity, and play, is what feeds connection. Participants were eager to share experiences more than information, feelings more than facts.

From public diplomacy literature, Zaharna (2008) advocates for the importance of the ritual view of communication, initially introduced by Carey (1998) as an alternative to the dominant transmission view, in which the purpose is to “transmit and disseminate information farther and faster with the goal of controlling space and people” (p. 17). The ritual view is directed toward the maintenance of society and the representation of shared beliefs, drawing people together in fellowship and commonality. Zaharna (2008) posits that the ritual view may lead to feelings and acts of reciprocity and mutuality. She believes relational frameworks seek to find common ground and mutual interests between people; relational initiatives aim to establish interactive communication channels that allow direct interaction, create a sense of immediacy, and facilitate involvement among the participants (p. 88).

Also highlighting mutuality, Cowan and Arsenault (2008) consider dialogue to be inclusive of the “myriad situations in which ideas and information are exchanged and communication is reciprocal and multidirectional” (p. 18). They suggest that both true and technical dialogue matter, that both can advance public diplomacy goals because the act of exchanging information can lay the groundwork for deeper attachments. I posit that the opposite may also be true – that a deeper attachment may be formed through ritual communication, which will then make transmission, or the exchange of information, more effective and trusted. The deliberate absorption of ritual communication into the vernacular of public diplomacy may help foreground the soft strategies and permit space for organic interactions to unfold. What would happen if nations treated ritual communication with as much attention as the act of transmitting

information? If relations between nations were predicated on experiences of ritual before experiences of transmission?

Through the Commitment to Listen

The third way participants of Portals build connection is through their commitment to listen to each other. Regarding the origin story of Portals, Bakshi reflects, “What struck me over time was how much more I gained when I spoke to people with the camera off. In fact, the best conversations were on long bus rides with no technology at all – computer and phone dead, camera off, and time to kill. For hours, to pass the time, I listened to the stories of the person sitting next to me and shared mine” (Barlow, 2019, para. 18).

This emphasis on listening – distraction free, undivided listening – carries through to the model of Portals. This comes as a result of the disarming nature of the medium; the dimly lit space and seamless technology afford the user an experience of quietude, where the primary focus is on listening carefully and then responding to the other participant. There could be an additional layer to the experience that heightens this commitment, too. As a way to test or feel-out the newness of the interaction, participants are more attentive and focused. When faced with an image of an individual who lives half-way across the world, the participant, in some cases, displays more patience and attention than if the person were actually standing in the same room.

The importance of listening, and its role in relationship-building, is becoming more recognized within diplomacy. Aptly posited by Cull (2009), listening is “the foundation for all effective public diplomacy” (p. 10). This involves an international actor seeking out a foreign audience to engage them through listening rather than speaking, “a phenomenon which is much promised but seldom performed” (p. 19). As a practice, “listening” has not been deconstructed, nor has its emotional dimensions been extensively explored, but public diplomacy may benefit

from such work. Questions worth exploring include: In what environments might an individual or community be able to listen most effectively? What might deep-listening look like in this context or for this culture?

Through Residual Wonder and Engagement

The fourth way participants of Portals build connection is through residual wonder and engagement after their exchange. Following the Portals experience, many individuals expressed feelings of wonder and a desire to continue a relationship with their fellow participants. Noted in several Gold Books are sentiments that suggest participants will return to the Portal and attempt to stay connected to the people with whom they engaged. Some excerpts include: "This experience was unimaginable and incredible," "It was absolutely beautiful...my conversation was full of joy and surprises...it was exceptionally moving – I want to do more!" "I cannot wait to return here and hear of the projects' expansion to other cities," "we exchanged emails and will be in touch," "I look forward to staying connected with this lovely and talented woman."

While not explored explicitly in literature on public diplomacy, this sensation could be likened to the feelings of warmth and nostalgia an individual may feel after participating in a positive cultural exchange, whether at a university or through sports. Participants of cultural programs likely have vivid memories of the experience that stay with them for many years. In a similar way, participants of Portals appear to keep their experience(s) with them. Whether or not two participants of a Portals exchange end up actually meeting in person makes a difference, but it may not be a significant one. Perhaps the mere intent to stay connected, to stay curious, and to stay with the experience, is enough to cause a slight change in an individual's worldview.

Conclusion

Through the holistic analysis of Portals – its creators, the system itself, and its participants – several postulations about connection can be made. In summary, the creators of Portals contribute to the experience of connection by promoting simple and organic communication among participants, by building a strong internal culture, by investing in an ever-expanding network of allies, and through the practice of cultural accompaniment in their efforts to work with participating communities. The system of Portals contributes to the experience of connection by creating feelings of presence among participants, by being positioned as a phenomenon of art and as a special destination, by acting as a community anchor, and by providing participants with novel or foreign experiences. The participants of Portals contribute to the experience of connection by co-creating a shared narrative, by engaging in ritual communication, by committing to listen to one another, and through the continued experience of residual wonder and engagement. The observations presented here capture several perspectives of the Portals experience in attempt to reach a more refined distillation of analysis, one that will be elucidated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX:

DISCUSSION

Snapshot and Overview

“We say, ‘just sit down for a couple seconds,’ and they sit down and stay for a half hour more than they intended to...I think we’re all looking for that kind of connection. I think everybody is craving it, we’ve just forgotten about it...I see Portals as a tool that counteracts [today’s] rising waves of xenophobia...and we can see the impact when people [visit] ...I don’t know how to describe it, their eyes are glowing, and they’re excited, and alive” (Community Curator, personal communication, March 2019).

Based upon observations offered in the Case Analysis, the overall narrative about connection can evolve into a higher level of abstraction. Accordingly, this chapter presents a framework grounded in the final iteration of analysis within the selective coding stage – a formula that evokes further lines of inquiry but must be tested and experimented with through additional settings and methodologies.

In response to the guiding inquiry of this dissertation, which asks how the problem of connection might be tackled in a novel way, the case of Portals has led to a working framework that could be used to better understand and build connection between individuals and communities. The framework suggests that “connection” can be positioned on a spectrum and considered the result of the alchemy of three fluctuating dimensions: agency, emotion, and imagination, all of which exist at both the individual and shared level. This chapter provides an explanation of the framework for connection, as observed through Portals, and considers how it might be put into practice within public diplomacy.

First, a summary of the framework will be provided, as it relates to the observations within the case of Portals.

Second, the framework will be situated within public diplomacy, showing how lessons could be applied to the practice of public diplomacy and how each component of the framework is lacking in public diplomacy scholarship.

Third, speculations will be made about how to strengthen each component of the framework; while inspired by this research, these ideas should be considered exploratory.

And finally, the dissertation will reach its close, offering suggestions for future research, and a final conclusion.

A Framework for Connection

Three thematic observations have emerged around Portals: those related to agency, emotion, and imagination. By exploring the case through the lens of its creators, its system, and its users, a collection of insights have cohered in these categories, suggesting that for connection to occur and sustain within Portals, an exchange must involve components of agency, emotion, and imagination.

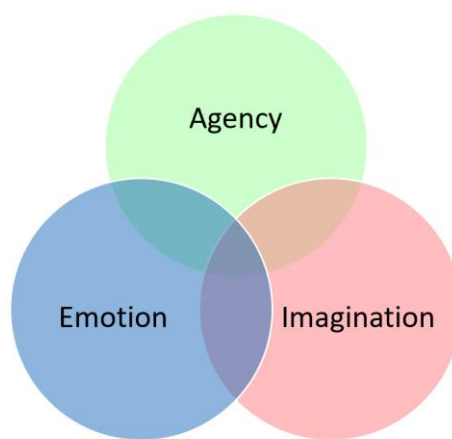


Figure 19. Framework for Connection

Agency

The definition of agency varies based on industry and application, but I subscribe to the simple one offered by philosophy: the capacity of an actor to act in a given environment; the mark of a self-determining actor (Millican & Woolridge, 2014). In the context of Portals, it refers to three interrelated concepts, the first two within the medium itself and the last within the greater ecology of the medium: individual participatory agency, agency as a technical affordance, and community agency.

Individual Participatory Agency

Every individual who engages with Portals does so by way of her own desire/interest. While some interactions involve more structure than others – consider the random passerby versus an individual aligned through Portals through an organizational partnership – all interactions occur because two parties consciously, willingly, choose to engage with each other. I believe the main factor that contributes to this is the fact that Portals is positioned as a phenomenon of art, not one of technology or public diplomacy.

Agency as an Affordance

The capacity for participants to experience agency continues inside the Portal, where they feel agency as an affordance of the social and technological structure. Participants have the ability to create their own experiences freely, unbound to expectations or external influences. From a social perspective, the primary reason I believe this agency exists is because the leaders of Portals aim to inspire authentic and organic communication among participants through strategic programmatic choices, namely the way they start each Portal exchange.

Community Agency

In addition to the individual agency of the participant, each community that hosts a Portal experiences agency. Emboldened by the leadership team, communities have freedom and autonomy in their mission to use Portals in a diversity of ways. Whether they want to program a shared dinner, partner with local high school students, or engage in a conversation with young entrepreneurs in Palestine, the local community chooses how to use Portals in a way that makes sense for their unique culture and needs. I believe this can be explained through the commitment of leadership to practice “cultural accompaniment.”

Emotion

Emotion refers to the intimacy, closeness, and feelings of joy and inspiration that participants of Portals experience. Participants have poured out emotionally rich feedback in the Gold Books, and leadership spoke of their relationship to Portals in an emotionally sensitive manner. Emotion was an early code that persisted through the axial and selective stages, signifying its importance; it emerged from multiple perspectives and in numerous stages of the Portals experience. Emotion constitutes the stickiness of Portals, the glue that holds together the leadership and participants, and their experience and vision.

Evident in almost every account of the Portals experience is emotion – in speaking with Portals leadership, Community Curators, and participants, and in close reads of the Gold Books, there was a surplus of rich, emotive, language and observations. These can be organized into the broad categories of intimacy, wonder and awe, and enduring.

Additionally, there is an important component that serves to augment the emotion of the experience: the Gold Books, which provide a dedicated space for reflection. The presence of the Gold Books signifies the desired tone and outcome of the experience; they contribute to the

reflective, contemplative atmosphere and augment the emotional dimension of the exchange. The fact that participants want to capture their thoughts and ideas right after the interaction (and many write more than one page) indicates the richness of the experience. It is not enough to walk away; they must account for what just happened.

Intimacy

Participants expressed feelings of intimacy through descriptions of closeness in their reflections. Here are several excerpts from Gold Books; for purposes of anonymity, the names, locations, and dates are excluded:

- “I am grinning. Overjoyed and inspired. I met Hama, a photography student in Tehran who had an infectious energy that you could feel despite the physical distance between us.”
- “...so happy to be a part of this quiet, personal, passionate revolution of connection...so moved by the practice of our oneness.”
- “To me, this experience was mind blowing...you are standing in front of someone, and this person can see your hands, the way you stand and move. You are opening your soul and your thoughts to another human being.”
- “I was happy. We saw a lot of killing in front of us in Mosul, but now we have a better life in the camp. I hope to come here every day and see my lovely friends in the Portal.”
- “There was a moment when all I wanted to do was jump through our boxes and see his street and show him mine. So we told each other about the weather and painted an image for each other.”

- “From our fondness of city walks at night to our appreciation of our recent skydiving trips, the proximity of our lives in form seemed to make the geographical distance insubstantial.”
- “And those on the other side, I feel such camaraderie for them!”
- “This was an amazing, emotional, and heartfelt experience to talk to people from my country who I didn't know and feel so connected to them.”
- “We swapped stories of our travels and interests, and as cliché as it sounds, we are all one community.”

Based on my observations, I believe two features contribute to the feelings of intimacy experienced by participants: the ability for Portals to establish presence, and the practice of ritual communication within Portals.

Wonder and Awe

Participants regularly reflected on their experience with feelings of wonder and awe. Often, they were surprised by the depth of the connection they felt and the information they learned; they described the interaction through overwhelmingly positive terms. Here are several excerpts:

- “Amazing, incredible profoundly beautiful and connective experience.”
- “What an incredible, powerful but at the same time, natural experience.”
- “I had not expected an Iranian American on the other side of the portal and I had expected to disappoint my Iranian counterpart by being a 'boring Iranian.' But in reality, we were both (at least I think he was too) very pleasantly surprised!”
- “This experience was unimaginable and incredible.”

- “Intimate - awkward - human - blessed. What a wonderful experience!”
- “It was absolutely beautiful...my conversation was full of joy and surprises...it was exceptionally moving – I want to do more!”
- “That was a truly phenomenal experience! It was amazing to see how similar he was to me in his goals for himself, his awareness of the issues in society, and his hobbies.”

