Uncertain Times: Citizen App and Temporalities of Personalized Security in New York City

Alice McAlpine-Riddell

Introduction

I am sitting in a Twin Peaks themed coffee shop in Bushwick, Brooklyn (NY) at eight thirty on a Monday morning, getting coffee with Tina and Kim before they start work. The shop serves beverages like lavender lattes and peppermint red eyes, the coffee cup sleeves adorned with quotes from the show, 'This is – excuse me – a damn fine cup of coffee'. It is raining heavily outside, the streets flowing rivers of dirty water from litter-blocked drains. Both Tina and Kim are White women in their mid-thirties who work remotely from their respective apartments a few blocks away. They are both slightly jaded after spending Sunday at the Renaissance Faire in Pennsylvania, a re-enactment entertainment extravaganza, combining a hodge-podge of bygone eras. As they discuss the corsets they wore, the sword swallowing they witnessed, and the cider donuts they ate, Tina receives a notification from Citizen, interrupting the conversation. 'Man slashed, two in custody', she reads out loud. Kim exclaims, 'It is eight in the morning, people!', while Tina continues this thought, 'I see them [notifications] when I wake up at night, and sometimes they are useful like information about a fire, but other times its missing children or a shooting. It's a lot and its constant.' She counts the notifications, 'two, four, six, eight, ten, ten from yesterday'.

Tina scrolls through all her Citizen notifications from the past week, which are saved on her iPhone notification centre. The list keeps rolling, ostensibly endless, against the backdrop of her home screen – a photo of her rescue

dog Cookies. Alerts include 'Electrical Fire'; 'Missing 14-year-old'; 'Police mobilization'; 'Armed shoplifting at Walmart'; 'Search for robbery suspects'; 'Possible gunshot detected'; 'triple shooting'. Often the text trails off, 'person barricaded with …', 'White BMW fled from pol …', due to the condensed nature of notifications, prompting the user to click and swipe open to gain a fuller picture. Kim is quiet. She also has Citizen on her phone but has chosen to turn off notifications because she does not want to feel fearful in her neighbourhood. 'I know the dangers', she tells me on another occasion, 'I don't have to have it in my face.' Once the coffee is finished, I too receive the 'man slashed' notification, some 30 minutes after Tina.

This moment condenses the complex temporal and rhythmic entanglements of Citizen app and its users. Citizen is a live crime-and-safety tracking app operating in 60 US cities, with over nine million users across the country (Citizen, 2024). Citizen proclaims to be a 'personal safety network', providing access to 'real-time 911 alerts', scraped from police scanners that are relevant to 'public safety', such as fires, shootings, accidents, and protests. It also offers 'magic moments', reporting on local news like the return of a missing cat or on humorous events, such as 'rooster making noise in apartment'. The app sends out alerts, to users based on their location, whilst also pinning the incidents, represented as yellow and red squares, to an ever-updating dark-mode map of the city. Citizen also allows users to self-report incidents, and utilizes user-recorded footage, as users near an ongoing incident are prompted to 'go live' and film the situation as it unfolds. Functioning like a form of social media, users can also comment and post expressive emojis of anger, shock, and hope, that bubble across the screen. In 2020, Citizen topped the Apple charts for the most downloaded 'news app', ahead of *The New York Times*, Twitter, and *Fox News* (Bertoni, 2020). Its rule-breaking founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Andrew Frame, was once arrested as a teenager for hacking into the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), before going on to make millions investing in early Facebook (Bertoni, 2020). So far, over ten billion alerts have reportedly been sent to users across the US (Citizen, 2024).

Citizen is a digital technology for community monitoring, as it encourages users to watch and report on one another. It is a form of 'digitalized vigilance' (Peacock, Introduction, this volume), as illustrated by its original name. When the app launched in 2016 it was called 'Vigilante', before being pulled from the Apple app store for violating the guidelines on user-generated content apps that risk physical safety. A few months later, the app rebranded and relaunched as Citizen, although many of the affordances remained the same. Vigilante's #CrimeNoMore, was replaced by Citizen's #ProtectTheWorld. The term 'Citizen' evokes a nationalistic mythology of the patriotic hero, in the form of the law-abiding citizen. It is both a personal call to action, and an inclusion in a broader community of like-minded

concerned citizens. This deviation from the crime fighting of Vigilante, to Citizen's imperative towards safety, reflects a shift towards 'Big Mother' surveillance in general (Peacock, Introduction, this volume). It draws on the increasingly femininized language of empowerment, and treads a delicate balance between care and control. I have discussed this ambivalence and tension elsewhere (Riddell, 2023).

This chapter presents the ways in which Citizen app impacts the temporality of its users, through the immediacy of the 'go live' function and real-time crime mapping, and the interruption of notifications. It does so from the perspective of two bordering neighbourhoods of Brooklyn, New York: Bushwick and Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy).[1] In these neighbourhoods, there is a tension between the temporal modalities of Citizen, and the space-time experienced by its users. Following the Bogardian shift of surveillance towards simulation outlined in the volume's introduction, and how it effects social rhythm, this chapter explores the hyperreality of Citizen app and the production of disruption and arrythmia among its users. Through ethnography with users, I conceptualize Citizen as a simulation in which crime is instant and constant, as Citizen notifications become a jarring interruption into the everyday, creating an isolated present at odds with the rhythm of the neighbourhoods. In practice, Citizen often fails to provide updates in real time, sending out notifications at different times to users in the same location, or failing to remove historic crimes that haunt the homepage map. This creeping arrythmia creates uncertainty and alienation in users, which can develop into resistance and nonchalance, as some users switch off notifications, refuse to 'go live', and practise indifference. Others engage cyclically with the app, demonstrating a different kind of response. As I will show, the concept of 'affordances-in-practice' can offer insights (Costa 2018). Through it we can see technological affordances as more than mere architectural features of a platform, but rather, culturally informed artefacts, used in a variety of specific ways, in localized situations and social contexts.

