e-misférica

Source: [United Nations Webcast](#)

The Live Archive of the World Stage: Engagement and Spectatorship in the United Nations Webcast

James R. Ball III | New York University

Abstract: The closing of the public galleries at the United Nations in the 1990s curtailed public access to UN proceedings until the advent of the UN Webcast in 2001. In the past decade, the Webcast has emerged as a new virtual space for public engagement with the United Nations. As both live broadcast and instantaneous archive, it serves as a hinge between diplomatic performances in the present and the previous performances of ambassadors and heads of state. This curious liminality has both spatial and temporal consequences. It provides opportunities for new forms of activism and intervention, but also obviates forms of mobility associated with physical engagement and progressive cosmopolitanism.

In the realm of the digital, the live and the archival exist on a continuum with one another. In an era of webcasting, the instantaneousness of live broadcast is wedded to its sedimentation in digital video archives: the transition from first performance and presentation to historical document can occur on a single webpage. Such technologies reconfigure the spatiality and temporality of both diplomatic performance and activist responses, opening new opportunities to artists even as

they prove more perfect tools of biopolitical control for states. The emergence of a vibrant public *cyber*space (televisual and mediated, but inherently interactive) can bring political leaders and global citizens closer than ever, even as it entrenches physical divisions between cultures, peoples, and nations. Webcasting rewrites web pages as live stages, and even when archived such presentations carry traces of that liveness. Digital technologies lend a new materiality to the performances of public officials, rendering those performances into manipulable raw materials for artists and activists. On the world stage of global politics, holding the live and archival in such close proximity opens seemingly the unassailable processes already decided by constituted powers to the risks and instabilities inherent in live performance.

During an official tour of United Nations headquarters in New York City some years ago, our guide ushered us into the public galleries of the Security Council with the same deadpan humor he had used all day: "please enjoy your seats, they're brand new—just 55 years old." While they may have been old, they had not seen much use by the public in recent years outside of tour groups like our own. They had been closed to the general public since the early 1990s, our guide informed me, largely due to problems with members of that public "chaining themselves to the chairs and being disruptive at meetings."[1] Finding accounts of such events in newspaper reporting from the period is surprisingly difficult. On 17 January 1991, 2,000 protesters were reported by the Long Island newspaper *Newsday* to have marched on United Nations Headquarters in opposition to the first US war in Iraq, clashing with police along the way. None, however, were said to have chained themselves to any UN furniture. In 1992, 16 Greenpeace protesters *were* arrested for chaining themselves to United Nations property—flagpoles and a fence—but even they hardly made it through the UN's gates (Associated Press 1992). Similar events appear again and again in news reporting ever since, but as with this brief survey, none found their way into the United Nations' ostensibly public spaces. Even before the public galleries were closed, physical engagement with the United Nations—activist interventions that mobilize bodies in protest—has most often been relegated to the streets of New York City, beyond the international space of United Nations Headquarters itself.

In 2012, demonstrations on the streets of New York City are becoming a standard feature of the urban milieu. The recent Occupy Wall Street protests in lower Manhattan have demonstrated the continuing relevance of live, embodied protest as a mechanism for influencing and redirecting public debate. The Occupy protests have also made clear the choreographic logic that characterizes such actions: protest oscillates between periods of stasis (the physical occupation of public space to disrupt the forces that previously flowed through them) and periods of movement (as the protesters articulate space, reclaiming it by marching to Union Square, Foley Square, the Brooklyn Bridge, and so on). This oscillation can be mapped onto the two primary pragmatic goals of most protest activity: disrupting normalizing processes through their interruption (static occupation) and drawing public attention to an issue or claim (dynamic activity). This activity establishes a divide between the live and archival, as the spatial effects on the streets of New York City do not have a necessary relationship to the records of those effects

that emerge digitally. Whereas the use of webcasting by Occupy Wall Street has increased its ranks of spectators, it has not stood in for physical access: those with means have always been able to join the live events.