Based on my observations, I believe two features contribute to the feelings of wonder and awe experienced by participants: the positioning of Portals as a special destination, which establishes and elicits a certain type of experience for participants, and the commitment by participants to listen to one another.

Enduring

Participants describe the enduring, long-lasting, impact of Portals. They express hope for future and/or continued connections and suggest that their experience, although brief, will stay with them for a long time. Here are several excerpts:

- “I don't know that I am ready to write about this experience yet, but I know that I will be thinking about my conversations for a long time.”
- "Hama encouraged me to write more, to share my story. We want to write together, to create together."
- "Thank you for organizing this experience. Please do it more! I can't wait to meet someone from another place."
- "I am so grateful to be a small mustard seed in what I hope will flourish in its own organic way."
- "I cannot wait to return here and hear of the project's expansion to other cities."

- “We exchanged emails and will be in touch!”
- "It is work like this that makes me hopeful for the future of the country."
- "We discussed culture, geography, politics, economics, religion, and ISIS. Most importantly, we laughed from our hearts, because we connected. We got their message and now will find ways to act."
- "We can't wait to connect with our new friend in person, in Cuba."
- “I look forward to staying connected with this lovely and talented woman."

Based on my observations, I believe the main feature that contributes to the enduring feelings and ideas experienced by participants is the investment in Portals as an anchor for the local community.

Imagination

Imagination refers to the power of Portals to expand the individual and shared imagination. Through novel, high-sensory exposure to new and different communities, Portals serves as a type of cultural disruption, an intervention of imagination that cracks open – even if only slightly or temporarily – the usual, contained realities of its participants. The experience contributes to an individual’s repertoire of perspectives and provides new, unexpected reference points. It enables participants to imagine differently, of themselves, of others, and of their futures.

Perhaps the most mystifying and expansive dimension, imagination can be understood as “the capacity to think of things as possibly being so” (Egan, n.d.). Through Portals, participants experience a transformation of imagination, even if it is subtle, which enhances their capacity to think of things – people, relationships, realities, dynamics, cities, etc. – in a novel way. The

Portals experience permits an expansion of the personal imaginative landscape, a change in the capacity to imagine “otherness,” and the ability to imagine an alternative future.

Personal Imaginative Landscape

Through Portals, participants increase their frames of reference to people and places around the world. Suddenly, a hip-hop artist in Milwaukee can listen to and learn from a hip-hop artist in Iran; as a result, both artists expand their reality of music and what is possible – for example, this meeting could lead to collaborate projects, and new influences/sounds. Through access to strangers in foreign communities, participants develop new touch-points, new perspectives from which to understand and act. Stated by Bakshi, "I definitely think there is an 'imaginative consequence' to the experience. I've seen people have an increased scope of reference they use to consider something. Like someone in Milwaukee who says, 'this is how they do it in Afghanistan,' rather than just seeing the options available to them in their own city" (A. Bakshi, personal communication, January 2018).

The personal imagination is confined by what one has experienced and what one has been exposed to. Portals is an opportunity to both experience and be exposed to something new and different; it allows an individual to see and feel what life is like for someone in another part of the world. As stated by one participant, "It has been such a gift to be witness to a growing, maturing, loving way of being in this young world. I felt different. I feel bigger and smaller at the same time, knowing how I was part of Herat, a place I have never been, for this short time."

Based on my observations, I believe that one major feature that contributes to the expansion of the participants' imaginative landscapes is the fact that Portals provides a novel and/or foreign experience.

Imagining Otherness

The “Other,” or “Otherness,” refers to the framing of one’s social identity in relation to another; it highlights how communities or publics create a sense of belonging, identity, and social status through the construction of social categories as binary opposites (Zevallos, 2011). This practice of social categorization can be explained through social identity theory, first introduced by Henri Tajfel in 1986, which asserts that individuals define their identities based on what groups they belong to, and that individuals who identify with a particular in-group often have exaggerated negative evaluations of the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). While such behavior can create value, such as the increase in an individual’s sense of belonging and the fostering of a group’s collective identity, it can also lead to increased prejudice and discrimination. When repeated over and over again, a problematic cycle occurs, in which otherness is inherited, and ideology, whether it be hate, compassion, or anything in between, is taught from one generation to the next. When not tempered, this process of out-group degradation and the reproduction of otherness can increase prejudice and discrimination, deepening the perceived divisions between communities.

Portals offers an opportunity to interfere with this cycle. By closing gaps between communities, participants can see, engage with, and relate to “others” in an intimate setting. This idea is captured well by leadership:

There are many imagined boogie men in the world that represent people and ideas of others...but these have been imagined and constructed in a way and are not representative of that person or community. Portals is really powerful in putting a face to stereotypes. When you step inside and have a face to face conversation with someone who is a member of that group or who may represent something that clashes with your imagined idea of what that person or place or

class or group of people is like, it can be really, really powerful (Levin, 2019).

Based on my observations, I believe one main feature that contributes to the imagining of “Otherness” is the fact that participants co-create a shared narrative and reality, even if only temporarily.

Imagined Future

Although the impact is difficult to measure, Portals can contribute to an individual’s ability to imagine a more globally inclusive and interconnected future. Entries in the Gold Books support this idea, capturing hope for continued engagement, inspiration for the future, and an increase in participants’ curiosity for, and mission to connect with, others. As stated by one participant, “this is a terribly important art exhibit that instantly breaks down the arbitrary barriers that we put up between cultures and people...it’s a beautiful, gorgeous bridge that I hope to see crossing more boundaries in the future.”

Based on my observations, I believe three features contribute to the practice of broadly imagining the future within the experience of Portals: the commitment by leadership to cultivate an internal culture fueled by principles of learning, adaptation, and future-oriented thinking; the commitment by leadership to build an ever-expanding network of partners and participants; and the residual feelings of wonder and engagement that participants experience after a Portals exchange.

Lessons for Public Diplomacy

This dissertation set out to theorize connection within public diplomacy. The framework for connection that emerged from observations of Portals reveals 1) the value of Portals itself as

a potential tool for public diplomacy, and 2) concrete lessons that can be applied to the general practice of public diplomacy.

First, public diplomacy practitioners should consider using Portals as a tool for promoting and cultivating relationships between publics, as well as exchanges between state leaders. The technology and overall experience of interacting through a Portal proves promising for public diplomacy and intercultural understanding; it creates feelings of intimacy, it fuels emotion, and it gives individuals the chance to imagine, more concretely, the lives and people from another part of the world. While exchanges might seem small, as they are often contained to conversations between individuals, the strategic placement and programming of a Portal can help expand its scope and impact so that publics (not just individuals) are affected. For example, placing a Portal at a University or in a high-foot-traffic zone of a city will promise a higher and more diverse volume of participants. Additionally, when a Community Curator tactically engages with several different types of community partners and groups, the base of impact will broaden. In an ideal situation, a Portal will facilitate both individual and group exchanges, gradually reaching more people via curator recruitment and participant word-of-mouth, thereby influencing wider publics over time.

From a logistical perspective, Portals could offer several advantages compared to other strategies for making connections within public diplomacy. When compared to traditional in-person exchanges, Portals could be more cost effective, able to engage more people, and able to sustain engagement for a longer period of time. When compared to exchanges via Skype or communication through social media, Portals could offer a more personalized and intimate experience, one that appears to create enduring feelings of wonder, and a willingness for participants to continue their connections beyond the exchange itself.

Second, public diplomacy practitioners could learn from my general observations of Portals. These observations range from insights about the creators of Portals (e.g., the leadership's practice of cultural accompaniment), the technology itself (e.g., the ability for Portals to create feelings of presence among users), and the participants of Portals (e.g., the natural gravitation toward ritual communication as a way to form connections). Detailed in the previous chapter, these insights could inspire practitioners and researchers to think differently about how connections are formed and maintained, between both state and non-state actors.

Third, public diplomacy scholars and practitioners could consider reassessing their conception of relationships and relationship-building. While contemporary scholars increasingly recognize the importance of relationship-centric models, there remains a belief that "relationship" represents a notch on the linear process of diplomacy, a transactional arrangement that exercises soft power, and ultimately, contributes to the mission of a nation or leader. This research challenges that notion and posits that the process of nurturing connection, and in turn, a relationship, could be a central priority within public diplomacy; accordingly, the nuances, intangibles, and underexplored facets of connection should continue to be studied.

Without question, soft power contributes to the new public diplomacy and effectively prioritizes relational and collaborative strategies (Rasmussen, 2009; The Soft Power 30, 2017). Importantly, however, there remains a caveat worth mentioning, which helps further the notion of meaningful connection in public diplomacy:

Soft power can be problematic insofar as it masks an agenda. Challenged by Cull, "the idea of a state entering into each international conversation purely to get what it wants makes excellent strategic sense, but it is certainly not attractive, rather it is repulsive: negative soft power. Listening and being open to being changed by an encounter is attractive" (2009). Banai

(2010) also questions the process of inducing or manufacturing attraction, stating “it would be quite a sensible and uncontroversial observation, I believe, to say that certain aspects of a given culture, value system or foreign policy can be viewed as ‘attractive’ by others; yet to suggest that this sense of admiration can be exploited somehow to yield political advantages is a telling fantasy about the normative schemes that lurk behind it” (p. 59). Going even further, he argues that concepts like “hard,” “soft,” and “smart” power are “intellectual luxuries” enjoyed only by wealthy, established nations. Perceivably weaker, developing nations, in contrast, suffer what they must, vulnerable to seduction into “alliances and coalitions with great powers, but lack[ing] the sufficient charms to seduce others” (p. 59).

Inherent to any type of power is control, manipulation, or the motivation to keep (or regain) power – to win. And inherent to most public diplomacy definitions are the notions of influence and power; the capacity for one party to persuade another of a certain outcome, even if through “soft” tactics. When power is blatantly involved in diplomatic engagements, however, the opportunity for relationship-building is displaced by the aim for one party to promote or advance their own agenda.

To make the claim that a relationship of any kind – as a basic psychosocial concept – is void of attributes like power and manipulation would be naïve. But to strategically suspend these ideas, for the sake of better understanding their place, and instead focus on what might be lacking, could be prudent. The focus then shifts from the construct of power to the construct of relationship, and relationship becomes the entity that must be deconstructed – from the initial connection between parties, to the type(s) of communication that yields high impact, and the cultural nuances that inhibit or complicate bonding.

Soft power still holds weight, but what also holds weight is the absence of power, arguably compared with collaboration (Fisher, 2012; Slaughter, 2011). Again, to create an interaction completely void of power is difficult, but to create circumstances where power is suspended or quieted is conceivable. And in these circumstances, when an exchange between people, communities, and nations appear and feel equal, a valuable style of communication ensues – at its best, a style based in ritual, authenticity, and mutuality. Portals, to a large extent, removes power from relationships and creates a dynamic that could be worth studying more within the context of public diplomacy.

Finally, the three primary themes that emerged from the case study on Portals – agency, emotion, and imagination – are lacking in public diplomacy literature. The subsequent section provides an overview of these terms in scholarship, with the intent to underline the importance of pursuing each concept more comprehensively.

Agency, Emotion, and Imagination in Public Diplomacy

The term “agency” itself is minimally present, but the idea pervades literature on non-state actors, boundary-spanners, and citizen diplomacy. This is wrapped in the argument that entities outside of the traditional sphere of diplomacy can (and ought to) play a part in a nation’s diplomatic mission. In an ideal environment, all citizens, non-governmental organizations, social enterprises, etc. would have the capacity to contribute to efforts of public diplomacy; they possess agency that enables them to act and react freely.

Emotion is more explicit in scholarship, and will likely continue to be, as public diplomacy evolves into a more relationship-centric field. At this time, however, only a few scholars have tapped into its significance. Banai, Constantinou, Zaharna, Cull, and others seem aware of the importance of relationships in public diplomacy, and the corresponding role of

emotion. The sentiments, raw feelings, enigmatic and inexplicable nuances that color the process of relationship building – these are recognized as important but not extensively studied.

In a less overt way, emotion is insinuated through scholarship that prioritizes listening and a departure from the winning and victory mindset. There appears to be growing recognition that, because public diplomacy involves the work of people, and people are emotional beings, the emotional landscape of international dialogue should be considered. But this idea still lives on the surface; it warrants deeper exploration and a multidisciplinary focus.