Real-time crime, all the time

As Rob Kitchin argues, 'digital technologies are reconfiguring everyday temporalities' (2023). Smartphones are the constant companions of urbanites, sustaining a life that is 'always on' (boyd, 2012), characterized by an 'ubiquitous connectivity' (Madianou, 2016). A plethora of services available at one's fingertips, from goods to be delivered, rooms to be reserved, or cars to be ordered, all seemingly in an instant and on-demand, furnishes the impression of 'time compressed to zero degree' (Stine and Volmar, 2021, p 10). Citizen app exists within this landscape as one form of emergency media. From 911 calls and Facebook's safety check feature, to national and regional emergency alert systems about weather warnings, missing children, or even incoming

missiles,[2] emergency media is versatile and ever evolving. As Elizabeth Ellcessor argues, 'the speed, interconnection, and everydayness of digital mobile media have created virtual "panic buttons" at our fingertips' (2022, p 3). From social media like X, to apps like Citizen, there is a proliferation of participatory engagement with emergency media, and 'crime in real-time', enabled by the promised immediacy of technology, creating 'uncensored, unsanitized, unfiltered versions of crime events' (Powel et al, 2018, p 69).

Citizen describes itself as enabling access to these crime events, providing 'real-time 911 alerts' and 'instant help' (Citizen 2024), cultivating a 'real-time awareness of nearby events' (Chordia et al, 2023, p 7). These real-time alerts are frequent and intense. A hallmark of simulation is how it professes reality, such as real-time or reality TV. It does not oppose the real but is rather a means of verisimilitude (Der Derian, 1990), in which virtual processes replace the actual (Bogard, 1996). Not only does Citizen purport to provide a map of crime in real time, but it simultaneously creates an atmosphere in which there is, to appropriate a headline, 'All the Crime, All the Time' (Herrman, 2019). This is Jenny's experience, who has lived in the city for most of her life. She expresses concerns about Citizen, and the skewed perspective of her neighbourhood it gives:

> The app makes it seem like we live in like a very crime riddled neighbourhood. I'll have a notification that 3 miles away, someone was stabbed. And then we walk the dog and see nothing is wrong out here. It makes it seem a lot worse than it seems to me just being around the neighbourhood.

While, for Bogard, 'surveillance always looks *through or behind* something; simulation is a projection *onto* something (a screen)' (Bogard, 1996, p 21, emphasis in original). Bogard's argument is that surveillance has shifted in the televisual age to being a simulation, a hyperreal illusion of control. He gives examples of simulations such as cybernetics, gaming, and police profiling, which work to transform the subject of the simulation's sense of rhythm (Lefebvre, 2013). I use the term 'rhythm' following Lefebvre's expansion of spacetime to encompass energy, as, 'everywhere where there is interaction between a place, a time and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm', (2013, p 25), which includes repetition, and linear and cyclical processes. The everyday is fundamentally an experience of and in rhythm. There are multiplicitous rhythms of the everyday and the body, which Lefebvre refers to as 'polyrhythmia', and when internal rhythms are in accord there exists a state of 'eurhythmia'. The inverse, 'the discordance of rhythms', results in the 'fatal disorder' of 'arrhythmia' (2013, p 25). Regarding temporality, Lefebvre aligns 'presence', a being in rhythm with oneself, others, and the polyrhythms of one's neighbourhood, with eurhythmia, and the 'present',

the immediate and real time, conversely with arrhythmia. Thus, for Jenny, Citizen projects an image onto her neighbourhood via her phone screen, an image that is 'very crime riddled', and at odds with her lived experience of the polyrhythms of her neighbourhood. This is not to say that Citizen is a-rhythmic but rather that its rhythms are in discord with Jenny's experiences of her neighbourhood, producing a sense of arrythmia. Moreover, when users speak of this dissonance, the hyperreality of Citizen is revealed, in which the perception of crime, as happening all the time, replaces the reality of decreasing crime rates (Akinnibi and Wahid, 2022; Fetterman et al, 2023) and the relative safety of Brooklyn neighbourhoods.