At the UN, however, even an interested general public without a predilection toward reciprocal protest performance has been kept at bay. This audience, a more traditionally figured audience, has had, in turn, to rely on the accounts of journalists whose spectatorship forms a surrogate for an absent public. While this has been the role of journalists at the United Nations since the institution's inception, without explicit public spaces, journalists are called upon to make up for the lack of spectatorial possibilities more than ever before. Much as diplomats represent constituents and populations through a convoluted chain of elections and appointments, so too do journalists come to represent the gaze of world publics. Between the public and their elected or unelected representatives at the United Nations stands a spectatorial class whose interpretative gestures prefigure diplomatic performances for public consumption. Even when their work puts uncomfortable pressure on those appearing on the world stage, it cannot approach the forms of intervention made possible by full public access.

In 2001, a digital solution to the problem of public access at the United Nations appeared that ultimately changed the terms of possible engagement, reintroducing the productive tension between stasis and mobility at the heart of so many recent demonstrations. The [United Nations Webcast](#) provides live streaming video of nearly every public event held at the United Nations. Security Council meetings, General Assembly debates, press and media stakeouts, and daily news briefings are all available, live, in the instant they happen, as RealVideo or Flash Video streams to interested global publics.[2] A new public gallery thus appeared in the mediated space of the Internet, with simultaneous presentations of the day's events in myriad UN spaces, and coverage often extending to the ceremonies and cultural events that overtake those spaces after hours. Significantly, this webcast does not stand in as an alternative to the live event. As it constitutes the initial public presentation of an event, to global publics it is effectively *the* live event itself, the moment in which diplomats and heads of state enact arrangements of power in live performance. Spaces at UN Headquarters thus extend themselves into cyberspaces, constituting the world stage as both a physical place in Manhattan and a virtual place online. From the outset the Webcast reiterated the optimistic and idealistic promise that accompanies so many technologies in an age of globalization. Interested parties at hemispheric distances from the United Nations were no longer at the whim of often spotty or disinterested traditional reporting on the UN's activities.[3] Concerned individual citizens could now have instant access to the performances of their own representatives and leaders.[4]

One might amend Walter Benjamin's comments on the democratizing possibilities of the advent of film art and the age of mechanical reproduction to include the new situation: "The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room,"

and the head of state speechifying at the high level summit gives his or her remarks from a device on your lap (Benjamin 2007, 221). Where masses had mobilized to approach the United Nations with their concerns, protests, or disapprobation, the institution now moves to meet its constituents at home around the world. Universal access appears at the cost of physical access.[5] The spectator who can now see more than ever before becomes chained to the perspective of the videographer and editor who shoot and upload the stream. Liveness is not lost in this operation; rather, it becomes reconfigured by digital technologies that give it a material existence as video files accessible to distant spectators. Furthermore, camera movements and editing attest to the tendency of such technologies to foreground their own material presence. The contingency of the viewing apparatus (the unique and particular position of the camera in time and space) appears and is identified with the contingency of a hypothetical live viewer: the ostensibly neutral viewing machine reveals itself to be guided by a consciousness like that of any other spectator. Jerky, unplanned camera movements, the seams of the Webcast's otherwise polished presentation, take on greater significance as the indicators of live viewing bodies attendant on scenes of global politics. The camera's liveness attests to the fact that performances before the webcast, though ostensibly the presentation of the already decided, remain vulnerable to the unforeseen and unexpected—to the possibility things might not go as planned.