Hall wrote *Emotional Diplomacy* in 2015, which explores the politics of officially expressed emotion and the ways in which state actors strategically deploy emotional behavior to shape the perceptions of others. He focuses on three strands of emotion: those rooted in anger, those rooted in sympathy, and those rooted in guilt, to show how states strategically use emotions to achieve their outcomes. By analyzing the Taiwan Strait Crisis, the reactions of Russia and China to the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, and the German-Israeli relationship, he demonstrates how emotions can be officially employed to generate positive economic and military outcomes as well as great-power cooperation.

While valuable, Hall's study of emotion is limited to the use of state actors and framed within models of soft and hard power. He does not delve into the interpersonal workings, or how more positively-associated emotions, such as joy, empathy, and camaraderie, may contribute to the depth and health of a relationship. His assessment stays within the bounds of state diplomacy, leaving much room for exploration of the non-state and non-traditional arena.

Affect and emotion are significant parts of the human experience, but they currently do not have a significant role in how actorhood in international relations is researched or theorized (Hall & Ross, 2015); also, because the “brain is inclined to reason emotionally, it is important to

recognize the value of emotional appeals...” (Scott, 2010, p. 245). Similarly, these elements are understudied in public diplomacy – they importantly, however, underline a principle as simple as connection; for a connection may only prove successful if certain levels of emotion are present.

Finally, imagination appears nascent in public diplomacy literature, with a few select scholars harnessing the concept in creative ways. Banai’s (2014) *Diplomatic Imaginations: Mediating Estrangement in World Society* presents salient insights:

- It is “important to note from the outset that as a key ‘institution’ of the international society of states diplomacy does not engage directly with the historical currents and contingent imaginations at work in the decentered, borderless world society of human beings” (p. 2).
- Diplomacy is “implicated in the normative dictates of public imagination: namely, the public understanding of history which arises from the exclusionary – and hence often conflicting – cultural narratives about nationhood, justice, language, rights, personhood, etcetera that remain the perennial facts of human relations in society. As such, the practice of diplomacy can be reconceived as a paradox: an intervention into, and an enabler of, exclusivist narrations of public imagination in a world society” (p. 3).
- The public imagination changes over time as the individuals and communities who contribute to its constructive change; it “both speaks to and attempts to shape the human condition. Yet, public imagination is also very messy, impure, and always in flux” (p. 15).

- The function of a diplomat, “as an intermediary between alien and public imaginations, is to relentlessly demystify and debunk seemingly monolithic representations of self and other” (p. 15).

In *Modernity at Large* (2016), Appadurai explores the role of imagination in the increasingly globalized world. He focuses on the interconnectedness of media and migration and their impact on the "work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity" (p. 3). Although his work is not overtly situated within public diplomacy, it offers highly relevant and significant reflections:

- "The image, the imagined, the imaginary - these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: the imagination as social practice...now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order" (p. 31).
- "The imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies" (p. 5).
- "The imagination has become a collective, social fact... [which] in turn, is the basis of the plurality of imagined worlds" (p. 5).

The ideas offered by Banai and Appadurai suggest that imagination ought to have a more prominent position in discussions of public diplomacy. Imagination, they contest, shapes one's understanding of the world and their place within it. The plurality of imaginations, or the multitude interpretations of “me vs. you,” “us vs. them,” or “Self vs. Other,” is a force that could be tackled by diplomats (state and non-state).

Portals appears to act as a catalyst for imagination transformation. The experience challenges the implicit parameters of its participants, clearing space for a new model to exist, one with a more expansive and inclusive imagination. Banai (2014) alludes to several interpretations of such parameters; those outlined “by religion (for example, a Protestant, Shi’a, Hindu or Buddhist imagination), culture (for example, a Turkic, Zulu, Arab or American imagination), ethnicity (for example, a Serbian, Kurdish, Greek or Persian imagination), ideology (for example, a Maoist, Islamist, capitalist or anarchist imagination) or by a combination of ideas and historical memories touching on different aspects of social life” (p. 461). These identifiers contribute to an individual’s personal imaginative landscape, the way in which she defines herself and the lenses through which she sees the world.

Through Portals, it appears that the personal imaginative landscapes of individuals come into conversation with one other. Consequently, subtly and over time, these conversations may change the contours of the greater public, or collective, imagination. They may influence the dynamic of what Taylor (2003) calls the modern social imaginary, or “the way people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (p. 23). Portals may challenge the usual boundaries of Anderson’s (1983) imagined communities, which are delineated by national lines, and instead cultivate an imagined community that transcends state borders; one that is global, transnational, and polycultural.

Limitations

This dissertation has clear limitations, which will be addressed in three capacities: limitations of the research strategy, focusing primarily on the methodological choices related to

grounded theory and case study research; limitations of the framework for connection; and finally, limitations of the positive outcomes of Portals.

Limitations of the Research Strategy

First, as with all methodologies, grounded theory and case study research have both advantages and disadvantages. Grounded theory is exploratory and interpretive by nature, and while this form yields a framework that could lead to enriching insights and important further research, it is also inherently limited – the outcome of a grounded theory research project is unique to the perspective, experience, and analysis of one researcher at a specific point in time. Put another way, the findings of this research cannot be applied to other cases as it is highly subjective and requires further iterations in order to be generalizable. With grounded theory, the “credibility of a theory cannot be dissociated from the process by which it has been generated” (Breckenridge & Jones, 2009).

Relatedly, the presentation of results in this dissertation are in a state more philosophical than toolbox-readymade for practitioners. As the researcher, upon reaching saturation with my data and analysis, I also reach a level of comfort and internal validity with my finding, the framework for connection. However, to advance the framework into a more precise articulation and accompanying recommendations, more researchers must experiment with the framework in other circumstances and from different perspectives. My outcome, therefore, does not represent a polished theory, rather a conceptual launch pad from which additional work might be done.

In regard to the case study approach, this research is contained to a single case of 21st century media. While Portals is distinct from many other examples of contemporary immersive media, a more comprehensive study might include a cross-comparison analysis between Portals and other virtual or augmented applications. Further, while each Portal site represents a unique

population and community, the field work for this research was confined to sites in the United States. I interacted with participants and Community Curators in international Portal locations, but to physically visit these sites would likely elicit a different cultural experience. In the case of my interviewees, the majority of participants were from the United States, though representative of different social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. When engaging with interviewees from other nations, conversation was restricted to English, which is my first language but the second, or in some cases, third of the interviewees. While language was not a barrier, the nature and content of some interviews could have changed if conversation was held in the first language of the interviewee. Finally, I had a limited number of interviewees. Rather than aim for quantity, I aimed for quality and richness of subject interaction, the goal being to pursue theoretical sampling until saturation is reached. However, the research could have presented divergent findings if I aimed for higher numbers and more global representation among interviewees.

Limitations of the Framework for Connection

While this could be true of many theories and ideas, it is worth noting here; the concepts involved in the framework for connection are not monosemic. Rather, each concept – agency, emotion, and imagination – has lexical ambiguity and carries a different meaning based on the context in which it is explored. As the researcher, I understand how each component manifests and offer basic definitions in this chapter, but to gain a truly comprehensive grasp on the synergy of components within the framework, a thorough study of each component must occur.

In addition to the conceptual limitations, the framework is also limited to the certain type of media, technology, and engagement that Portals offers. Unlike many other examples of immersive media, which present a story that is captured and created by a mediamaker, Portals functions as a true medium, a space wherein participants co-create a story; the experience

resembles an in-person conversation more than an application of virtual or augmented reality. While there are certainly similarities to other means and venues for communication, a Portal is qualitatively different and extends beyond the categorization of a simple improvement to Skype or a telephone call. Therefore, in order for the framework for connection to gain credibility within the arena of 21st century media, it must be experimented with in other cases.

Lastly, it would be prudent to conduct additional research that investigates ways the framework for connection could be used to engender negative beliefs or harmful movements. In the same way that Portals is positioned to foster connection for positive benefits (feelings of global cohesion, inspiration, oneness, etc.), the same, or a similar, medium could also be used to foster connection for negative outcomes (terrorism, hate groups recruitment, bullying, etc.). Just as social media can be weaponized, so too, could Portals.

Limitations of the Positive Outcomes of Portals

It is vital to consider how all tools impact society in productive and counterproductive ways. This practice, while itself rooted in bias, elevates analysis to a more holistic and balanced level. Accordingly, as a way to challenge my positive and productive observations about Portals, I acknowledge a few potential, unintended, challenges and negative consequences.

The first challenge is that of reaching and promoting ideologically divergent audiences. Most people drawn to Portals have an inherent belief system that aligns with the mission of the company; they are likely curious about the world and recognize the value of interacting with different cultures. With this perspective comes a relatively open mind and willingness, or desire, to have a constructive and inspiring experience. As a result, it could be argued that the ever-growing network of Portals is comprised of individuals who are already part of the proverbial choir to which the company preaches. However, the leadership of Portals appears aware of this

reality and strives to incorporate diversity and resist patterns of people self-segregating into homogenous enclaves. The team at Portals actively pursues diversity among participants, recognizing the Portals exchange as a venue for productive conflict and sharing of opposing viewpoints.

The second challenge lies in the gap between positive exchanges through Portals (at a micro level) and systemic issues pertaining to power and injustice (at a macro level). In some instances, positive exchanges through Portals could mask or subdue the reality of problematic international or domestic issues. An isolated interaction through Portals that prompts an optimistic or encouraging thought could supplant an important concern tied to real action or change. As a hypothetical example, a liberal-leaning student interested in investigating tension between political parties in the United States might have a promising exchange with a conservative-leaning student through Portals. As a result, the liberal-leaning student might believe that the problem of bipartisanship is actually not significant, perhaps quelling some of her motivation to research. However, the opposite could also be true; that both students feel increased motivation as a result of their Portals exchange.

Paradoxically, the third challenge is with the feature that also appears most crucial to the success of Portals: the Community Curators, or the overall human dimension of the medium. While the Community Curators are carefully vetted by the leadership of Portals, it is possible that a corrupt individual could slip through the process. A vital position, the Community Curator establishes a local tone and contributes to the greater mission of Portals. However, there might be, or could someday be, holes in the system. In a worst-case scenario, this could result in a Community Curator cheating her duties through damaging behaviors, e.g. pushing propaganda, reinforcing xenophobic narratives, inciting harmful dialogue among participants. This event

would compromise the mission of Portals and possibly cause a detrimental outcome among participants, wherein cultural curiosity is crushed and intercultural opinions are made negative.

Suggestions for Future Research

This research offers many opportunities for refining and building upon its findings. Here are just a few, of many, strands of potential future research:

Extending and Improving the Framework

The framework for connection elucidated here offers a useful tool for diagnosing the degree of connection between two actors; it can also be used to identify the facets of connection that must be repaired or improved upon. Accordingly, a natural progression for this dissertation could be to investigate strategies for strengthening agency, emotion, and imagination to increase the strength of a connection between two actors. Inspired by this research, I have provisional suggestions for how to augment connection, but these are exploratory and must be investigated further.

The intrigue of Portals is what led many individuals to participate in an exchange; accordingly, to strengthen agency, it seems that a state or non-state actor could manufacture a setting or system that engages people through intrigue and curiosity rather than force. The personal level of agency will likely be greater when an individual partakes in an activity through her own choice, rather than through the suggestion or request of an external entity. Another tactic for strengthening agency is to increase the number of agents. This can be done through the recognition of non-state actors as diplomatic actors, and by reaching out directly to communities that are not typically exposed to discussions and/or initiatives within public diplomacy.

To strengthen emotion, it appears valuable to invest in the practice of ritual communication and the facilitation of shared experiences. It seems important to empower people to engage in acts of co-creation and co-production, and also provide opportunities for reflection. Similar to the function of the Gold Books in Portals, having a dedicated space for reflection can likely magnify emotions and feelings of connectedness. Finally, it seems worthwhile to try and override negative emotional interactions with positive emotional reactions. This seems rudimentary, but a surplus of positive emotional experiences could function as types of recovery interactions, exchanges that offer alternative, mutually rewarding, perspectives.

To strengthen imagination, it appears vital to provide individuals to novel experiences, perspectives, and ideas; to deliberately seek experiences that are out of the ordinary. Additionally, it seems worth developing an awareness of both personal and collective imagination, for individuals to better understand the map of their personal imagination and then work to challenge and expand its boundaries.

These ideas are speculative but promising. A beneficial line of research would challenge and experiment with these insights, in the effort to create a more robust understanding of how to operationalize the framework for connection.

The Long-term Impact of Portals

Another constructive pursuit would be to conduct pre-and-post research with Portals participants to determine if and how their immediate reactions have sustained in the long term. This dissertation reveals the enduring effect of Portals, but it would be insightful to detail this more closely through a longitudinal study. Methods for such a pursuit could include interviews with repeat Portals participants, including those who have visited their local Portal multiple times, and those who have connected with members of the Portals network while on travel.