The hyperreal is a simulation of reality that appears more real than reality itself. The term was first coined in 1975 by Umberto Eco (1990), a reference to the North American imagination for the real fake, citing Disneyland and Las Vegas as the original sites of simulation. Jean Baudrillard similarly framed the US as hyperreal, as 'a giant hologram … a three-dimensional dream' (2010, p 29). For Baudrillard, hyperreality is a simulation, where the distinction between reality and its representations dissolves (1994). I am using the concept of hyperreal as a filter through which to analyse Citizen app. It is important to note that Baudrillard has been critiqued for a lack of evidence to support his theoretical claims (Cole, 2010). My application of hyperreality comes from my fieldwork, in which Citizen is frequently framed as representing a neighbourhood at odds with my interlocutors' concrete experiences of their neighbourhoods. This is not to say that it is unreal, but rather that it creates a hyperreality within a multiplicity of subjective realities that co-exist and overlap as competing rhythms within the city. New York, 'the shining and perishable dream itself', (Didion, 2008, p 231), also has an air of hyperreality, in the sense that it is place continually recreated and recast by its representations, through the filmic imagination of Hollywood. Picturing New York City as Gotham, a crime-filled city in need of cleaning up by a vigilante hero, is an image Citizen has latched onto. Calls of 'Gotham needs Batman' fill comments sections, and the ominous dark mode map further encourages such links.[3]

The hyperreal is sustained by the image. Images represent a surreal enterprise, and to quote Susan Sontag, are a 'creation of a duplicate world, of a reality in second degree, narrower but more dramatic than the one perceived by natural vision' (2019a). This is exemplified by the photos and clips posted on Citizen, which are often sensational: flames exploding out of buildings and rows of emergency vehicles with flashing red and blue lights. The frame is specific, withholding context, focusing on the most evocative and theatrical moments of the scene. This is amplified in the isolated, contracted present of the real time, which 'engulfs the subject with indescribable vividness, a materiality of perception properly overwhelming, which effectively dramatizes the power of the material' (Jameson, 1991, p 27). For example, Drew, a 28-year-old musician and grad student living in

Bushwick, is a somewhat reluctant Citizen user. He uses the app until it 'becomes too depressing', or evokes feelings of unsafety, and then deletes it, only to re-download it weeks or months later when an event piques his interest on Instagram or in the neighbourhood. Drew then deletes Citizen again when these feelings of uncertainty and insecurity creep back in. When I ask him the reason for his most recent re-download, his answer is dramatic:

> A car had blown up like a block down and the first thing that came to mind, actually I called 911 first and said 'Hey, there is a car on fire do something', and then I saw people gathering around the car and I thought ok I'm going to check Citizen and lo and behold I now have thirty angles of this car that is actively exploding. … It's interesting because it's so dystopian, this multi-cam of crime that nosy people want to check out.

Such vivid images resulting from this 'multi-cam of crime' are seen as dystopian because they are '*copies conforming to a standard*, parodies of presence' (Lefebvre, 2013, p 33). Lefebvre expands further:

> you attend the incessant fêtes or massacres, you see the dead bodies, you contemplate the explosions; missiles are fired before your eyes. You are there! … but no, you are not there; your present is composed of simulacra; the image before you simulates the real, drives it out, it is not there. (Lefebvre, 2013, p 41)

The real time simulates the real, through the image, making the experience feel immediate, as Drew says, he now has 30 angles of the car actively exploding, generating the illusion of presence. Citizen as a simulation creates '*unmediated immediacy* of remote places and times' (Bogard, 1996, p 49, emphasis in original), through the representational strategy of transparency, which attempts to obscures the medium (Bolter and Grusin, 2000) as a technology for the cultural (re)production of the real.

Drew engages with Citizen cyclically, deleting and re-downloading the app around ten times over the course of two years.[4] He explains, 'in my neighborhood, I felt more paranoid and on guard when I was using it, normally I am pretty trusting of my surroundings, but with Citizen I'm constantly thinking, "what's that guy doing over there?"' Once again, there is a divergence between Citizen's real-time crime and the lived everyday of walking around one's neighbourhood: creating dissonance, misplaced suspicion, and uncertainty. To obviate this arrythmia, Drew deletes Citizen; however, the enticing nature of the simulation as a technology of vigilance draws him back in, as the desire to stay connected results in continuous patterns of redownloading, reflecting an urge to stay in the loop, and avoid

a fear of missing out (FOMO). In this way Citizen can function like a trap, a technology that enchants and beguiles (Gell, 1999). Considering it through the lens of traps further implies the dissolution of the 'dichotomy between the voluntary and the coerced' (Seaver, 2019, p 424), as agency circulates between the technology of entrapment and the trapped. As Lefebvre argues, 'if you have the ability to take the flows and streams (TV, the press, etc) as *rhythms* among others, you avoid the trap of the *present* that gives itself as presence' (2013, p 32, emphasis in original). Drew experiences Citizen itself rhythmically,[5] through the act of deleting and re-downloading, engaging with the app in an oscillating manner to avoid entropy, offset arrhythmia and mediate the feelings of uncertainty that arise. Such a cycle of delete/re-download reflects the tension between presence (deleting) and the present (re-downloading the simulation).

Often such feelings of uncertainty arise from the illusion of the real time, in a two-fold way. Firstly, this is because the real time is simulated and therefore chimerical, and secondly, because Citizen often fails to provide real-time reporting, as it claims to. As with Tina and Kim, alerts from the same location may arrive at different times to different users. Such hypermodulation fails to create synchrony between users (Pettman, 2015), further fuelling experiences of uncertainty, arrhythmia, and this sense of 'time out of joint' (Derrida, 1994; Fisher, 2012).[6] Additionally, rather than consistently providing information that is relevant to the 'here and now', some incidents remain on the map up to a month after they happened. Often these 'there and then' incidents that remain are highly emotive, such as shootings. Yet there is no way to tell when they took place without clicking onto the incidence on the map, and even then, the information, 'live on the scene 14 days ago', is unobvious and in small print. These past crimes remain spectral to the simulation. Mark Fisher says that hauntings happen, 'when a place is stained by time, or when a particular place becomes the site for an encounter with broken time' (2012, p 19), like the fracturing real time of Citizen.