Scenes played out for the Webcast's eyes run the gamut of premeditation and stagecraft. Some, like the General Debate of the General Assembly, are planned for months and heavily choreographed. As Stéphane Dujarric, Director of News and Media in the Department of Public Information at the United Nations, describes that event, "It's a tradition that's been going on for 50 years […] a lot of that is rehearsed, in a sense." But, he adds, "Sometimes there is improv" (Dujarric 2011). The Webcast is an integral tool for managing the instability of live presentations: the digital becomes a buffer zone between performer and audience, but like many other such zones, it often proves porous and inadequate. Following closed consultations in the Security Council the Webcast usually provides access to a "Media Stakeout," in which a hallway becomes a stage set with a baby-blue backdrop featuring the United Nations logo, flanked by flags, and faced by a podium or microphone and a bevy of reporters lying in wait for passing diplomats. The stakeout implies the possibility of escaping the General Assembly's rigid scripts, that the always present Webcast camera might catch something unplanned or unintended. It thrives on the theatrical construction of liveness, even if it serves purely digital and archival technologies. Those on their way to or from the Council's meetings regularly make use of this stage for impromptu performance: sometimes prepared statements are read, but often there are off-the-cuff engagements with cameras, microphones, and publics.

On 5 June 2009, following the regular briefing of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno-Ocampo of Argentina, to the Security Council on the Situation in the Sudan, the Sudanese permanent representative addressed members of the press at the media stakeout. "Once more the mercenary of death and destruction, the so-called prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, is before the Council," began Abdalmahmood Mohamad, a broad

smile disappearing into a dourly serious visage, "once again he is coming, spreading lies." As he continued his diatribe against the prosecutor (deriding him, among other things, for his "drama") the camera remained in medium close up, framing him from the chest up. The Ambassador addressed his remarks verbally to Ocampo, while pivoting left and right to address himself physically to the unseen reporters behind the Webcast camera. After nearly three minutes spent denigrating the Prosecutor, the camera zoomed out, revealing the "mercenary" himself some six inches away, waiting for his turn to speak.

The Permanent Representative of Sudan speaking to reporters at the Media Stakeout, June 5 2009. RealVideo available here

This digital zoom punctuates the otherwise drily formal stagecraft of the moment. Revealing the presence of the Prosecutor as it reveals its position as surrogate for our own presence, the camera in movement reminds the dislocated spectator of the physical terms of the scene and the bizarre, almost comic encounters it can produce. The Ambassador and the Prosecutor never once look at one another, and Mohamad's epithets take on an aspect of schoolyard bickering quite unexpected in the context of accusations of genocide. As part of a live feed, the zoom articulates the dynamism of a moment in which two antagonists of a compelling global drama could face and challenge one another. The inherent riskiness of their live performances appears as the zoom out indicates the presence of a human operator trying to keep up with the scene. To write this analysis, though, I have had to revisit the video some two years later, when the link to the stream has been moved to the "Archives" section of the Webcast's website, and the camera's movement has become a fixed feature of the formal record, a correction of the image's framing and not a theatrical reveal. I remember the exhilarating charm of the original moment, but cannot reproduce its effects on me as a spectator. The camera's movement will always register the activity of a live human body reacting to a curious scene in the halls of power, but it loses some of its original dynamism under multiple viewings as it enters its new archival existence. Nonetheless, I find it impossible to separate that initial experience of the live from later experiences of the archival; indeed, the webcast's function is partly to lend a sense of liveness to the multiple archives (not just video, but reams of official documents) with which the UN works.

Angelica Macklin has reflected on her experience filming Diana Taylor's lecture "Save As… Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies," translating it from performance to document. She notes: "filming Taylor was itself an act that linked the live and the digital" (Macklin 2010, 18). If the camera is the apparatus that links the live event to its digital archive, the camera's movement, cited above, also serves as a reminder that the UN Webcast leads a two-fold existence and must be understood as a hinge between a live presentation and archival record. The Webcast's dissemination of live events to global audiences has accrued over the past decade to become a vast publicly available archive of