Additionally, surveys and/or interviews could be issued to participants one, or several, month(s) after a Portals exchange to help measure the degree to which the experience has stayed with them, to what extent participants' worldviews, and actions, have transformed.

The Paradigm of Imagination

Influenced by one dimension of the framework for connection, and the related work being done by scholars and practitioners at The Civic Imagination Project, it would be advantageous to pursue the expansion and refinement of the paradigm of imagination. By decidedly bringing imagination into focus, additional research can explore innovative tactics for minimizing otherness and promoting understanding; to examines the capacity for initiatives like Portals (and different from Portals) to expand an individual's imagination so that she/he may relate in a more complete way to the many other, often conflicting, imaginations within a community. Through this research, Portals can be understood as an opportunity of imagination, or the opportunity for an individual to comfortably engage, often in an innovative way, with something or someone foreign to her dominant reality; the chance for an individual to safely acquire an experience that feels markedly different from her normative existence, ideally in a way that challenges, expands, or changes her mind. What other examples of 21st century media function like Portals? What examples outside of media could be effective? It is worth studying, what I speculatively refer to as, interventions of imagination, or curated experiences that aim to increase intra-or-inter group understanding through the sustained opportunity to more closely understand the other. These involves forethought on the part of the facilitator or creator, structure within the content and delivery method, and a desired outcome of change on behalf of the participant, in terms of her imaginative capacity and level of agency.

Role of Empathy in 21st Century Media

While several affordances of 21st Century Media are not explored in this dissertation, one in particular should be explored further, especially in relation to the framework for connection: empathy. The idea of empathy surfaced many times throughout this research (i.e., explicitly in discussions of PeaceTech, Impact Storytelling, and industry examples in Chapter 3; implicitly in discussions of emotion and imagination as experienced in Portals) but was not elevated or prioritized as a major point of focus. However, the importance of empathy in the mission to better understand how media could be used to foster connection is critical.

Enthusiasts celebrate the potential of some new media, like virtual reality, to function as an “empathy machine,” a tool capable of changing the world and transforming industries (Shockman, 2015; Novacic, 2015). Skeptics challenge this optimism with questions of accessibility, ethics, and give new gravity to the longstanding debate on media effects, namely about the causation between dangerous or violent material on-screen and dangerous or violent behavior in the physical world (Bushman & Huesmann, 2001; Anderson, 2000).

For many examples of 21st century media, empathy is a desired and welcomed outcome. For RYOT, which is cited in Chapter 3, the organizational goal is for people to “watch the news through virtual reality” (“RYOT” homepage), to see the perspective of a marginalized individual or community and obtain increased levels of empathy and activism. Within the PeaceTech movement, also cited in Chapter 3, virtual reality is seen as a vehicle to generate empathy through powerful immersive experiences. And for Portals, if a participant leaves an exchange with a greater level of empathy for a person, people, or nation, the engagement would be considered successful.

While 21st century media has made the affordance of empathy more commonplace, it has also made the complexity of empathy more transparent. The act of “putting yourself in someone

else's shoes," a figurative practice for empathy, no longer requires an imaginative leap (R.L., 2017); it is easier and more seamless through many applications of immersive media. While this practice offers myriad benefits, it can also be questioned – who makes the decision to wear another's shoes? And to what extent does it matter that the shoes are offered or stolen? If empathy leads to policy changes that protect vulnerable people and places, mitigate racism, and increase sociocultural acceptance, how can there be any negative side effects?

But as a counter to the movement of empathy, what happens when only certain issues are covered by immersive media and others omitted, whether arbitrarily or intentionally? Is empathy always good and productive? Or is empathy actually a biased moral guide that pushes people in the direction of parochialism and racism? Should people instead employ rational compassion, a more balanced practice based in reason, caring, and "detached cost-benefit analysis?" (Bloom, 2017; Senior, 2016) As noted by Bloom, Yale Psychology Professor and author of *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*, empathy can be "exploited by unscrupulous actors to make the world worse"; it is "strongly influenced by irrelevant factors" that may direct viewers away from the most pressing causes and towards those "whose suffering [they] are prompted to feel more acutely" (Bloom, 2017). Similarly, journalist and critical scholar, Brian Winston, argues that "too many documentaries run away from social meaning, substituting empathy for analysis and paying more attention to effect than to cause" (Winston, 2000). Although Winston's reference is to traditional two-dimension documentaries, the observation remains applicable, maybe even more so, for immersive media. If the personal narrative of a subject is projected in a more direct and intimate way, with the goal of influencing policy or raising funds for a certain cause, does the standard for what is ethical change?

Because Portals does not entail the viewing of or interaction in a prescribed narrative, it is not susceptible to the same criticisms around empathy as many other cases of 21st century media. However, Portals is not entirely immune and should be investigated further through inquiries like these – how might feelings of empathy experienced through Portals be different than those experienced from a film or virtual reality? To what extent are feelings of empathy through Portals translated into action and/or quantifiable behavioral change? What might other mediamakers and public diplomacy actors learn from distinguishing the nature of empathy in Portals from the nature of empathy in other technologies?

Conclusion

Subscribing to the claim that the two most significant challenges of the 21st century are global warming and migration (de Melo, 2015; Werz & Hoffman, 2016; United Nations Press Release, 2006; Dyer, 2014), this dissertation relates to the latter. At the highest level of abstraction, it is an attempt to better understand the problem of connection between people and communities. With the impending collision of humanity, wherein different cultures, religions, political ideologies intersect, there is a need – and perhaps will always be – to transform issues of connection into opportunities. This research attempts to contribute to that process of transformation by theorizing the concept of “connection” within public diplomacy.

Concepts from two bodies of scholarship were imperative to this research. From public diplomacy, the importance of non-state actors, the turn to relationship-centric paradigms, and the use of media and technology were prioritized. From 21st century media, the affordance of presence was explored, as well as recent trends of Impact Storytelling and PeaceTech. Collectively, these concepts led to a case study on Portals, an emblematic example of 21st century media that can be positioned as a vehicle for fostering intergroup and intercultural

connections. As noted previously, Portals embodies the triad of recurring themes within public diplomacy, and fittingly, presented a rich and relevant site for research.

The major finding of this research – a framework for connection – suggests that connection is malleable, determined by an alchemy of agency, emotion, and imagination. Awareness of this idea can aid in diagnosing the strength, or quality, of a connection between actors, and serve as a map for improving the quality of a connection between actors. While the framework itself emerged from the study and observation of one case, and is therefore in need of further experimentation, the overall research findings reveal 1) the value of Portals itself as a potential tool for public diplomacy, and 2) concrete lessons that can be applied to the general practice of public diplomacy.

Portals represents just one example of 21st century media that could be used to enhance diplomatic goals. It manufactures a natural situation in which connection, comprised of agency, emotion, and imagination, is inevitable. Uniquely, the system places greater weight on its human dimension than its technological dimension. As a result, Portals, at its best, functions as an apolitical medium that tactfully harnesses immersive audiovisual equipment so that humanity might persist; by quieting technology, it cultivates relationships that are transcendent to the borders often used to separate “Self” from “Other.” In a world comprised of ostensibly infinite divergent identities, it is worthwhile to reimagine the process of making and sustaining meaningful connections.

This dissertation presents several insights on the nature of relationships. While some may seem extreme for the context or time, the underlying aim is to issue a challenge for traditional and non-state actors of public diplomacy to prioritize meaningful connection in their efforts; to abandon the mission of winning and instead pursue the process of fertilizing ground upon which

relationships can flourish. With this, practitioners can strive to create an environment or structure in which people can connect in an intimate way. They can invest in the maintenance of a space that elicits authentic emotion and allows individuals to reimagine themselves, the other, and the relationship between the two (perhaps both historically and future-oriented); a space that will prompt curiosity, challenge stereotypes, and expand imaginative landscapes.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PORTALS' LEADERSHIP

Sample Interview Questions for Portals' Leadership

- When and why did you start Portals?
- How do you articulate the mission and vision of Portals?
- Walk me through the typical Portals experience, from selecting a theme, to the recruitment of participants, and the role of the curator.
- What has made Portals successful?
- What obstacles have you faced in the growth and development of Portals?
- What is the most common experience you've seen people have with Portals? Any negative implications?
- How do you measure success/impact?
- How do you see your role as an influencer and/or someone creating positive impact?
- Do all communities have the opportunity to set-up a Portal? What kind of opportunity do you think Portals offers its participants?
- Are there any particular resources provided for participants before and/or after?
- Can Portals be used to directly discuss social and political issues between groups that are different?
- Can this be used on a larger scale? What the ideal way to grow?

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY CURATORS

Personal Investment

- How did you get involved?
- What drew you to the Portal's mission?
- How have you been surprised by your experience, if at all?
- To what extent has working with Portals impacted your life?

Participant Observation

- How do most visitors discover / end up visiting Portals?
- What are some important tips for someone's first time going into a Portal?
- What kind of engagement do you think is most effective?
- To what extent is this an emotional experience for participants?
- What are some common reactions you see from participants?
- What has been one of the most surprising?
- Most impactful?
- Have you observed any negative interactions between participants?
- Have you been briefed / trained on what to do if the interaction starts going into questionable territory? (participants uncomfortable, comments inappropriate)
- In terms of the technology, why do you think this works? How is it different from chatting on Facebook or even Skyping on a regular computer?

Co-prospection

- What do you see for the future of Portals? And your involvement?
- Do you see any possible risk of Portals expanding/growing?
- In what settings do you think these exchanges could be most valuable?
- How would you try to recruit someone who has no interest in entering the Portal? Are people ever apprehensive, why?

- How could this be used to bridge gaps between political parties in the US?
- Anything else you would like to share with me, regarding Portals and your experience with it?

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

Before the Exchange

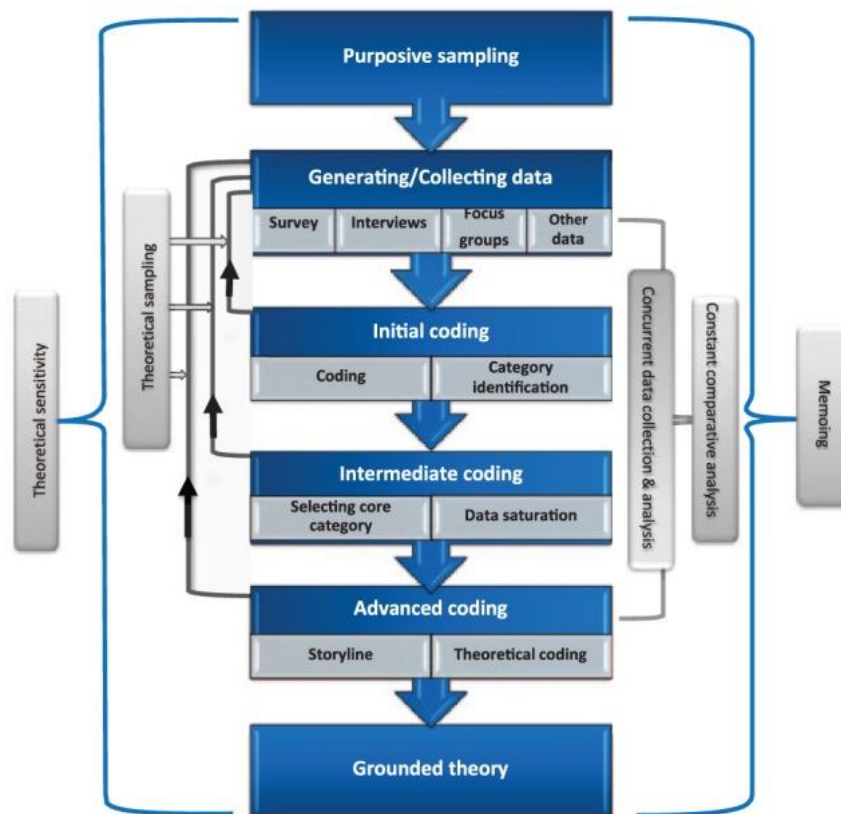
- What brought you to Portals today?
- Did you have any expectations/fears?
- Have you ever had an opportunity similar to Portals?
- Have you ever visited (location of other Portal)?
- Do you know someone from (location of other Portal)?
- Do you feel like you have much knowledge of life and people in (location of other Portal)?
- Do you feel connected to people from (location of other Portal)?

After the Exchange

- What was the experience like?
- Were you surprised by anything?
- Did you learn anything new?
- Would you want to partake in another Portal exchange?
- What kinds of communities and places would you want to engage with through Portals?
- How would you measure the success of Portals?