Lizzie, a queer events coordinator and political strategist, describes the app as 'spooky', going on to describe lingering past events which were weeks or even months old. Her word choice emphasizes this spectrality, being not of this time, and the creation of 'temporal disunity, shining with an eerie glossiness' (Genosko and Thompson, 2006, p 127). When I remark that I had just seen a woman's stabbing stay on the map for weeks, she responds surprisingly offhandedly, 'Yeah, that's not helping me now, okay, a bird s*** in the spot an hour ago. Like, I don't think it's coming back here to s*** again.' Here she shifts quickly from spooked to flippant, trivializing a serious event. I contend that this 'blasé attitude' (Simmel, 2012, p 14) is typical of and heightened in New Yorkers, where indifference becomes a defence mechanism. I now turn to the affordance of real-time notifications, and how they interrupt my interlocutors' everyday rhythmicity.

Notifications and interruption

> I'm confronted with somebody else's humanity. And it's in this bite-sized little notification just on the top of my screen. And I'm just trying to take a photo of a dog or something and then there are three stabbings and my heart is like … [trailing off]. (Sammy, 28-year-old graduate student living in Bed–Stuy)

Push notifications are smartphone pop-up alerts which appear at the top of the screen and are generated by closed apps to indicate something of interest to the user, prompting them to click on the notification and open the app. Push notifications are mundane and prosaic occurrences that simultaneously punctuate and disrupt the flow of the everyday. They are both everyday, and an interruption to the everyday. Notifications are thus inherently temporal and, in the case of Citizen, can jarringly disrupt the day without warning. Wherever you happen to be, be it at work, on the subway, or at home in your bedroom, the app blurs the boundaries between public and private.

The lives of city dwellers are deeply mediated by technology, and specifically by smartphone apps. Digital interruptions from smartphone notifications are part of the undulations of the everyday and are as commonplace as catching up with friends over coffee − if not more so. Yet there is arguably a meaningful difference between a notification of an iMessage from a friend, or an Instagram like, and the highly emotive and confronting nature of Citizen notifications, which can evoke anxiety, uncertainty and, in Sammy's case, a confrontation with humanity. This is not to say that there is such a time as uninterrupted time, or that digital media necessarily creates more disruption, but rather that the content, consistency, and intensity of Citizen notifications, which purport to inform one's sense of safety and security (based on geolocation awareness and physical proximity), function at a different affective register that may produce an interruption with greater impact. For example, Sammy's tone shifts from saccharine cheerfulness (when mentioning a photograph of a dog) to alarm and despondency that results in her sentence ending prematurely, stymied by competing emotions. Sammy, in a later conversation, states, 'I feel a lot depending on notification. But consistently I feel interrupted (I stop what I'm doing to read it).' It is important to ponder on Sammy's use of words, 'I feel interrupted'. Here interruption itself has become an affect, something to be felt and experienced.

Citizen's real-time notifications puncture the everyday, disjointing time and throwing off harmonies. Its present disrupts and consumes presence (Lefebvre, 2013), as, for example, when Sammy's act of photographing a dog (presence) is interrupted by a real-time notification of three stabbings (present). The name 'push notification' is telling, one that *pushes* the present

and consequently an incremental arrhythmia into daily life. In the context of security, Ellcessor places emergency in an extended, intensified, present tense, due to its 'nowness', its 'disruption', as emergency is 'defined by it's *happening*' (2022, p 12, emphasis in original). Anjali Nath describes Metadata+, an app that sends out notifications when a US drone strike is reported, as an interactive practice that reimagines users' concept of temporal and geographic orientation in a 'present-continuous tense' (2016, p 325). Metadata+, like Citizen, is predicated upon 'a future unfolding in real time' (p 326) and, thus, a future unfolding out of time. This is because the real-time 'causes a condensation of the past and future in a strange durationless' (Genosko and Thompson, 2006, p 129), a compressed and isolated present that feels dislodged from everyday rhythms. With these supposedly real-time notifications there is an intrusion of the simulated present, 'a time all of its own' (Bogard, 1996, p 52), into presence, and the rhythms of everyday life, which are informed by experiences of the past and expectations of the future. For users, Citizen can feel out of time, because it does not correspond with past experiences, and future anticipations of one's neighbourhood being safe.

However, these notifications are 'consensual disruptions', (Nath, 2016, p 325) which are curated, most often pushing in from other apps that users have chosen to download.[7] That choice can be extended to turning off notifications on certain apps, a choice made by many of my interlocutors. Indeed, the choice to keep notifications on, would often be met with a wonderous, 'Oh wow, so you have notifications *on*!' Lisa Stevenson has described interruption as, 'a moment of disorientation, of terror, of boredom, of uncertainty' (Hölsgens, 2020). These undulations are representative of experiences of Citizen, in particular those of uncertainty. Such confusion also arises due to the frequency of notifications declaring incidences to be 'unconfirmed', 'unfounded', or 'false'. Often this uncertainty prompted my interlocutors to turn off notifications, refusing these jarring interruptions. Lizzie switched off notifications because she didn't want to hear, 'about robberies every five seconds', hence rejecting the simulation's seemingly constant encroachment into her everyday life, the exaggerated framing, 'every five seconds', evoking this sense of constancy. Meanwhile, Cyrus, a nightlife entertainer in their late twenties, describes turning off notifications because: 'I want to live in the real world, and I don't want to get caught up in this metaverse of crime.' Here Cyrus distinguishes between the actuality of 'living in the real world', and the virtuality of being 'caught up in the metaverse of crime'. Their choice of words is significant. 'Caught up' alludes to the trap-like nature of Citizen articulated earlier, and the 'metaverse of crime' not only references Citizen as a simulation, but speaks to its gamification.