diplomatic performance. Online, records of previous Webcasts between 2001 and 2010 are listed chronologically, piling on one another to develop stalagmites of historical performance—lengthy webpages detailing the public presentations of the organization. These archives are organized haphazardly: records from 2008 and 2007 each get their own page, while 2009 is split in two (January to May and June to December), and earlier years stretch across three pages. These arbitrary temporal breaks suggest that the archive is not a consciously produced facet of the Webcast project, but rather a felicitous accretion. Since a redesign in September 2010, the Webcast page has become more visually arresting and better organized (now by event type in addition to date and time), but the emphasis on the live, which leaves the archive extending as a trail into digital depths, remains. Of course, it is not the Webcast's function to be the United Nations' primary audio-visual archive. Film and video records, audio records, and transcript documents are all maintained with the appropriate levels of forethought and care elsewhere on UN premises. Dujarric is proud of these additional efforts, "We are the keepers of a real human global heritage—we have stuff from the League of Nations" (Dujarric 2011). The United Nations' Archives and Records Management Section handles all of the organization's paper and electronic records, while the Department of Public Information maintains a Film and Video Archive available to researchers. By comparison, the Webcast's own Internet archives appear a poor afterthought and precarious presence. And yet they are a service whose value should not be underestimated: while the official archives are by no means private, unlike the Webcast archives they are not accessible by a few clicks of the mouse. If the Webcast opens a new public space at the UN, that space is characterized by maintaining the present and past together in one place, a live archive.

The Webcast archive lacks the assurances to longevity implied by official archives—one frets that it might disappear should it prove too unwieldy, or too tedious to find an audience, or, perhaps, too useful to those addressing powerful states with their own words. While it remains, however, the Webcast also realizes in digital terms a relationship between the live performance and the historical document it will become. Each Webcast occupies a liminal space between these two moments and ontologies (live presentation, historical representation), and its temporality refuses to isolate the moment it shifts from one to the other. Peggy Phelan has famously argued that, "Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so it becomes something other than performance" (Phelan 1993, 146). Such a clean division between a performance and its record cannot hold in the space of the Webcast—lost like the incremental frames of the camera's zoom out. Without true public access to the unmediated event, the live Webcast is a first performance, a presentation not a re-presentation. What is unique to the unmediated event is largely moot as the public audience that ratifies the public performance as such appears only in the instance of broadcast. But this broadcast is also a filmic record, and can be mobilized to re-present itself whenever called upon to do so. The live moment indicates the history it will become, while the growing archive also apparent on the same webpage implies a future in which such performances will continue to proliferate. Naturally, this has performative consequences.

eMISFéRICA

US President Barack Obama Addresses the 66th Session of the General Assembly, 21 September 2011. (Best viewed in Internet explorer or Firefox browsers) Original available [here](#)

In his initial outline of the performative utterance, J.L. Austin notes that, in a speech-act, "there must exist an accepted conventional procedure [which] must be executed by all participants both correctly and [...] completely" (Austin 1975, 14-15). Performative speech rests on its history (a conventional procedure) and indicates its future (where it will be carried through completely). The Webcast, as both live event and archival record, manifests this relationship in digital space. Slipping past the viewer from live moment to archival record, each Webcast realizes the operation by which present utterance becomes past convention. The Webcast archive thus offers a trove of such conventions—of since reiterated performances. In its unplanned development it suggests a map (scale 1:1) of the daily diplomatic rituals that lend power and authority to the institution in their repetition. As Diana Taylor notes, "we might conclude that the archival, from the beginning, sustains power," and the Webcast gives daily evidence of the activities of powerful states to cement their place in a global order by re-performing its contours (Taylor 2003, 19). With the Webcast the archives that sustain power re-enter the realm of the live. So one finds the parade of heads of state each September to the dais in the General Assembly hall to mark again their global positions via oral performance before equally high-level delegations—a live presentation with a necessary relationship to the archive it will soon join. Much is predictable, and in September 2011 one can find US President Barack Obama on the Webcast replaying the same themes from years past: highlighting his administration's own commitment to nuclear disarmament while chastising Iran and North Korea for their weapons programs.