APPENDIX D

SUMMARY OF THE INTERPLAY BETWEEN GROUNDED THEORY METHODS AND PROCESSES



Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE GOLD BOOK ENTRIES

With all the experiences I've had as an Iranian American and as a part of this community, this experience was unimaginable & incredible. I had a conversation with a complete stranger, someone who I would normally never meet. Thank you for organizing this experience. Please do it more! I can't wait to meet someone from another place.

There was a moment when all I wanted to do was jump through our boxes and see his street and show him mine. So we told each other about the weather and painted an image for each other.

I am grinning. Overjoyed and inspired. What an incredible, powerful but off the same natural experience. I met Hana, a photography student in Tehran who had an infectious energy that you could feel despite the physical distance between us. We talked about stories and visits, little things & big things. She talked about Google like God, her "window to the world." Hana encouraged me to write more, to share my story. We want to write together, to create together. Thank you for curating this beautiful

That was a truly phenomenal experience! It was amazing to see how similar he was to me in his goals for himself, his awareness of the issues in society, and his hobbies. That being said, he is clearly working in a much more difficult environment (lack of electricity, economic hardship, educational barriers, etc.) that contextualize how lucky I am to have the opportunities I do. I was especially blown away by the fact that he is trying to start his own IT company and asked for my help as a business major who has worked both in start-ups and microfinance to help him develop a business plan... business, really can be used for good. We exchanged emails & will be in touch!

REFERENCES

- A Golden Portal. (n.d.). Retrieved from One Quarter Journals website:
<http://onequarterjournal.com.au/story/a-golden-portal>
- ABOUT. (2017). Retrieved from The Civic Imagination Project website:
<https://www.civicimaginationproject.org/about>
- Acerbi, A. (2016). A Cultural Evolution Approach to Digital Media. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*. Retrieved from
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2016.00636/full>
- Aharoni, I. (2015, September 8). How Technology Has Revolutionized Diplomacy. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4015667/how-technology-has-revolutionized-diplomacy/>
- Alcantara, S. D. (2017, March 26). Public Diplomacy: The Art of Thinking Different. Retrieved from LinkedIn website: <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/public-diplomacy-art-thinking-different-stacy-danika-alcantara/>
- Allport, G. W. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Anderson, B. (n.d.). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.
- Anselm L. Strauss, & Barney Glaser. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Aldine Transaction.
- Aparna. (2018). Curator Interview.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Argyle, M., & Dean, J. (1965). Eye-Contact, Distance and Affiliation. *Sociometry*, 28(3), 289–304.
- Aronson-Rath, R., Owen, T., Milward, J., & Pitt, F. (n.d.). *The Foundations of Immersive Media Research*. Retrieved from https://towcenter.gitbooks.io/virtual-reality-journalism/content/vr_as_journalism/the_foundations_of.html
- Arquilla, J., & Ronfeldt, D. (1999). *The Emergence of Noopolitik: Toward An American Information Strategy*. CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1033.html
- Arsenault, A. (n.d.). Public Diplomacy 2.0. In *Toward a New Public Diplomacy: Redirecting U.S. Foreign Policy* (pp. 135–153). Retrieved from http://sipa.jlu.edu.cn/__local/7/94/CA/FBE4ECE1238E9A97E89E980A8B8_57749AE5_1885A9.pdf

- Artist Partner Program. (2015, September). Shared_Studios: Portals. Retrieved from The Clarice website: <https://theclarice.umd.edu/events/2015/sharedstudios-portals>
- Asia Society Policy Institute. (2016). 'Playing the Long Game': Cultural Diplomacy and U.S.-China Relations. Retrieved from <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/%E2%80%98playing-long-game%E2%80%99-cultural-diplomacy-and-us-china-relations>
- Auwers, M. (2013). The Gift of Rubens: Rethinking the Concept of Gift-Giving in Early Modern Diplomacy. *European History Quarterly*, 43(3).
- Babcock, S. (2018, June 15). Technically Baltimore: How a shipping container is connecting strangers around the world. Retrieved from Technically Baltimore website: <https://technical.ly/baltimore/2018/06/15/how-a-shipping-container-is-strengthening-cross-cultural-dialogue/>
- Bakshi, A. (2015). Kickstarter, PORTALS by Shared_Studios. Retrieved from Kickstarter website: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/sharedstudios/portals-by-shared-studios>
- Bakshi, A. (2016). Lessons from the Launch of Portals. Retrieved from <https://www.sharedstudios.com/story-of-portals>
- Bakshi, A. (2018a, September 14). BIO. Retrieved from <http://www.amarcbakshi.com/>
- Bakshi, A. (2018b, December). Leadership Interview [Phone Call].
- Bakshi, A. (2018c, December 21). Structured Interview [Phone].
- Bakshi, A., Meares, T., & Weaver, V. (2017). Portals to Politics: Perspectives on Policing from the Grassroots. Retrieved from NYU Law School website: http://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/Bakshi%20Meares%20and%20Weaver%20Portals%20to%20Politics%20Study.pdf
- Bakshi, A., & Moghtader, M. (2018, December 14). Q&A With Shared_Studios. Retrieved from https://dohadebates.com/2018/12/14/qa-with-shared_studios/
- Balkin, J. (2004). Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society. Yale Law School Legal Scholarship Repository. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1239&context=fss_papers
- Balkin, J. (2009). The Future of Free Expression in a Digital Age.
- Banai, H. (2010). Diplomacy and Public Imagination. In *Sustainable Diplomacies* (pp. 46–65). MacMillan Publishing Company.

- Banai, H. (2014). Diplomatic imaginations: mediating estrangement in world society. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 27(3), 459–474.
- Barlow, C. (2018, October 23). A Doorway Into Future Discourse. Retrieved from Future of Storytelling website: <https://futureofstorytelling.org/story/a-doorway-into-future-discourse>
- Barston, R. P. (2014). *Modern diplomacy* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Baumgartner, T., Esslen, M., & Jancke, L. (2006). From emotion perception to emotion experience: Emotions evoked by pictures and classical music. *International Journal of Psychophysiology*, 60, 34–43.
- Baxter, P., & Jack. (2008). Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544–559.
- Becker, E., & Dao, J. (2002). A NATION CHALLENGED: HEARTS AND MINDS; Bush Will Keep the Wartime Operation Promoting America. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/20/world/nation-challenged-hearts-minds-bush-will-keep-wartime-operation-promoting.html>
- Begley, S. (2018, February 21). White Supremacist and Black Nationalist Groups Both Grew During Trump’s First Year as President. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5168677/donald-trump-hate-groups-splc/>
- Benkler, Y. (2006). *The Wealth of Networks*. Yale University Press.
- Bennett, B. (2018, June 14). This Is What Trump’s Impulsive Diplomacy Looks Like. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5311983/donald-trump-north-korea-diplomacy/>
- Bjola, C. (2015). The future of digital diplomacy. In M. Holmes (Ed.), *Digital diplomacy: Theory and practice* (p. 252). Routledge.
- Blakley, J., Huang, Grace, Nahm, Sheena, & Shin, Heesung. (n.d.). Changing Appetites & Changing Minds | Measuring the Impact of Food, Inc. Retrieved from The USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center website: <http://www.mediaimpactproject.org/uploads/5/1/2/7/5127770/food-inc-summary-report.pdf>
- Boczkowski, P. J. (2004). The Mutual Shaping of Technology and Society in Videotex Newspapers: Beyond the Diffusion and Social Shaping Perspectives. *The Information Society*, 20, 255–267.
- Bode, K. (2018, March 21). A “portal” to other parts of the world. *Andover Townsman*.
- Boehner, K., Sengers, P., & Gay, G. (2005a). Affective presence in museums: Ambient systems for creative expression. *Digital Creativity*, 16(2), 79–89.

- Boehner, K., Sengers, P., & Gay, G. (2005b). Affective presence in museums: Ambient systems for creative expression. *Digital Creativity*, 16(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/NDCR-117286>
- Bohm, A. (2004). Theoretical Coding: Text Analysis in Grounded Theory. In *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage Publications.
- Boot, M. (2018, May 24). Surprise! Donald Trump is terrible at diplomacy. *The Washington Post*.
- Bowman, S., & Willis, C. (2003, July). We Media. Retrieved from http://www.hypergene.net/wemedia/download/we_media.pdf
- boyd, danah. (2010). Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications. In *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites* (pp. 39–58). Retrieved from <https://www.danah.org/papers/2010/SNSasNetworkedPublics.pdf>
- Boyle, T., & Cook, J. (2004). Understanding and using technological affordances: a commentary on Conole and Dyke. *Research in Learning Technology*, 12(3), 295–299.
- Brauner, C. (2016). Connecting Things: Trading Companies and Diplomatic Gift-Giving on the Gold and Slave Coasts in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. *Journal of Early Modern History*, 20(4), 408–428.
- Brown, Governor of California, et al. v Entertainment Merchants Association et al. , (Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit June 27, 2011).
- Brown, R. (2013a). The Politics of Relational Public Diplomacy. In R.S. Zaharna, A. Arsenault, & A. Fisher (Eds.), *Relational, Network and Collaborative Approaches to Public Diplomacy* (pp. 44–55). New York: Routledge.
- Brown, R. (2013b, April). Public Diplomacy, Networks, and Influence. Retrieved from <https://pdnetworks.wordpress.com/tag/relational-public-diplomacy/>
- Bryant, J., & Thompson, S. (2002). *Fundamentals of media effects*. McGraw-Hill.
- Buckle, A. (2012). The New Diplomacy: Devising a Relational Model of Public Diplomacy. Pursuit - The Journal of Undergraduate Research at the University of Tennessee, 3(2). Retrieved from <https://trace.tennessee.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1105&context=pursuit>
- Byrne, C. (2015, August 11). Welcome To PeaceTech, The Movement To Use Technology To End Violent Conflict And Extremism. *Fast Company*. Retrieved from <https://www.fastcompany.com/3047534/welcome-to-peacetech-the-movement-to-use-technology-to-end-violent-conflict-and-extremism>

- Campbell, R., Martin, C., & Fabos, B. (2017). *Media & Culture: An Introduction to Mass Communication* (11th Edition). MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Castells, M. (2007). Communication, Power and Counter-power in the Network Society. *International Journal of Communication*, 1.
- Castells, M. (2008). The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1).
- Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2015, August 17). The Scientific Benefits of Mind-Wandering. Fast Company. Retrieved from <https://www.fastcompany.com/3049892/the-scientific-benefits-of-mind-wandering>
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Charmaz, K. (2008). Constructionism and the Grounded Theory. In *Handbook of Constructionist Research* (pp. 397–412). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Che, A. (2015, April 10). 7,500 Miles in 15 Minutes. *The Hoya*. Retrieved from <http://www.thehoya.com/7500-miles-in-15-minutes/>
- Cohen, L. (2017, February 14). Baltimore Portal Aims to Connect Locals with Strangers Around the World. *Baltimore Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://www.baltimoremagazine.com/2017/2/14/baltimore-portal-aims-to-connect-locals-with-strangers-around-the-world>
- Coldewey, D. (2018, February). Bilingual? Tarjimly lets you help a refugee or aid worker right now. Retrieved from Tech Crunch website: <https://techcrunch.com/2018/02/13/bilingual-tarjimly-lets-you-help-a-refugee-or-aid-worker-right-now/>
- Collier, D., Brady, H. E., & Seawright, J. (2010). A Sea Change in Political Methodology. In *Introduction to Rethinking Social Inquiry*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Comp, D. (2012, December 13). Senator Lugar talks about the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES). Retrieved from International Higher Education Consulting Blog website: <http://ihed-djc.blogspot.com/2012/12/senator-lugar-talks-about-kennedy-lugar.html>
- Constantinou, C. M. (2006a). Human Diplomacy and Spirituality. *Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael*.
- Constantinou, C. M. (2006b). On Homo-Diplomacy. *Space and Culture*, 9(4), 351–364.
- Copeland, D. (2019). Diplomacy for the 21st Century. Retrieved from Guerilla Diplomacy website: <http://www.guerrilladiplomacy.com/getting-started/>

- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1).
- Cowan, G., & Arsenault, A. (2008). Moving from monologue to dialogue to collaboration: The three layers of public diplomacy. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 10–30.
- Cull, N. (2009). *Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past*. Figueroa Press.
- Cull, N. (2017, February 19). Public Diplomacy Explained: What it Means and Why it Matters. Retrieved from <https://placebrandobserver.com/what-is-public-diplomacy/>
- Cull, N. (n.d.). Public Diplomacy before Gullion, The Evolution of a Phase. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (pp. 19–22).
- Cull, N. J. (2013). The Long Road to Public Diplomacy 2.0: The Internet in US Public Diplomacy. *International Studies Review*, 15(1), 123–139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12026>
- Curtin, J. (2018, December 12). Trump Has Officially Ruined Climate Change Diplomacy for Everyone. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/12/12/trump-has-officially-ruined-climate-change-diplomacy-for-everyone/>
- Davenport, L. E. (2013). *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era*. University Press of Mississippi.
- de Melo, J. (2015, August 24). Climate change and the growing challenge of migration. Brookings. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/planetpolicy/2015/08/24/climate-change-and-the-growing-challenges-of-migration/>
- Deuze, M. (2006). Participation, Remediation, Bricolage: Considering Principal Components of a Digital Culture. *The Information Society*, 22(2), 63–75.
- Devlin, M. (2017, February 15). This Augmented Reality App Tells Indigenous Stories in Canadian Cities. *Motherboard*. Retrieved from https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/8qk9w5/augmented-reality-vancouver-indigenous
- Dittmer, J. (2015). Theorizing a More-than-Human Diplomacy: Assembling the British Foreign Office, 1839-1874. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 11, 78–104.
- Draper, J. V., Kaber, D. B., & Usher, J. M. (1998). Telepresence. *Human Factors: The Journal of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society*, 40(3), 354–375.
- Duncombe, C. (2017). Twitter and transformative diplomacy: social media and Iran–US relations. *International Affairs*, 93(3), 545–562.

