

Scroll, Swipe, Resist: Storytelling and Remix from Gaza's Digital Frontlines

S.P. Lejoe Pracilla¹   V. Sharon Shinolini²  

Abstract

Social media, once the domain of entertainingly curated reels, dance challenges, and ephemeral celebrity gossip, has undergone a radical transformation into a platform for real-time, high-stakes conflict narration. This paper investigates the paradigm shift from “entertainment” to “infotainment” and “citizen journalism” within the context of the Gaza conflict. It argues that the digital frontline has given rise to a new form of anti-war activism that diverges sharply from traditional literary canons. By employing Lawrence Lessig’s concept of “Remix Culture” and Lev Manovich’s five principles of new media: Numerical Representation, Modularity, Automation, Variability, and Transcoding, this research analyses how digital narratives are constructed, disseminated, and consumed. Through a close reading of digital artifacts, including the viral recitation of Refaat Alareer’s poetry by actor Brian Cox and the visual poetry of Instagram accounts like @gazapoets, this paper demonstrates how algorithmic frameworks and collaborative authorship are reshaping the documentation of war. The study posits that these “living archives” do not merely record history but actively produce it through a complex interplay of human agency and machine automation, creating a “Read/Write” culture of resistance that defies the static linearity of traditional war narratives.

Submitted: 12.12.2025

Accepted: 03.02.2026

Published 28.02.2026

¹S.P. Lejoe Pracilla, M.A., M.Phil., NET, Assistant Professor, Department of English (SF) Lady Doak College (Autonomous), Madurai – 625 002, Tamil Nadu, India.

² V. Sharon Shinolini, M.A., MS (France), NET, Assistant Professor, Department of English (SF) Lady Doak College (Autonomous), Madurai – 625 002, Tamil Nadu, India.

©2026 S.P. Lejoe Pracilla & V. Sharon Shinolini. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction, provided the original author and source are credited.

Keywords: digital narratology, remix culture, gaza conflict, lev manovich, algorithmic activism, citizen journalism, transcoding.

Introduction

The history of war is inextricably linked to the history of its mediation. From the Homeric epics to the trench poets of World War I, literature has served as the primary vessel for processing the trauma of conflict. W.B. Yeats, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen utilized the lyric form to divulge human suffering and assert moral agency against the machinery of war. However, the twenty-first century has witnessed a seismic shift in this narratological landscape. The locus of anti-war activism has migrated from the printed page to the vertical screen, from the static stanza to the kinetic scroll. In the context of the ongoing Gaza conflict, this shift is not merely technological but ontological. The mobile phone has transformed the civilian from a passive victim into an active producer of history, a “citizen journalist” capable of broadcasting raw, unedited trauma to a global audience instantly. This phenomenon has birthed a unique digital aesthetic where the boundaries between observer and participant, author and reader, are irrevocably blurred.

This article explores this new terrain through the lens of ‘Remix Culture’, a term coined by Lawrence Lessig to describe a society that encourages the derivative combination of existing materials to create new creative works. In the digital ecosystem of 2024-2025, the ‘remix’ has become a potent tool of resistance. Poems inked in blood are not just read; they are overlaid with audio, spliced with video footage, and algorithmically amplified. To understand the mechanics of this resistance, we turn to Lev Manovich’s seminal text, *The Language of New Media*. By applying Manovich’s five principles, this paper attempts to deconstruct the algorithmic architecture of Gaza’s digital narratives, revealing how they function not just as stories, but as programmable data points that challenge the hegemonic silence of traditional media.

Theoretical Framework: From Read-Only to Read/Write

Lawrence Lessig distinguishes between ‘Read-Only’ (RO) culture, where a passive audience consumes content created by professional sources, and ‘Read/Write’ (RW) culture, where the audience actively participates in the creation and recreation of culture. Traditional war reporting dominated by state-sanctioned news outlets operates within an RO framework. The audience receives the narrative as a fixed, immutable product. Conversely, the digital activism emerging from Gaza represents the apex of RW culture. A video filmed by a teenager in Khan Younis is not a static object; it is raw material. It is downloaded, re-captioned, set to music, stitched with reaction videos, and

shared across platforms. This endless cycle of recontextualization is what Lessig calls the ‘Remix’.

“Unlike text, where the quotes follow in a single line... remixed media may quote sounds over images, or video over text, or text over sounds. The quotes thus get mixed together. The mix produces the new creative work the ‘remix.’” (Lessig 69). In this environment, authorship becomes fluid. The original creator the person holding the phone is joined by a legion of co-authors who edit, filter, and redistribute the content. This collaborative authorship creates a “multimodal” narrative that is far more difficult to suppress than a single newspaper article.

Algorithmic Narratology: Applying Manovich’s Five Principles

To understand *how* these narratives function effectively, we must move beyond content analysis and examine the structural properties of the media itself. Lev Manovich identifies five principles that distinguish new media from old: Numerical Representation, Modularity, Automation, Variability, and Transcoding.