The 6191st Meeting of the UN Security Council, on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, 24 September 2009. RealVideo available [here](#)

The Webcast archive collects together the materials by which such commitments can be tested and this possibility is what makes a live archive in digital realms such a compelling figure for activists, citizens, and others. From 2011, one can click back through to September 2009, to the high-level Security Council summit at which Obama presided over the adoption of resolution 1887 on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. In 2011, he can claim some progress promised in 2009—the new START treaty signed with Russia in 2010—but must gloss over other failures and inconsistencies. Flanked by Hillary Clinton and Susan Rice, in 2009 Obama leans forward at the Security Council's horseshoe table to assert: "We will move forward with the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty." But, two years later, he stands alone in front of green marble, gesturing with his left hand, pointing into space: "America will continue to work for a ban on the testing of nuclear weapons." While the president may have forgotten that the United States signed such a ban in 1996, and the current work (as 2009 Obama made clear) is merely to ratify it, the Webcast's public archive provides the terms by which the performative promises of sovereigns and diplomats may be regularly tested by citizen spectators.[6] Bringing the archive to digital life maintains its immediate

relevance to political performance in the present.

States already hold one another accountable for what is said in such arenas, so by bridging the live and archival, the Webcast provides significant opportunities for private individuals to do the same. If world leaders must make use of the UN to perform and re-perform their own positions of power—Susan Rice arguing for intervention in Libya is formally similar to Colin Powell arguing for intervention in Iraq—the Webcast's audiovisual record in turn opens an aesthetic space for the contestation of such performances. Highlighting a performative temporality, the Webcast suggests opportunities for engagement and activism unavailable to physical actors. Chaining oneself to UN property will delay the performative cycle, but virtual interventions can address that cycle's terms. In 2009, "Auto-Tune the News" re-edited UN video to put Obama calling for a new era of engagement on the same stage as Hugo Chavez playing air-guitar. The Webcast renders the ephemeral live performance of state functionaries into manipulable material for digital activist artists. Underneath the frivolity of the "Auto-Tune the News" example lies the reality that words spoken and promises performed in the official spaces of the world stage have effects, and that these effects remain available for comment and action by interested publics.

Auto-Tune the News Addresses the United Nations, October 2009.

Forms of new media have not and likely will not replace the traditional channels by which information is disseminated to viewing publics. Indeed, *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* already make compelling arguments for the responsibility of journalists and news organizations to make use of such documentary records to hold national or world leaders accountable (and in practice both those programs show the transgressive potential of the form). Nonetheless, the ease of access that characterizes the Webcast implies a new space for an engaged public to carry out some of this work in its own right. Much like related forms of so-called citizen journalism, such activity becomes embedded in existing media. New media and old each amplify the other, and couched within one another indicate new configurations for public engagement and spectatorship. Dujarric related a recent incident, a video question-and-answer session with the Secretary-General streamed live over the Internet. Thirteen million spectators watched the presentation via Weibo, a social network similar to Twitter, in the People's Republic of China. "But what was interesting to me," said Dujarric, "is that because of the build-up […] and the conversations that were happening on this microblogging site, there was interest from the traditional media. […] Xinhua [the state-run Chinese news service] wrote an article about it. I did an interview on China national radio about it […] to me it was interesting to see the porousness […] between so-called new media and so-called traditional media" (Dujarric 2011). In the context of such events, playing with the Webcast might reiterate traditional activist strategies. Creative performances that take the United Nations' significant audio-visual output as their resource and material can draw the attention of adjacent media and traditional approaches. Spectacular uses of publicly available United Nations video could in the 21st century reproduce (in virtual space) theatrical forms of protest that require physical access—chaining images together in editing to match

chaining oneself in protest to the public galleries. Just as new media become embedded in the old, so too can such practices fit themselves into existing, physical forms of protest—each enhancing and amplifying the other.[7] The Secretary-General's performance of transparency drew the attention of Xinhua, extending his reach in digital space. Energetic forays into the Webcast archives could both enforce accountability, by playing upon the performative structures apparent in the public performances of diplomats, and enhance the visibility of a given issue, by emphasizing the novelty of the unfettered access that the Webcast archive provides.