- Duttagupta, I. (2018). Justin Trudeau's socks appeal. *Economic Times*. Retrieved from <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/justin-trudeaus-socks-appeal/articleshow/62962715.cms>
- Dyer, Z. (2014, September 19). Migration is one of the most challenging issues of the 21st century, says UN official. *The Tico Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.ticotimes.net/2014/09/19/migration-is-one-of-the-most-challenging-issues-of-the-21st-century-says-un-official>
- Dyson, E. (1993). Interactivity Means "Active" Participation (Using Computers to Facilitate Interpersonal Communication). *Computerworld*, 27(50).
- Education, Government, Nonprofit. (2017, April 13). What is Peacetechnology? A New Environment Brings New Opportunity. Retrieved from Amazon AWS website: <https://aws.amazon.com/blogs/publicsector/what-is-a-peacetechnology-a-new-environment-brings-new-opportunity/>
- Egan, K. (n.d.). *A Very Short History of Imagination*. Simon Fraser University.
- Eisenberger, N. I., & Cole, S. W. (2012). Social neuroscience and health: neurophysiological mechanisms linking social ties with physical health. *Nature Neuroscience*, 15(5), 669–674.
- Emerging Media. (n.d.-a). Retrieved from NYU Academic Programs website: <https://www.nyu.edu/academics/academic-programs/emerging-media.html>
- Emerging Media. (n.d.-b). Retrieved from BU College of Communication website: <http://www.bu.edu/com/academics/what-we-do/emerging-media/>
- Eurodiaconia. (2014, December). Guidelines on Social Impact Assessment. Retrieved from <https://eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/guidelines-on-social-impact-assessment1.pdf>
- Evaluating Immersive User Experience and Audience Impact (p. 48). (2018).
- Evans, J., & Fernandez, F. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Politics*. Routledge.
- Evans, S. K., Pearce, K. E., Vitak, J., & Treem, J. W. (2017). Explicating Affordances: a Conceptual Framework for Understanding Affordances in Communication Research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 22(1), 35–52.
- Everett, A., & Caldwell, J. T. (2003). *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*. Routledge.
- Ferderer, B. (2018). *Affective Elsewheres: Technology and Everyday Talk as Mediators for Human Connection*.

- Fink, D., Zagoria, J., Drye, K., & LLP, W. (2017). Expert Analysis, Virtual Reality And The Law: Part 1. Retrieved from Law 360 website:
<https://www.law360.com/articles/879785/virtual-reality-and-the-law-part-1>
- Fisher, A. (2010). Looking at the Man in the Mirror: Understanding of Power and Influence in Public Diplomacy. In *Trials of Engagement: The Future of US Public Diplomacy*. BRILL.
- Fisher, A. (2013). *Collaborative Public Diplomacy: How Transnational Networks Influenced American Studies in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fitzpatrick, K. (2007). Advancing the new public diplomacy: A public relations perspective. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 2(3), 187–211.
- Fitzpatrick, K., Fullerton, J., & Kendrick, A. (2013). Public Relations and Public Diplomacy: Conceptual and Practical Connections. *Public Relations Journal*, 7(4).
- Fitzpatrick, K. R. (2011). *U.S. Public Diplomacy in a Post-9/11 World: From Messaging to Mutuality*. Los Angeles: Figueroa Press.
- Franz, M. (2018, February 1). *Migration, Identity, and Belonging: Defining Borders and Boundaries of the Homeland*.
- Friedman, V. (2017, June 27). Justin Trudeau's Sock Diplomacy. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/27/fashion/socks-justin-trudeau-canada.html>
- Gallagher, A. (2018, May 10). How “Peace Tech” is Changing Global Conflict - Innovations Alter Ways That Citizens and States Make War -- and Peace. Retrieved from United States Institute of Peace website: <https://www.usip.org/publications/2018/05/how-peace-tech-changing-global-conflict>
- Galloso, I., Feijóo, C., & Santamaría, A. (2015). Novel Approaches to Immersive Media: From Enlarged Field-of-View to Multi-sensorial Experiences. In *Novel 3D Media Technologies*. Springer.
- Gentles, S. J., Jack, S. M., Nicholas, D. B., & McKibbin, K. A. (2014). Critical Approach to Reflexivity in Grounded Theory. *The Qualitative Report*, 12(44), 1–14.
- Gerring, J. (2006). *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press; 1 edition.
- Gibson, J. (1979). *The Theory of Affordances*. In *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Ginwright, S. A. (2010). Peace out to revolution! Activism among African American youth: An argument for radical healing. *Nordic Journal of Youth Research*, 18(1), 77–96.

- Glaser, B. (1965). The Constant Comparative Method of Qualitative Analysis. *Social Problems*, 12(4), 436–445.
- Golan, G. J. (2014). Towards a Smarter Public Diplomacy. *Diplomatic Courier*. Retrieved from <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/towards-a-smarter-public-diplomacy/>
- Gold Books, P. P. (n.d.). Gold Books.
- Graber, D. A., & Dunaway, J. (2017). Media and Politics in the Changing Media Landscape. In *Mass Media and American Politics* (pp. 104–149). CQ Press.
- Gregory, B. (2008). Public Diplomacy: Sunrise of an Academic Field. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 274–290.
- Gregory, B. (2011). American Public Diplomacy: Enduring Characteristics, Elusive Transformation. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 6(3), 351–372. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187119111X583941>
- Gregory, B. (2014). *The Paradox of Public Diplomacy: Its rise and “demise.”* Washington, D.C: Institute of Public Diplomacy and Global Communication.
- Grier, R. A., Thiruvengada, H., Ellis, S. R., Havig, P., Hale, K. S., & Hollands, J. G. (2016). Augmented Reality – Implications toward Virtual Reality, Human Perception and Performance. *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting*, 56(1), 1351–1355.
- Ha, A. (2018). Tribeca Film Festival unveils its VR and AR lineup. Retrieved from Tech Crunch website: <https://techcrunch.com/2018/03/08/tribeca-immersive/>
- Haiven, M. (2013, February 25). The Radical Imagination. Retrieved from <https://maxhaiven.com/2013/02/25/the-radical-imagination/>
- Haiven, M., & Khasnabish, A. (2014). *The Radical Imagination: Social Movement Research in the Age of Austerity*. Zed Books.
- Halaweh, M., Fidler, C., & McRobb, S. (2008). Integrating the Grounded Theory Method and Case Study Research Methodology Within IS Research: A Possible 'Road Map. *ICIS Proceedings*, (165).
- Hall, T. H., & Ross, A. A. G. (2015). Affective Politics after 9/11. *International Organization*, 69(4), 847–879. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000144>
- Harmony Institute. (2013). Impact playbook: Best practices for understanding the impact of media. Retrieved from <http://www.media-alliance.org/article.php?id=2231>
- Harris, B. (2013). Diplomacy 2.0: The Future of Social Media in Nation Branding. *The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, 4(3).

- Heer, J. (2015, December 13). Benedict Anderson, Man Without a Country. The New Republic. Retrieved from <https://newrepublic.com/article/125706/benedict-anderson-man-without-country>
- Heeter, C. (1992). Being There: The subjective experience of presence. *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 1(2), 262–271.
- Himelfarb, S., & Idriss, S. (2011). Exchange 2.0. Retrieved from United States Institute of Peace website: <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Exchange2.0.pdf>
- History, Culture, and Current Events. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.sharedstudios.com/university/humanities/>
- Hocking, B. (2008). Reconfiguring Public Diplomacy: From Competition to Collaboration. Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Retrieved from https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20080700_cdsp_chapter_hocking.pdf
- Hocking, B. L. (2005). Introduction: Gatekeepers and Boundary-Spanners: Thinking about Foreign Ministries in the European Union. In B. Hocking & D. Spence (Eds.), *Foreign Ministries in the European Union: Integrating Diplomats* (pp. 1–16). Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Hocking, B. L., & Melissen, J. (2015). Diplomacy in the Digital Age. Retrieved from <http://www.egmontinstitute.be/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/DIPLO-IN-DIGITAL-AGE.-PDF.pdf>
- Hocking, B., Melissen, J., Rioran, S., & Sharp, P. (2012). Futures for Diplomacy: Integrative Diplomacy in the 21st Century (p. 85). Clingendael, Netherlands Institute of International Relations.
- Hocking, B., Melissen, J., Riordan, S., & Sharp, P. (2012). Futures for diplomacy: Integrative diplomacy in the 21st century. Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations.
- Hopkins, J. (2016). The Concept of Affordances in Digital Media. In *Handbuch Soziale Praktiken und Digitale Alltagswelten*.
- Howard-Payne, L. (2016). Glaser or Strauss? Considerations for selecting a grounded theory study. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 46(1), 50–62.
- Hufp, R. (2015). “Step Into the Game”: Assessing the Interactive Nature of Virtual Reality Video Games Through the Context of “Terroristic Speech.” *Virginia Journal of Law and Technology*, 19(3). Retrieved from http://www.vjolt.net/vol19/issue3/v19i3_2-Hufp%20.pdf
- Hutchby, I. (2001). Technologies, Texts and Affordances. *Sociology*, 35(2), 441–456.

- Hyer, P., Herrmann, F., & Kelly, K. (2017, October 19). Applying human-centered design to emerging technologies: VR, AR, and digital assistant present exciting opportunities for the future, but how can we ensure we're designing for what people really want? Retrieved from Medium website: <https://medium.com/googleplaydev/applying-human-centered-design-to-emerging-technologies-6ad7f39d8d30>
- Ijsselstein, W. A., de Ridder, H., & Freeman, J. (2000). *Presence: Concept, determinants and measurement*. The International Society for Optical Engineering.
- Inagaki, N. (2007). *Communicating the Impact of Communication for Development: Recent Trends in Empirical Research* (No. Working Paper 120; p. 62). Retrieved from World Bank website: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/6728/405430Communic18082137167101PUBLIC1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Institute for Cultural Diplomacy. (n.d.). What is Cultural Diplomacy? Retrieved from http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy
- IVLP Experience. (n.d.). Retrieved from Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs website: <https://eca.state.gov/ivlp/about-ivlp>
- J, G.-M., O, G.-M., D, L., C, P., & R, N. (2010). Presence, involvement and efficacy of a virtual reality intervention on pain. *Student Health Technology Information*, (154), 97–101.
- James Pamment. (2014). *New Public Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Comparative Study of Policy and Practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Jenkins, H. (2006, October 19). *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century (Part One)*. Retrieved from Confessions of an Aca-Fan website: http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2006/10/confronting_the_challenges_of.html
- Jenkins, H. (2016, December 5). *Civic Imagination for Social Change*. Retrieved from USC Center on Public Diplomacy website: <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/civic-imagination-social-change>
- Jenkins, H., & Deuze, M. (2008). Editorial: Convergence Culture. *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 14(1), 5–12.
- Johnson, T. (2011, September 19). *Muslims in the United States*. Retrieved from Backgrounders, Council on Foreign Relations website: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/muslims-united-states>
- Jonsson, C. (2017). *Diplomatic Actors Beyond Foreign Ministries [Working Paper: Project "Diplomacy in the 21st Century"]*. German Institute for International and Security Affairs.
- Jowett, G., & O'Donnell, V. (2006). *What Is Propaganda, and How Does It Differ From Persuasion?* In *Propaganda and Persuasion*. SAGE.