Brayne et al (2023) write about the ways in which surveillance is deputized by the state, via private tech companies, onto the individual citizen. They argue that one of the tactics of such deputization is gamification (see also

Shapiro, Chapter 9, this volume). They cite Fourcade and Johns (2020), who argue that 'platforms employ psycho-social strategies and campaigns to draw people in and form habits by drumming up reciprocity and participation through notifications and rewards' (Brayne et al, 2013, p 473). Citizen employs similar tactics and gamified affordances – press the big red button to record, as text bubbles of 'the community needs you' appear against the dark mode map. This gamification, strangely paired with such moralizing language as 'the community needs you', builds affective attachment to offset the often fallible nature of such vigilant technology (see Sun-ha Hong, Afterword, this volume).

In 2023, the gamification of the 'go live' affordance escalated to include a cash incentive and a chance to 'win $500!' Citizen's promotional videos further entrench this gaming atmosphere, with dramatic clips of searches for missing persons, using language such as, 'watch my back' and 'agents standing by', the background music evocative of video games or Hollywood action movies. This gamification strategy also reinforces the hyperreal nature of Citizen, as games are another example of simulation (Der Derian, 1990; Bogard, 1996) that try to entice users with rewards and 'videoludic' (Vanolo, 2018, p 320) infotainment. However, many simply refuse to play the game, as I will now describe.

'Go live, go *live*, go eat a donut!'

[Simulations] hyperrealize our experiences of time, space, agency, and society itself. Push a button, enter a code, and go anywhere. (Bogard, 1996)

Sammy is a self-described woman of colour and active Citizen user. She describes herself as an 'information seeker', originally downloading the app during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, to monitor narratives about protestors, and the behaviour of the police. Sammy recalls a particularly intense interaction with the app. She was walking from her apartment to go roller-skating in her local park when she heard gunshots. Within minutes she received a notification: 'reports of shots fired 900 Feet away'. 'The community needs you!', the message read, above a cylindrical red button with a camera icon and the words, 'I'm on it', encouraging her to 'go live' and film the unfolding situation with a touch of her screen. She continued around the block, away from the incident and towards the park, when she received a follow-up notification, 'Shots Fired in Bed-Stuy: Police located shell casings on the scene. Use caution in this area. This is an ongoing investigation.' At this point Sammy realized she had left her skates at home and turned back. She debated whether she should still skate, but felt she still needed to 'decompress' so she turned back. At that point she realized that

the incident had been a lot closer to her than the alert showed, as she had been briskly walking away from that location at the time. Fifteen minutes after the shooting follow-up notification, Sammy received another separate notification, 'report of person brandished knife'. When I ask how these numerous notifications made her feel, she responds, 'Girl, I was heavily activated!', before adding, 'but I'm staying safe lol'. She speculates that because there was such an abundance of gun violence recently around her area, it could be gang related. Sammy observes that Citizen is a unique tool to map these kinds of incidents over time, while also acknowledging – 'I just know racist vigilantes[8] foam at the mouth for it.'

As discussed, the hyperreal obscures the distinction between the real and its representations. It is therefore not contradictory to speak of Citizen as a simulation, while also acknowledging the actual reality of *some*[9] of the incidences reported there, which at times do correspond to experiences of one's neighbourhood, as, for instance, in Sammy's case, when she heard the gunshots that were being reported. Rather, it is through the uncertainty and blurring of what is and is not 'real', namely what is either confirmed or unfounded on the app, that the hyperreal emerges. It therefore abounds in paradox. Sammy describes the 'go live' prompt, in particular, as, 'truly unreal. Absolutely not,' is her rejoinder, 'I will not go live, I want to *live*'. Other scholars have similarly questioned how the 'go live' feature can be reconciled with the app's purported mission of user safety (Chordia et al, 2023). Sammy's utterance, 'to live' can also be understood as a desire to remain alive. I am, however, more interested in Sammy's refusal to alter her everyday rhythm and succumb to the encroaching real time of digital monitoring, as she instead went to the park to roller-skate as planned. Sammy's choice of words is pertinent, calling the prompt to 'go live', as 'truly unreal'. It references both the unbelievability, as well as the simulated nature of the real time. By saying that she wants to live, Sammy, like Cyrus, emphasizes the fragmentation Citizen can create, encapsulating the potentially alienating nature of real-time recording, which would place her outside of her ordinary rhythms and into a state of arrhythmia.

Sammy's refusal to 'go live' is further compounded by her nonchalant comment, 'but I'm staying safe lol'. I encountered this kind of irreverence often in the field, exhibited too by Lizzie's flippancy noted earlier. In fact, this was an aspect of the fieldwork from the very beginning. On a Saturday in March 2022, I went thrifting with a group of women in East Williamsburg, bordering Bushwick. We had decided to take a break and get a rose donut from a small Iranian bakery. Upon sitting down to eat, I received a Citizen notification which I dutifully opened. 'Report of Man Armed with Gun', it read, just metres away, our blue location circle adjacent to the glowing yellow square alert. It was broad daylight on a very busy semi-commercial street. Because of its potential gravity, I shared this news with the group.