Such temporal opportunities—the opening out for potential intervention allowed by the Webcast's digital archive—reintroduce forms of dynamism and movement that appeared to be lost as protest performance was relegated off-site. Nonetheless, physical stasis continues to be reinscribed as the virtual space expands. Indeed, the availability of certain performances to this digital archive is fully contingent on the physical architecture of the United Nations. In April 2010, renovations began on the Security Council chamber forcing relocation to a basement room. At the same time, access by the Secretariat—the UN's administrative arm—to Council meetings began to be systematically curtailed, and the media stakeout was moved some distance from Council chambers (Lynch 2010a). No longer would impromptu appearances be likely; only those diplomats planning to perform for the Webcast and international press would seek it out. In many ways this reiterates for journalists the experience of public protesters outside. In September 2011, as I walked through the annual protests accompanying the General Assembly debate I noted how distant they seemed from the UN itself and that their only audience consisted of those, like myself, who had specifically sought them out. *Security Council Report*, a journal reporting on the Security Council's work, noted: "the reduction of 20 percent in appearances in recent months by the president [of the Security Council and a] 64 percent drop in appearances by other Council members [at the Media Stakeout]." The journal went on to point out that though the move was to be temporary, "the physical status quo seems likely to prevail for some time and there is therefore a real risk that the information status quo will become a permanent habit" (Security Council Report 2010). Colum Lynch, blogging for the journal *Foreign Policy*, was less diplomatic, substituting scenes of slapstick comedy for the usual gravitas of the stakeout as reporters raced to the new location: "There is a shortcut that can get you to the council in half the time by walking through the U.N. basement, but at least two reporters, including a CNN employee and a Lebanese reporter, have gotten trapped in a high-security revolving door en route to the council" (Lynch 2010b). Though the example borders on the absurd, it points to an insidious reality: even as the Webcast permits televisual and conceptual mobility (images, sounds, and the ideas they carry travel far and wide), it encourages physical stasis.

ResoNations 2010: An International Telematic Music Conference for Peace, 3 December 2010. original available [here](link)

Occasionally the Webcast offers special events—ceremonies, roundtable discussions, concerts, and the like. On 3 December 2010, the Webcast broadcasted one such concert: "ResoNations 2010: An International Telematic Music Conference for Peace." Telematic music, as the program handed out to live audience members at the event explains, "is real-time performance via the internet by musicians in different geographic locations."[8] In this case, the Webcast cameras captured musicians performing live at United Nations Headquarters in New York at the same time that they re-photographed images projected behind those musicians—other live feeds from Beijing and Seoul featuring additional musicians. In many ways, the Webcast rendered the performance more perfect. In the local spaces, the live musicians and instruments had a tendency to dominate over those projected into the space telematically; online, each of the three feeds could be mixed into a coherent whole. Visually, the Internet viewer was presented with frames within frames. The multiple cameras in New York would shift between the performers there and a projection of single-camera setups in each of the remote locations. One had a sense of spaces opening up within one another: the space of the Webcast held the conference room in New York, embedded in which one found Seoul and Beijing. The cameras filming musicians in Asia were often dynamic and speedy, panning across performers as they were introduced and later plied their craft. The web viewer maintained a privileged viewing and listening position in which all was appreciable by the senses, even if the images of images tended to get a bit blurry. The active and mobile cameras also offered a stark contrast to the static performing bodies they captured. In Seoul and Beijing, musicians remained seated on stages, while the situation here in New York was more pronounced: there was not even a stage, and the performers sat between the desks and chairs of a conference room, in the literal interstices of the United Nations architecture.

In his opening remarks, Abdulkaleq Bin-Dhaaer Al-Yafei, Minister Plenipotentiary and Deputy Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations, described the technical apparatus as "a miraculous innovation […] we are very impressed by this technology and hope it will contribute and serve to build peace in the world and among nations" (See video above). Indeed, this was the underlying theme of the event—that improvements in videoconferencing technology could facilitate cultural interaction to encourage an amelioration of violent conflict. By playing together in a digital space capable of ignoring geopolitical borders, future violent transgressions of those borders might be avoided. Such a progressive dream reiterates popular and optimistic views of globalization, and especially of the positive possibilities opened up to globalizing processes by advancements in technological connectivity. However, by disavowing physical national borders, this peace (and indeed this piece of theatre) is contingent on maintaining those borders and the physical stasis of those bodies contained within them.