- Jr, A. F. de L. (2007). The role of international educational exchanges in public diplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 3(3), 234–251.
- Jr., J. S. N. (2005). *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics*. PublicAffairs; New Ed edition.
- Kawachi, I., & Berkman, L. (2014). *Social Capital, Social Cohesion, and Health*. In *Social Epidemiology*. Oxford University Press.
- Kawamoto, K. (2003). *Digital Journalism: Emerging Media and the Changing Horizons of Journalism*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Kedar, P. (2013). Twitter Diplomacy. *Government Executive*, 45(5), 33.
- Kirk, M. (2017, May 8). The “Portals” Encouraging Real Conversations About Policing and Race. City Lab.
- Konle-Seidl, R., & Bolits, G. (2016). Labour Market Integration of Refugees: Strategies and good practices [Policy Department A: Economic and Scientific Policy]. Retrieved from European Parliament’s Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. website: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578956/IPOL_STU\(2016\)578956_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2016/578956/IPOL_STU(2016)578956_EN.pdf)
- Kozłowska, H. (2015, September 21). The UN is using virtual reality and an immersive “wormhole” to connect diplomats with Syrian refugees. Quartz. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/506201/the-un-is-using-virtual-reality-and-an-immersive-wormhole-to-connect-diplomats-with-syrian-refugees/>
- Kravarik, J., & Elam, S. (2017, April 23). The Portals Project: This gold box is “better than Facebook.” CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/style/article/portals-project-los-angeles/index.html>
- Krueger, M. W. (1977). Responsive environments. *The New Media Reader*. Retrieved from <http://raley.english.ucsb.edu/wp-content/Engl800/Krueger-AFIPS.pdf>
- Krugman, H. E. (1971). Brain Wave Measures of Media Involvement. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 11(1).
- L., R. (2017, July 5). Immersive experiences, the future of philanthropy. *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/prospero/2017/07/05/immersive-experiences-the-future-of-philanthropy>
- Laurentsyeve, N., & Venturini, A. (2017). The Social Integration of Immigrants and the Role of Policy – A Literature Review. *Intereconomics*, 52(5), 285–292.
- Lederach, J. P. (2010). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. Oxford University Press.

- Leonard, M. (2009, November 9). Diplomacy by Other Means. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/09/diplomacy-by-other-means/>
- Leonardi, P. M., Huysman, M., & Steinfield, C. (2013). Enterprise Social Media: Definition, History, and Prospects for the Study of Social Technologies in Organizations. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(1), 1–19.
- Levin, J. (2019, January). Leadership Interview [Phone Call].
- Liasson, M. (2017). Trump Continues To Use Twitter As Main Form Of Communication. NPR. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/11/557198057/trump-continues-to-use-twitter-as-main-form-of-communication>
- Living Cities: Innovate, Invest, Lead. (n.d.). The Integration Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.livingcities.org/work/the-integration-initiative/about>
- Logan, R. (2010). *Understanding New Media*. Peter Lang Publishing.
- Lombard, M., & Ditton, T. (1997). At the Heart of It All: The Concept of Presence. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3(2), 0–0. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.1997.tb00072.x>
- Manor, I. (2016). What is Digital Diplomacy, and how is it Practiced around the World? A brief introduction. *Annual Review of the Diplomatist Magazine*.
- Manor, I. (2017a). The Digitalization of Diplomacy: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Terminology. *Exploring Digital Diplomacy*, Working Paper. Retrieved from <https://digdipblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/the-digitalization-of-diplomacy-working-paper-number-1.pdf>
- Manor, I. (2017b, July 5). Ambassadors in Digital Age. *Diplomat Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.diplomatmagazine.com/ambassadors-in-digital-age/>
- Manor, I. (2018, March 16). Preparing for the #Digital Future.
- Manovich, Lee. (1999). *New Media: A User's Guide*. Retrieved from http://manovich.net/content/04-projects/026-new-media-a-user-s-guide/23_article_1999.pdf
- Manovich, Len. (2002). *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Manovich, Len. (n.d.). What Is New Media? In *The New Media Theory Reader*. Retrieved from <https://www.mheducation.co.uk/openup/chapters/0335217109.pdf>
- Marar, Z. (2014). *Intimacy : Understanding the Subtle Power of Human Connection*. Routledge.
- Martel, Y., & Sielke, S. (n.d.). The Empathetic Imagination. *Canadian Literature*, 117(Summer 2003), 12–32.

- Martin, C., Jagla, L., & Firestone, C. M. (2013). Integrating Diplomacy and Social Media: A Report of the First Annual Aspen Institute Dialogue on Diplomacy and Technology. Washington D.C.: Aspen Institute.
- Martinez Pantoja, Y. I. (2018). Conceptualizing a New Public Diplomacy Model: “Intermestic” Strategies and Instruments to Promote Change in Mexico’s GM Food Policy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 13(3).
- Master of Arts in Emerging Media Design and Development. (n.d.). Retrieved from Ball State University Academic Programs website:
<https://cms.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/journalism/academic-programs/masters/emerging-media-design-and-development>
- Maxine, G. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination. Essays on education, the arts, and social change.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Maytree Foundation. (2012). Good Ideas from Successful Cities Municipal Leadership on Immigrant Integration. Retrieved from http://citiesofmigration.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Municipal_Report_Main_Report2.pdf
- McMullan, J. (2017). A new understanding of ‘New Media’: Online platforms as digital mediums. *Convergence*.
- Meares, T., & Weaver, V. (2018). Portals: How Connectivity Can Build Community Among America’s Dispossessed (p. 117). Yale Law School’s Justice Collaboratory and John Hopkins University’s Department of Political Science.
- Melissen, J. (2005). The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice. In *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (p. 221). Springer.
- Melissen, J. (2013). Public Diplomacy. In A. F. Cooper, J. Heine, & R. Thakur (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*.
- Mestre, D. R. (2005). Immersion and Presence. *Movement & Perception*, CNRS & University of the Mediterranean. Retrieved from
http://www.ism.univmed.fr/mestre/projects/virtual%20reality/Pres_2005.pdf
- Milk, C. (2015, March). How virtual reality can create the ultimate empathy machine. TED Talk. Retrieved from
https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine
- Millican, P., & Woolridge, M. (2014). *Them and Us*: Autonomous agents in vivo and in silico.*
- Mills, C. W. (1959a). *The Sociological Imagination.* Oxford University Press.
- Mills, C. W. (1959b). *The Sociological Imagination.* Oxford University Press.

- Minutes, Regular Meeting. (2015). Public Arts Commission: City of Palm Springs, California. Retrieved from <http://www.palmspringsca.gov/home/showdocument?id=38223>
- Mitchell, A. (2018, June 18). Interview: How are ‘Portals’ making the world a smaller place? Retrieved from Inavate website: <http://www.inavateonthenet.net/features/article/interview-how-are-portals-are-making-the-world-a-smaller-place>
- Mulani, V. (n.d.). SHARED STUDIOS: A GOLDEN PORTAL. Retrieved from <http://vinisha-mulani.net/shared-studios/>
- Murphy, T. (2014, December 3). A New Exhibition Offers a Virtual Link to Tehran. New York Times Magazine. Retrieved from https://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/12/03/amar-bakshi-portals-tehran-art-project/?_r=0
- Myers, M. (2009). Qualitative research in business & management. Sage.
- Nafisi, A. (2015). The Republic of Imagination. Penguin Books; Reprint edition.
- Nagy, P., & Neff, G. (2015). Imagined Affordance: Reconstructing a Keyword for Communication Theory. *Social Media and Society*, 1(2). Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305115603385>
- Napoli, P. M., & Norman Lear Center. (2014, Winter). Measuring Media Impact: An Overview of the Field. Retrieved from <https://learcenter.org/pdf/measuringmedia.pdf>
- Nelson, K. (2017, November 28). How the Portals project really opened doors with its Milwaukee Superstar. Retrieved from Avixa website: <https://www.avixa.org/insight/blog/blog/2017/11/28/how-the-portals-project-really-opened-doors-with-its-milwaukee-superstar>
- Neuman, W. R. (1991). The future of the mass audience. Cambridge University Press.
- Ng, P., She, J., Matthias Baldauf, & Jeon, K. E. (2017). When Smart Devices Interact With Pervasive Screens: A Survey. *ACM Transactions on Multimedia Computing Communications and Applications*, 13(4), 1–23.
- Niles, C., & Bates, J. (2016, July 14). Virtual Obama meets a young Iraqi entrepreneur. Retrieved from unicef connect website: <https://blogs.unicef.org/blog/virtual-obama-meets-a-teen-iraqi-entrepreneur/>
- Nye, J. S. (2011). Soft Power. In J. S. Nye (Ed.), *The Future of Power* (pp. 81–109). New York: PublicAffairs.
- O’Boyle, J. (2018). Twitter diplomacy between India and the United States: Agenda-building analysis of tweets during presidential state visits. *Global Media and Communication*.

- Ogawa, T. (2013a). New Frontiers in Relational Public Diplomacy: Collaborative Cultural Initiatives in Peace Building. In *Relational, Networked and Collaborative Approaches to Public Diplomacy: The Connective Mindshift* (pp. 117–131). Routledge.
- Ogawa, T. (2013b). New Frontiers in Relational Public Diplomacy: Collaborative Cultural Initiatives in Peace Building. In R S Zaharna, A. Arsenault, & A. Fisher (Eds.), *Relational, Network, and Collaborative Approaches in Public Diplomacy*. (pp. 117–131). Routledge.
- Peterson, M. A. (2008). The Ethnography of Media Production. In *Anthropology & Mass Communication: Media and Myth in the New Millennium*. (p. 170). Berghahn Books.
- Pettigrew, T. E. (1998). Intergroup Contact Theory. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 65–85.
- Pillay, S. (2017, May 12). Your Brain Can Only Take So Much Focus. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2017/05/your-brain-can-only-take-so-much-focus>
- Portals FAQ. (2018). Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from Shared Studios website: <https://www.sharedstudios.com/k12/faqs/>
- Portals for Refugees. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.sharedstudios.com/refugees>
- Porte, T. L. (2012). The Legitimacy and Effectiveness of Non-State Actors and the Public Diplomacy Concept. *Public Diplomacy Theory and Conceptual Issues*. Presented at the ISA Annual Convention.
- Portland Communications, & USC Center on Public Diplomacy. (2017). *Soft Power 30*. Retrieved from <https://softpower30.com/>
- Powers, J. (2016, November 9). Shared Studios’ portal project aims to bridge international divides with face-to-face interaction. *The Diamondback*. Retrieved from <http://www.dbknews.com/2016/11/09/shared-studios-portal-project-the-clarice/>
- Prashad, V. (2002). *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*. Beacon Press.
- progrss Newsroom. (2017, June 20). Shared Studios Connects Detroit With Communities Worldwide. *Progrss*. Retrieved from <https://progrss.com/communities/20170620/shared-studios-detroit-worldwide/>
- Rasmussen, I. W. (2009). *Towards a Theory of Public Diplomacy, A Quantitative Study of Public Diplomacy and Soft Power* (The Fletcher School, Tufts University). Retrieved from <https://www.slideshare.net/remasmohamed37201/a-theoryofpublicdiplomacyrasmussenjune2012>
- Riordan, S. (2002). *The New Diplomacy* (1st ed.). Polity.