Some were slightly concerned, but mostly it was donut-absorbed 'oh s***'s that murmured around the table. Looking at the screen over my shoulder, Marysol read out, 'It was reported 21 minutes ago', while another responded, 'It's probably fine now.' Z exclaimed 'why, Citizen!', almost irritated that I had brought it up. We all gazed around at each other once more, a cursory glance with a nonchalance that, for me, felt at odds with the incident. We finished our donuts, walked out of the bakery, and the episode was never mentioned again.

Insistent yet uncertain rhythms of (in)security pulsate in the everyday, threatening to impact time spent with friends, eating donuts and roller-skating. As I have shown, such encroachment is often resisted, by turning off notifications or by refusing the insistence to 'go live'. However, there is in addition a more subtle refusal, an emotional disengagement taking place, in which nonchalance is employed to create a further emotional firewall into Citizen's intrusive simulation of the city. 'The ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion', Kathleen Stewart argues (2007, p 1). This conceptualization of the everyday is apt for city life: excitement and stimulation exist on a knife-edge, alongside indifference and weariness. This 'blasé spirit' is indicative of the attitude of New Yorkers, or even of those who have lived in the city for a few years. In the early twentieth century Georg Simmel described the inhabitants of metropoles as 'indifferent', as exhibiting a 'blasé metropolitan attitude'. He contended that this was due to the visual oversaturation of 'violent stimuli' in the city so much so that 'the metropolitan type … creates a protective organ for itself against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it' (2012, p 12). Such violent visual stimuli of the city are amplified through digital monitoring media like Citizen, where the image is prioritized and sensationalized. A blasé spirit is harnessed to block disruptions to spatiotemporal experiences of one's neighbourhood. It is important to emphasize that, as Simmel contends, the city itself is a place of intensity. Yet I further argue that Citizen brings its incidents of violence into focus, creating a hyperreality of crime as immediate and constant. This is something my interlocutors well recognized, as Kim, earlier, says, 'I know the dangers, I don't have to have it in my face'.

While Simmel was writing more generally about the city, his description is equally apt for my interlocutors and their experiences of New York City (NYC). As Vanessa, a born-and-bred New Yorker who grew up there, observes, 'the stereotype of New York is kind of true and people heard the stereotype of being hardy New Yorkers always seeing s*** and then moving on, and then they move here and perpetuate the stereotype by being like omg crazy s*** but whatever its just NYC'. Indeed, often stories regaling shocking or concerning incidents witnessed by my 'transplant'[10] interlocutors

were often concluded with the utterance, 'you're not a New Yorker until you've seen … [insert shocking or concerning incident]'. Thus, for many of my interlocutors the blasé attitude is two-fold: it is an expression of resistance to the arrhythmic real time presented by Citizen app, and an adopted or perceived spirit of being a New Yorker. There is a pervasive attitude of 'only in New York', a prideful shrug at all the weird and wonderful inhabitants and happenings in the city, in which indifference and a fear of missing out intermingle in complex ways. Moreover, feelings and perceptions of fear and (in)security are culturally informed and socially situated. This may explain why I found the nonchalance misfitting at the bakery, because I mapped my own security imagination (Schwell, 2015, p 104) of London onto Brooklyn. What constitutes a threat, as well as the modality of response, depends on specific localized contexts.

This also exemplifies the tension between how my interlocutors talk about Citizen, and how they use it in practice. All the women in the bakery had previously told me, separately, about how Citizen notifications made them 'anxious', 'uneasy' or 'triggered'. Yet in practice, a notification of a violent incident just feet away was ignored, and seen as an inconvenient interruption, perhaps to mitigate these anxious feelings, or because Citizen represented an image of the neighbourhood that did not correspond to their view of it. While both are equally important when doing ethnography, it demonstrates the difference between discourse and practice: between how technology is spoken about and used, between describing affect and doing in practice. This highlights the importance of analysing Citizen app through the lens of affordances-in-practice. The use of Citizen is mediated by the blasé spirit of its users, who resist the real-time affordances, like incident notifications and the encouragement to 'go live'. 'Affordances are not intrinsic properties that can be defined outside their situated context of usage, but ongoing enactments by specific users that may vary across space and time' (Costa, 2018, p 3653), and as such are 'culturally and socially bound' (p 3651). If one neglects to look at Citizen app through the lens of affordances-in-practice, prioritizing localized practices and cultural specificities of use, such as Drew's cycle of deleting and re-downloading, a fuller, more nuanced picture of Citizen app can be omitted.