Arriving together in a digital space obviated any need for the traditional trappings of mobility—passports, visas, and the like. It has become something of a truism to suggest that the United Nations is the last champion of antiquated conceptions of state sovereignty (even as it promotes the revision of such concepts through doctrines such as "the Responsibility to

Protect"), but events like ResoNations demonstrate the complicity of certain progressive ideals in reinforcing those concepts: a world without borders to information is perhaps a world in which physical borders are more heavily policed than ever. Forms of physical encounter—like that between delegates and constituents in a public gallery, or diplomats and journalists at a stakeout, or musicians from different national backgrounds in a concert hall—become increasingly unnecessary and so the potential they contain for redrawing the contours of human communities is lost. This is not to reiterate tired arguments that digital technologies isolate individuals from one another, producing new forms of alienation that mark a 21st century dystopia; rather, the immobility of these performers indicates a biopolitical state strategy of control that is antithetical to the cosmopolitan world the United Nations occasionally imagines. When cosmopolitanism becomes purely ideational and ceases to have physical or spatial consequences, it loses its capacity to address issues of mobility and migration—the freedom of movement and the oppressions of forced displacement.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon answers questions from social-media websites, 13 September 2011. original available [here](#)

The archival space of the Webcast corresponds to the space indicated by ResoNations. It is a space explicitly linked to real places on Earth (the meeting and performance spaces of the United Nations), but it is also a space largely dissociated from the physical world, that can be entered wherever certain technological barriers (access to a computer connected to the Internet) are surmountable. Dujarric invoked a spatial metaphor to describe the tension between transparency and secrecy in the work of the Department of Public Information, noting a need for balance between what is public and what is private: "Clearly there needs to be a space where negotiations can happen without the glare of the media, where one party or another can make concessions without appearing to be weak. That's an important space that needs to be preserved" (Dujarric 2011). The Webcast preserves the private space needed at Turtle Bay in part by transferring the public viewing space to a virtual archive (let us not forget that the word "archive" denotes a place as much as it does a practice or document). The Webcast archive does provide a unified virtual space in which to collect the organization's public performances. If it dematerializes them, preventing forms of physical encounter and physical circulation, it nonetheless provides a unified body of material with which to interact digitally. If liveness marks, among other things, the moment and location of a physical encounter between a public and performer, the digital archive expands that moment and attaches it to the physicality of media.

Taking the Webcast as both live stage and historical record, as a space for making new presentations and for collecting past presentations, as platform and archive, shows that while our eyes and ears may be extended (the terms of our spectatorship may be greatly expanded), our ability to physically address the powerful in their own spaces remains curtailed. This is a new twist on an old tension between stasis and mobility in forms of public engagement: "Feel free to chain yourself to your seat in the new public gallery: it is your own recliner!" An ambivalent view of the Webcast as a mechanism of transparency and as a successor space to

the public galleries emerges from a temporal and spatial theatrical analysis of that mechanism. The Webcast allows audiovisual access to live political and diplomatic performances at the United Nations to wider swaths of the world population than ever before. It provides an archive to interested publics that is infinitely manipulable and could provide grist for new forms of artistic intervention. Perhaps most importantly, it provides a clear and accessible record by which world leaders may be held accountable for their promises, commitments, or threats. It marries the instability of live performance—its capacity to allow the entry of the unanticipated—to the purported certainty of historical records. To do all this, however, it maintains bodies in their places. Ideas, sounds, and images travel freely, while people remain bound within older political structures. This immobility risks derailing efforts towards cultural understanding, but it is not fatal. The Webcast shifts the center of gravity for cosmopolitan protests that address institutions of global governance and the world leaders who perform in them, forcing a reconfiguration of previous spectatorial landscapes. Diplomatic performances at the United Nations in 2012 address themselves to broad audiences even as they fix those audiences in space. The encounter between global publics and the live archive of the world stage is thus a moment of tremendous political urgency, but also the location for new forms of engagement with the seemingly monolithic forces that shape world affairs.