1. Numerical Representation: The Programmability of Trauma

Manovich’s first principle states that all new media objects are composed of digital code. They are “subject to algorithmic manipulation” (Manovich 27). A photograph of a ruined building in Gaza is not just an image; it is a dataset of pixels, quantifiable and manipulable. (see *Fig. 1*)

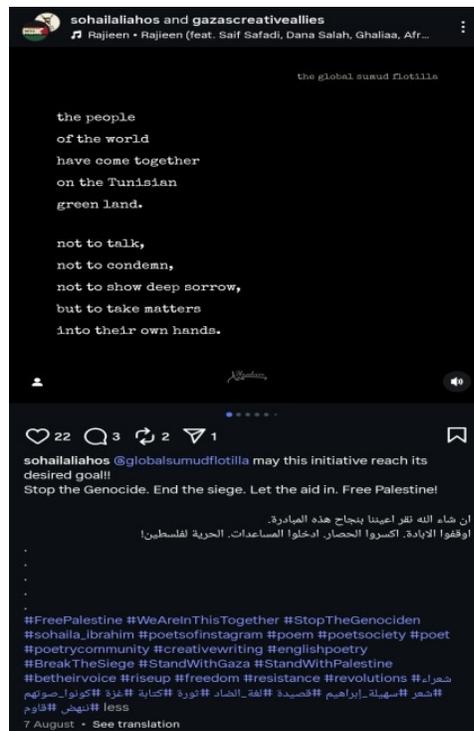


Fig. 1. Screenshot of the Instagram post by @gazascreativeallies, 8 Aug, 2025.

“For instance, by applying appropriate algorithms, we can automatically remove ‘noise’ from a photograph, improve its contrast, locate the edges of the shapes, or change its proportions. In short, media becomes programmable.” (Manovich 27). In the context of digital activism, this principle explains the aesthetic uniformity often seen in protest posts. Activists use “filters” and editing software to enhance the visibility of details in low-light rubble footage or to overlay text in high-contrast fonts that are machine-readable by accessibility software. The “programmability” of the media allows for the rapid generation of content that fits specific aesthetic criteria favored by social media algorithms. An image of war is no longer a fixed historical document; it is a fluid set of data points that can be brightened, sharpened, and reformatted to ensure maximum emotional impact on a five-inch screen.

2. Modularity: The Fractal Structure of Resistance

Modularity refers to the “fractal structure of new media” (Manovich 30). Just as a fractal has the same structure on different scales, a new media object is composed of independent elements (images, sounds, text) that can be assembled into larger objects without losing their separate identities. This principle extends beyond the visual to the auditory landscape of the conflict. In the digital remix, sound becomes a distinct, mobile agent of narrative. The terrifying hum of surveillance drones, the sharp intake of breath before a scream, or the specific cadence of a prayer are often extracted from their original footage and overlaid onto new visual contexts.

This ‘sonic modularity’ creates a haunting, collective soundscape that transcends linguistic barriers. When a trending audio clip of a blast is reused across thousands of TikTok posts, it ceases to be a singular recording of a specific event and transforms into a universal auditory symbol of the war, triggering a visceral, synchronized emotional response in a global audience.

Case Study:

“The Visual Poetry of Falling Bombs” consider the intersection of concrete poetry and digital modularity. E.E. Cummings’ poem “Buffalo Bill’s” (1920) famously used the layout of the text to mimic the content, creating a visual shape on the page. However, this modularity was static- frozen in print (see Fig. 2).