Moreover, as with Drew's cyclical use of Citizen, there is a push and pull to simulation. Its luring rhythm is disjointed and uncanny, yet can be simultaneously interesting, pulling Drew back in through the characteristic FOMO of a New Yorker. As described, such undulations are part of Drew's polyrhythmic urban everyday. However, for other interlocutors, Citizen's temporal modes made them feel 'spooky', 'unreal', endowing them with a sense of time out of joint. In short, Citizen use fluctuates among users, quite like the polyrhythmia of the city itself. Some embrace the push-and-pull cycles of delete and re-download, while others choose the pull of roller-skating and eating donuts, over the push of the simulated real time.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored ethnographically the ways in which Citizen app functions as a simulation, due to its gamified affordances of going live and real-time crime mapping, and its rhythmic impact on users. Such temporal regimes, including the interruption of real-time notifications, can conflict with users' past experiences and anticipations of their neighbourhoods, instilling feelings of uncertainty, dissonance, and fracture. Moreover, Citizen can also fail in its claim to provide real-time reporting, as notifications are received at different times, and historic incidents haunt the homepage for weeks or months after the fact. In response, some of my interlocutors switch off notifications, refuse to engage in the real time by going live, and exercise nonchalance, choosing instead to *live* in presence in their neighbourhoods, rejecting Citizen's isolated present. Others chose to engage with Citizen in cycles, in patterns that interact with the larger polyrhythms of the city. Rhythms fragment and undulate in their hands as they open notifications and scroll through their phones, pulling them in different directions: between indifference and intrigue, between going live and living; between the push of a real-time notification, and the pull of the last bite of a donut.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] This chapter is based on long-term ethnographic research conducted both online and in the increasingly gentrified neighbourhoods of Bushwick and Bed-Stuy in Brooklyn, New York City (NYC), between March 2022 and September 2023. I utilized participant observation at community events, undertook autoethnography on the app, and interviewed more than eighty people, both in person and over Zoom. I also conducted two intensive group interviews, one year apart, with my primary interlocutors. My interlocutors comprised both present and past users of the Citizen app, and were often millennial or generation Z artists, performers, activists, and community leaders who had lived in the neighbourhoods for several years. Having lived in NYC from 2017 to 2020, my initial introduction to this population was through friends, before proceeding to utilize a 'snowballing sampling technique' (Low, 2008, p 55) to recruit interlocutors. I worked closely with a community gatekeeper, where I met other interlocutors while volunteering at their multi-purpose community space in Bushwick. I chose to work with this community as it was where I had both access and interest, as people were open to talking to me and recommending others I should speak with. All names have been pseudonymized and specific locations blurred to protect the identity of my interlocutors.

2   Such as the false missile alert sent out in error to Hawaii residents in 2018.

3   In terms of hyperreal media representations, New York City is the site of one of the most infamous: the terror attacks on the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001 (9/11). The images of impact, explosion, and collapse were continuously replayed, watched by my interlocutors, often while many of them were still in elementary school. 9/11 has been described as 'unreal', 'surreal', and 'like a movie' (Sontag, 2019b, p 17). 9/11 was unthinkable and yet terror attacks and apocalyptic accidents had been the object of the US's imagination, projected large and looming onto the screen, in the form of Hollywood movies. As Žižek argues, 'this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality' (2012, p 19). A nation watched their screens transfixed, as the desert of the real appeared as dust cleared from ground zero (Žižek, 2012). The Citizen app is mediated by the cultural context in which it exists. Legitimized by 9/11, the US moved into a state of hyper-securitization, normalizing the mass surveillance of civilians and creating a cultural landscape in which an app like Citizen could thrive.

4   Other interlocutors had similar experiences of a delete/re-download loop. Often Citizen would be deleted due to 'anxiety' or 'for the sake of my mental health' and re-downloaded on a need-to-know basis, to confirm a local incidence seen on social media or in their neighbourhood.

5   Some of my interlocutors used Citizen in confluence with their (eu)rhythmic experiences of the city, for example, utilizing the app to navigate protests. As with most technology, the use of Citizen is nuanced and fluctuates across the intersecting positionalities of users.

6   This utterance originally traces back to Shakespeare's Hamlet; however, it is also the title of Phillip K. Dick's book *Time Out of Joint* (Dick, 2003), set in a Californian city in the 1950s, in which the protagonist gradually discovers the whole town is engaged in a staged fake to keep him fulfilled, thus alluding to the temporal nature of simulations.

7   However, in practice often Citizen notifications are screenshot and shared in group chats, and sometimes members of those groups have chosen to turn off notifications or delete Citizen altogether. Thus, Citizen can continue to interrupt one's day even when one does not have the app.

8   This is a pertinent comment considering Citizen's original moniker and the potential dangers of racial profiling and discrimination that arise with the 'go live' affordance. Citizen, in its suggestion to 'go live', asks users to make time-sensitive moral judgements on situations, bringing into question who does and does not look suspicious, a decision that could be animated by the threat of a racialized other. Further analysis is outside the scope of this chapter.

9   'Some' being the operative word here, due to numerous unfounded notifications which further fuel uncertainty.

10   A term used for describing people who recently who moved to the city.

References

Akinnibi, F. and Wahid, R. (2022) 'Fear of Rampant Crime is Derailing New York City's Recovery', *Bloomberg*, 29 July. Available from: https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2022-is-nyc-safe-crime-stat-reality/ (Accessed: 25 February 2024).

Baudrillard, J. (1994) *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by S. Glaser. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Baudrillard, J. (2010) *America*. Translated by G. Dyer. London: Verso.

Bertoni, S. (2020) 'How Safety Startup Citizen Surpassed Twitter to Become Apple's Top News All Amid the George Floyd Protests', *Forbes*, 6 June. Available from: https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevenbertoni/2020/06/06/how-safety-startup-citizen-surpassed-twitter-to-become-apples-top-news-app-amid-the-george-floyd-protests/?sh=205ffe1559f1 (Accessed: 23 February 2024).