- Riordan, S. (2004a). Dialogue-based Public Diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Paradigm? Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' - Discussion Papers in Diplomacy, (95).
- Riordan, S. (2004b). Dialogue-based public diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Paradigm?
- Ronfeldt, D., & Arquilla, J. (2009). Noopolitik: A New Paradigm for Public Diplomacy. In *Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (pp. 352–362).
- Ross, A. (2011). Digital Diplomacy and US Foreign Policy. *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 6(3–4), 451–455.
- Sandler, E. (2016, August 24). How Can AR Be Used for Social Good? RYOT Media Has An Answer. *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmasandler/2016/08/24/how-can-ar-be-used-for-social-good-ryot-media-has-an-answer/#34225e3e79fb>
- Santulli, D. (2011a). *Relational Diplomacy: Innovations in Peacebuilding: A Case Study of Cyprus*. Arlington Street Press.
- Santulli, D. (2011b). *Relational Diplomacy. Innovations in Peacebuilding: A Case Study of Cyprus. Executive Summary*. Retrieved from <http://www.relationaldiplomacy.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/RD-Executive-Summary.pdf>
- Saunders, H. H., & Parker, N. P. (2015). The Sustained Dialogue Model: Transforming Relationships, Designing. In *Resolving Community Conflicts and Problems: Public Deliberation and Sustained Dialogue*. Columbia Scholarship Online.
- Scolari, C. A. (2009). Mapping conversations about new media: The theoretical field of digital communication. *New Media & Society*, 11(6), 943–964.
- Scott, B. (2010). Skill of the Public Diplomat: Language, Narrative and Allegiance. In A. Fisher & S. Lucas (Series Ed.), *Diplomatic Studies: Vol. 6. Trials of Engagement The Future of US Public Diplomacy* (pp. 231–250).
- Sepulveda, D. (2015, February 24). A New Channel Opens to Tehran. Retrieved from New Haven Independent website: https://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/connects_international_stra/
- Serratore, A. (2018, January 11). A Portal to Genuine Human Connection in One of the Businest Places on Earth.
- Sevin, E. (2017). Public Diplomacy and the Implementation of Foreign Policy in the US, Sweden and Turkey.
- Shared Studios. (2017, June 20). Progrss: Shared Studios Connects Detroit With Communities Worldwide. Retrieved from Shared Studios website:

<https://www.sharedstudios.com/press-list/2017/7/10/progrss-shared-studios-connects-detroit-with-communities-worldwide>

- Shared_Studios Dispatches. (2016). 2016 Summer Recap: Face-to-face with President Obama, a UN Portal, and more. Retrieved from <https://www.sharedstudios.com/dispatches/2016/9/14/summer-recap-face-to-face-with-barack-obama-ewan-mcgregor-ban-ki-moon>
- Sharp, P. (2005). Revolutionary States, Outlaw Regimes and the Techniques of Public Diplomacy. In *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (pp. 106–123). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Shaw, A. (2017). Digital Diplomacy: Will State Ever Take the Plunge? *The Foreign Service Journal*. Retrieved from <http://www.afsa.org/digital-diplomacy-will-state-ever-take-plunge>
- Sheridan, T. B. (1992). Musings on telepresence and virtual presence. *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 1(1), 120–125.
- Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Simmons, M. (2014, May 21). How Being Unfocused Can Take Your Career To The Next Level. Retrieved from Forbes website: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelsimmons/2014/05/21/how-being-unfocused-can-take-your-career-life-to-the-next-level/#25ad57d7272d>
- Skura, E. (2016, June 23). 2167: Indigenous artists to use virtual reality to imagine Canada's future. Retrieved from CBC News website: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/2167-indigenous-virtual-reality-art-project-1.3647580>
- Slater, M. (1997). A framework for immersive virtual environments (FIVE): speculations on the role of presence in virtual environments. In *Presence-Teleop Virtual Environment* (pp. 603–616).
- Slater, M., & Steed, A. (2000). A Virtual Presence Counter. *Presence: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments*, 9(5), 413–434.
- Smith, B. (2015). Towards a Science of Emerging Media. In *Philosophy of Emerging Media: Understanding, Appreciation and Application* (pp. 29–48). Oxford University Press.
- Snow, N., & Taylor, P. M. (2008). *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*. Routledge.
- Snow, N., & Taylor, P. M. (2009). Preface and Introduction Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*.
- Sorapure, M. (2003). *Five Principles of New Media: Or, Playing Lev Manovich*.

- Soros, G. (2016, September 16). The EU, in order to survive, needs to welcome and integrate immigrants. Market Watch. Retrieved from <http://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-eu-in-order-to-survive-needs-to-welcome-and-integrate-immigrants-2016-09-15>
- Spurgeon, C. (2015). Participatory Media and “Co-Creative” Storytelling. *Media International Australia*, 154(1), 132–138.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2013). Collective Intentionality. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/collective-intentionality/>
- Stephan, W. G., & Corneblum, B. (2001). White fears and native apprehensions: an integrated threat theory approach to intergroup attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 33(4).
- Stephan, W. G., & Renfro, C. L. (2002). The role of threat in intergroup relations. From Prejudice to Intergroup Emotions: Differentiated Reactions to Social Groups.
- Stephan, W. G., Ybarra, O., & Morrison, K. R. (n.d.). Intergroup Threat Theory. *Handbook of Prejudice*.
- Stogner, M. B. (2011a). Communicating Culture in the 21st Century: The Power of Media-Enhanced Immersive Storytelling. *Journal of Museum Education*, 36(2), 1–96.
- Stogner, M. B. (2011b). The Immersive Cultural Museum Experience - Creating Context and Story with New Media Technology. *International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 3.
- Stokes, B., Dols, S., & Hill, A. (2018). Cities Remix a Playful Platform: Prominent Experiments to Embed Pokémon GO, from Open Streets to Neighborhood Libraries. Retrieved from American University website: <https://playfulcity.net/go/pokemon-report/>
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative analysis for social scientists*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- STRIVR. (2018). About STRIVR.
- Sun Sentinel Editorial Board. (2017, February 4). President Donald Trump’s reckless diplomacy | Editorial. Sun Sentinel. Retrieved from <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/opinion/editorials/fl-editorial-donald-trump-reckless-diplomacy-20170203-story.html>
- Sundance New Frontier. (n.d.). 10 Years New Frontier. Retrieved from <http://www.sundance.org/newfrontier10>

- Swant, M. (2015, October 6). How the United Nations Is Using Virtual Reality to Boost Global Diplomacy. Retrieved from Ad Week website: <https://www.adweek.com/digital/how-united-nations-using-virtual-reality-boost-global-diplomacy-167382/>
- Taber, K. S. (2000). Case studies and generalizability: grounded theory and research in science education. *International Journal of Science Education*, 22(5), 469–487.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior. In *Psychology of intergroup relations*.
- Taylor, C. (2003). *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Duke University Press.
- The 14th Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship - Fault Lines, Finding Common Ground. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://12982-presscdn-0-38-pagely.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2017-Skoll-World-Forum-Web-Version-SASE-small.pdf>
- The Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy. (n.d.). In *Public Diplomacy*. Retrieved from http://publicdiplomacy.wikia.com/wiki/The_Edward_R._Murrow_Center_of_Public_Diplomacy
- The Enemy: About. (2018). Retrieved from <http://theenemyishere.org/about>
- The Soft Power 30. (2017, September 4). Virtual exchange, an evolution in citizen diplomacy. Retrieved from <https://softpower30.com/virtual-exchange-evolution-citizen-diplomacy/>
- Trost, K., & Wallin, M. (2013). Academic Exchange: A Pillar of American Public Diplomacy. Retrieved from American Security Project website: <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/ASP%20Reports/Ref%200135%20-%20Academic%20Exchange%20-%20A%20Pillar%20of%20American%20Public%20Diplomacy.pdf>
- Turkle, S. (2015). *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*. Penguin Press.
- Tyler, I. (n.d.). Endorsements, Radical Imagination. Retrieved from <https://maxhaiven.com/2013/02/25/the-radical-imagination/>
- United Nations Press Release. (2006, April 6). International Migration One of the Great Challenges of 21st Century, Special Representative Tells Population Commission. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/press/en/2006/pop946.doc.htm>
- United States Institute of Peace. (2018). The PeaceTech Lab. Retrieved from United States Institute of Peace website: <https://www.usip.org/programs/peacetech-lab>
- U.S. Department of State. (2005). *Cultural Diplomacy The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy [Report of the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diplomacy]*.

- Videotelephony. (2002). In Concise Encyclopedia of Engineering. Videotelephony. McGraw-Hill.
- Villarreal, A. (2018, March 13). Greenwich Academy teachers stop by South by Southwest. Greenwich Time. Retrieved from <https://www.greenwichtime.com/local/article/South-by-Southwest-12750694.php#photo-15226675>
- Walker, J. W., & Gaynor, D. (2014, March 14). Smarter Diplomacy: Doubling Down on People-to-People. Retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2014/03/smarter-diplomacy-doubling-down-on-people-to-people/>
- Waller, J. M. (2007). The Public Diplomacy Reader. The Institute of World Politics Press.
- Wang, J. (2006). Managing national reputation and international relations in the global era: Public diplomacy revisited. *Public Relations Review*, 32(2), 91–96.
- Wang, J. (Jay), & Nisbet, E. (2018, June 25). Reimagining Exchange: The Local Impact of Cultural Exchanges. Retrieved from USC Center on Public Diplomacy website: <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/reimagining-exchange-local-impact-cultural-exchanges>
- Wang, Y. (2015, June 14). At Woodrow Wilson Plaza, a Portal to connect with faraway strangers. The Washington Post. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/at-woodrow-wilson-plaza-a-portal-to-connect-with-faraway-strangers/2015/06/14/a4dcaca8-0f9c-11e5-9726-49d6fa26a8c6_story.html?utm_term=.8cb39a18db88
- Werz, M., & Hoffman, M. (2016). Europe's Twenty-first Century Challenge: Climate Change, Migration and Security. *European View*, 15(1), 145–154.
- What is Virtual Reality? (2017). Retrieved from Virtual Reality Society website: <https://www.vrs.org.uk/virtual-reality/what-is-virtual-reality.html>
- Whitson, B. (2012, May 31). W&M Chancellor makes the case for international education. Retrieved from William & Mary: News and Media website: <https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2012/wm-chancellor-makes-the-case-for-international-education123.php>
- Why do diplomats give gifts? (2018). Retrieved from Discover Diplomacy website: <https://www.state.gov/discoverdiplomacy/diplomacy101/people/203502.htm>
- Williams, F., Rice, R. E., & Rogers, E. (1998). *Research Methods and the New Media*. New York: Free Press.
- Williams, M., & Mehrabian, A. (1969). Nonverbal concomitants of perceived and intended persuasiveness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 13(1), 37–58.

- Witmer, B. G., & Singer, M. J. (1998). Measuring Presence in Virtual Environments: A Presence Questionnaire. *Presence*, 7(3), 225–240.
- Working together: Labour Market Integration of Refugees in Germany and other OECD Countries. (n.d.). Retrieved October 11, 2017, from OECD website: <http://www.oecd.org/germany/workingtogetherlabourmarketintegrationofrefugeesingermanyandotheroecdcountries.htm>
- Wright, Q. (1963). The Decline of Classic Diplomacy. *Journal of International Affairs*, 17(1), 18–28.
- Zaharna, Rhonda S, Arsenault, A., & Fisher, A. (2013). Relational, networked and collaborative approaches to public diplomacy: The connective mindshift. Routledge.
- Zaharna, R.S. (2003, June 13). Winning Round Two of American Public Diplomacy in the Arab and Muslim Worlds. Retrieved from Institute for Policy Studies website: https://ips-dc.org/winning_round_two_of_american_public_diplomacy_in_the_arab_and_muslim_worlds/
- Zaharna, R.S. (2008). Mapping out a Spectrum of Public Diplomacy Initiatives. In *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy* (pp. 86–100).
- Zaharna, R.S. (2012a). The Cultural Awakening in Public Diplomacy. Retrieved from <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/useruploads/u35361/2012%20Paper%204.pdf>
- Zaharna, R.S. (2012b). The Cultural Awakening in Public Diplomacy (No. Paper 4, CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy). Retrieved from Figueroa Press website: <http://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/useruploads/u35361/2012%20Paper%204.pdf>
- Zaharna, R.S. (2013). Network Purpose, Network Design: Dimensions of Network and Collaborative Public Diplomacy. In *Relational, Networked, and Collaborative Approaches to Public Diplomacy: The Connective Mindshift* (pp. 173–191). Routledge.
- Zaharna, R.S. (2016). Reassessing “Whose Story Wins”: The Trajectory of Identity Resilience in Narrative Contests. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 1–31.
- Zaharna, R.S. (2017). Synopsis. In *Globalizing Public Diplomacy: Three Communication Logics for a Digitally Connected & Culturally Diverse World* (forthcoming).
- Zaharna, R.S. (2019). Global Engagement. In *The Handbook of Communication Engagement*.
- Zaharna, R.S., Arsenault, A., & Fisher, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Relational, Networked and Collaborative Approaches to Public Diplomacy: The Connective Mindshift* (First). Routledge.

Zevallos, Z. (2011, October 14). What is Otherness? Retrieved from Other Sociologist website:
<https://othersociologist.com/otherness-resources/>

Zittrain, J. (2006). The Generative Internet. *Harvard Law Review*, 119, 1974–2040.

Zittrain, J. (2008). *The Future of the Internet and How to Stop It*. Yale University Press.

Zuckerman, E. (2013). Cute Cats to the Rescue? Participatory Media and Political Expression. In *Youth, New Media and Political Participation*. MIT Press.