James R. Ball III received his Ph.D. from the Department of Performance Studies at New York University in 2012. His research examines the United Nations and International Criminal Court through the lens of theatre and performance, identifying the theatrical conditions of possibility for the work of global politics. He also teaches Shakespeare in NYU's Department of Drama.

Notes

[1] On a subsequent tour, another guide identified the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center as the impetus for closing the galleries. The discrepancy between their accounts reflects the lack of clarity I discovered on the issue. Whatever the reason for the closure, the effect is the same—the elimination of a live, unmediated stage for political performance at the United Nations.

[2] It is worth noting that the UN is hardly an early adopter of new media technologies—the Webcast continued to be available only in RealVideo format until September 2010, when it was revamped to make use of the Flash video format made standard with the advent of Youtube in 2005.

[3] My comments throughout should not be taken as a denigration of those who report daily on the work of the United Nations. Their work is invaluable. Rather, I am arguing for forms of public engagement that would stand alongside their work.

[4] Assuming they can afford the requisite technologies. In the realm of technological solutions one must always remember the specific forms of exclusion they inevitably produce.

[5] Though I use the world universal here one should recognize again that such a figure represents the ideal not the reality of access to digital technologies.

[6] Which, it should be noted, is more a failure of the US legislature than its executive.

[7] We might extend this logic of embeddedness to address anew the place of our surrogate spectator filming the Webcast—he or she is a viewing body embedded in the apparatus that permits our own spectatorship.

[8] The event was held outside of regular hours in a conference room. The presence of a live audience here should not be taken to indicate the reappearance of open public galleries in either of the UN's primary spaces: the General Assembly or Security Council.

 Works Cited

1991. "The Gulf War 2,000 Rally at Angry UN Protest Marchers torch police barriers." *Newsday*, January 17: 24.

1992. "Sixteen Greenpeace Protesters Arrested at the United Nations." *The New York Times*, May 1: B4.

Austin, J. L. 1975. *How To Do Things With Words*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 2007. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Harry Zohn, Trans. New York: Schocken Books.

Dujarric, Stéphane. 2011. Interview by author. New York, 4 November.

The Gregory Brothers. 2009. Auto-Tune the News 9: Nobel. Health Care. United Nations. Accessed 15 October 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnoD3NUux3M

Lynch, Colum. 2010a. Chamber of Secrets. *Turtle Bay.*
Accessed 19
September 2010. http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/04/09/chamber_of_secrets

----------. 2010b. The U.N. Security Council's great disappearing act. *Turtle Bay*

http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/08/25/the_un_security_council_s_great_disappearing_act

Macklin, Angelica. 2010 "Digital Dust: Filming for the Digital Archive." *Save As…Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies*. Foreseeable Futures #10: Position Papers from Imagining America.

Phelan, Peggy. 1993. *Unmarked: the Politics of Performance*. New York: Routledge.

Security Council Report. Security Council Statistics. *September Forecast*

http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/site/c.glKWLeMTIsG/b.6196129/k.EB72/September_2010brSecurity_Council_Statistics.htm

Taylor, Diana. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/stakeout/2009/so090605am.rm?start=00:00:00&end=00:10:44

United Nations Webcast.
2009b. Security Council:
Maintenance of International
Peace and Security – Nuclear
Non-Proliferation and Nuclear
Disarmament. Accessed
13 November 2011. http://webcast.un.org/ramgen/ondemand/sc/2009/sc090924am.rm

United Nations Webcast. 2010. ResoNations 2010: An International Telematic Music Concert for Peace. Accessed 13 November 2011.

http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2010/12/wafunif-arts-for-peace-worldconcert-2010-an-international-telematic-music-concert-for.html

United Nations Webcast. 2011. United States of America, General Debate, 66th Session. Accessed 13 November 2011.
http://www.unmultimedia.org/tv/webcast/2011/09/united-states-of-america-general-debate-66th-session.html