Bogard, W. (1996) *The Simulation of Surveillance: Hypercontrol in Telematic Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bolter, J. and Grusin, J. (2000) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

boyd, D. (2012) 'Participating in the Always-On Lifestyle', in M. Mandiberg (ed) *The Social Media Reader*, New York: New York University Press, pp 71–6.

Brayne, S., Lageson, S., and Levy, K. (2023) 'Surveillance Deputies: When Ordinary People Surveil for the State', *Law & Society Review*, 57(4): 462–88.

Chordia, I., Erete, S., Hiniker, A., Parrish, E., Tayebi, T., Tran, L.-P., and Yip, J. (2023) 'Deceptive Design Patterns in Safety Technologies: A Case Study of the Citizen app', *CHI'23,* 23–28 April 2023, Hamburg, Germany [conference paper].

Citizen (2024) *Citizen*. Available from: https://citizen.com/ (Accessed: 23 February 2024).

Cole, S. (2010) 'Baudrillard's Ontology: Empirical Research and the Denial of the Real', *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, 7(2).

Costa, E. (2018) 'Affordances-in-Practice: An Ethnographic Critique of Social Media Logic and Context Collapse', *New Media & Society*, 20(10): 3641–56.

Der Derian, J. (1990) 'The (S)pace of International Relations: Simulation, Surveillance, and Speed', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34(3): 295–310.

Derrida, J. (1994) *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, Oxford: Routledge.

Dick, K.P. (2003) *Time Out of Joint*, London: SF Gateway.

Didion, J. (2008) *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays (FSG Classics)*, London: Macmillan Publishers.

Eco, U. (1990 [1975]) *Travels in Hyperreality*, W. Weaver (trans.), New York: HarperVia.

Ellcessor, E. (2022) *In Case of Emergency: How Technologies Mediate Crisis and Normalize Inequality*, New York: New York University Press.

Fetterman, A.K., Baker, C.D., and Meier, B.P. (2023) 'Crime in Your Area: Use of Neighborhood Apps is Associated with Inaccurate Perceptions of Higher Local Crime Rates', *Psychology of Popular Media*, 13(2): 269–73.

Fisher, M. (2012) 'What is Hauntology?', *Film Quarterly*, 66(1): 16–24.

Fourcade, M. and Johns, F. (2020) 'Loops, Ladders and Links: The Recursivity of Social and Machine Learning', *Theory and Society*, 49(5–6): 803–32.

Gell, A. (1999) *The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams*. Edited by E. Hirsch, London: Routledge.

Genosko, G. and Thompson, S. (2006) 'Tense Theory: The Temporalities of Surveillance', *Theorizing Surveillance: The Panopticon and Beyond*, Edited by D. Lyon. London: Willan Publishing, pp 123–39.

Herrman, J. (2019) 'All the Crime, All the Time: How Citizen Works', *The New York Times*, 17 March. Available from: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/17/style/citizen-neighborhood-crime-app.html (Accessed: 23 February 2024).

Hölsgens, S. (2020) 'What Is an Interruption? An Interview with Lisa Stevenson', *Supplementals: Fieldsights*, 3 November. Available from: https://culanth.org/fieldsights/what-is-an-interruption-an-interview-with-lisa-stevenson (Accessed: 23 February 2024).

Jameson, F. (1991) *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Kitchin, R. (2023) *Digital Timescapes: Technology, Temporality and Society*, NJ: Wiley.

Lefebvre, H. (2013) *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*. Translated by S. Elden and G. Moore, London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Low, S. (2008). 'Fortification of Residential Neighbourhoods and the New Emotions of Home', *Housing, Theory and Society*, 25(1), 47–65.

Madianou, M. (2016) 'Ambient Co-Presence: Transnational Family Practices in Polymedia Environments', *Global Networks*, 16(2): 183–201.

Nath, A. (2016) 'Touched from Below: On Drones, Screens and Navigation', *Visual Anthropology,* 29(3): 315–30.

Pettman, D. (2015) *Infinite Distraction: Paying Attention to Social Media*, New York: Polity Press.

Powel, A., Stratton, G., and Cameron, R. (2018) *Digital Criminology: Crime and Justice in Digital Society*, New York: Routledge.

Riddell, A. (2023) 'Intersecting Positionalities and the Unexpected Uses of Digital Crime and Safety Tracking in Brooklyn', *Social Inclusion*, 11(3): 30–40.

Schwell, A. (2015) 'The Security-Fear Nexus: Some Theoretical and Methodological Explorations into a Missing Link', *Etnofoor*, 27(2): 95–112.

Seaver, N. (2019) 'Captivating Algorithms: Recommender Systems as Traps', *Journal of Material Culture*, 24(4): 421–36.

Simmel, G. (2012) 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950) [1903], Edited by K. Wolff, London: Routledge.

Sontag, S. (2019a) *On Photography*, UK: Penguin Random House UK.

Sontag, S. (2019b) *Regarding the Pain of Others*, UK: Penguin Random House UK.

Stewart, K. (2007) *Ordinary Affects*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Stine, K., and Volmar, A. (eds) (2021) *Infrastructures of Time: An Introduction to Hardwired Temporalities*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp 9–38.

Vanolo, A. (2018) 'Cities and the Politics of Gamification', *Cities*, 74: 320–26.

Žižek, S. (2012) *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London: Verso.