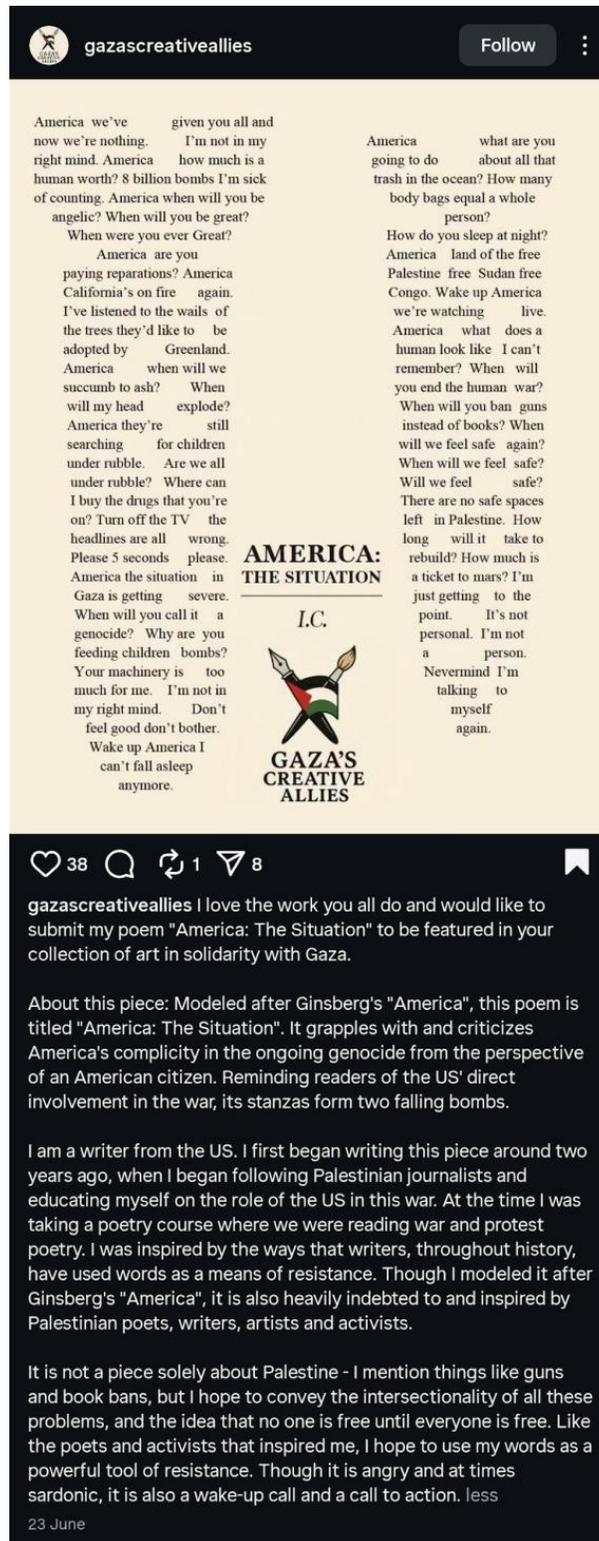


Fig. 2. Screenshot of the Instagram post by @gazascreativeallies, 10 Aug, 2025.

Contrast this with the digital post from @gazascreativeallies on August 10, 2025 (see Fig. 3). The poem *America: The Situation* utilizes a vertical structure where the stanzas physically mimic the trajectory of falling bombs. But unlike Cummings' print poem, this digital text is overlaid on a moving video or a high-resolution image of the actual conflict zone. The text (one module) and the background image (another module) are combined to create a third meaning, yet they remain separate layers in the software. This modularity allows activists to swap out the background image while keeping the poem, or translate the poem while keeping the background, facilitating rapid localization of the narrative for different linguistic audiences.

3. Automation: The Invisible Co-Author

Manovich's third principle, automation, highlights the removal of human intentionality from parts of the creative process. "The numerical coding of media... allows for the automation of many operations involved in media creation, manipulation, and access" (Manovich, 32).

In the context of the Gaza digital frontlines, automation plays a dual role:

1. **Creation:** Apps like TikTok and Instagram offer automated editing tools—auto-syncing video clips to trending audio, auto-generating captions, and auto-correcting lighting. This lowers the barrier to entry, allowing untrained civilians to produce professional-grade war reportage.
2. **Dissemination:** The 'Feed' is an automated curator. The algorithm decides which stories are told and which are buried. This is where the concept of "Algorithmic Resistance" emerges. Activists must learn to "game" the automation - using specific keywords, trending audio, or visual styles to bypass "shadowbanning" (the automated suppression of political content). The narrative is thus co-authored by the human activist and the platform's code.

4. Variability: The Infinite Versioning of the Story

Classical narratology relies on the "fixity" of the text. There is one definitive version of *The Iliad* or *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Digital narratology, however, is defined by Variability: "A new media object is not something fixed once and for all, but something that can exist in different, potentially infinite versions" (Manovich, 36).

Case Study:

The Resurrection of Refaat Alareer The most poignant example of variability is the afterlife of the poem *If I Must Die* by the Palestinian poet and martyr, Refaat Alareer.

- **Version 1 (Text):** The original poem posted on X (formerly Twitter).
- **Version 2 (Remix):** The actor Brian Cox recites the poem in a video. This adds a layer of vocal authority and Western celebrity endorsement.

- **Version 3 (Visual Remix):** Instagram users take the audio of Cox’s reading and overlay it with montages of kites flying over Gaza (referencing the poem’s imagery).
- **Version 4 (Musical Remix):** Musicians add melancholic scores underneath the recitation.

Each version is a “variable” of the original object. The story of Alareer’s death and his final message is not a single narrative but a cloud of variations, adapting to fit different platforms (YouTube, TikTok, Instagram) and different audiences. This variability ensures that the narrative cannot be easily killed; if one version is censored, ten new variations emerge.

5. Transcoding: The Blend of Culture and Computer

The final and most profound principle is Transcoding. Manovich argues that new media consists of two layers: the ‘cultural layer’ (the story, the meaning, the human element) and the ‘computer layer’ (the file format, the code, the packet size). Transcoding describes the influence of the computer layer on the cultural layer. “Similarly, new media in general can be thought of as consisting of two distinct layers-the ‘cultural layer’ and the ‘computer layer’” (Manovich, 46).

This transcoding process imposes a ‘database logic’ onto the narrative of war. Manovich argues that the database and the narrative are natural enemies; the former is a list of items, the latter a cause-and-effect trajectory. In the context of Gaza, the “Feed” acts as an endless, non-linear database of tragedy without a clear beginning or resolution. Unlike a novel that moves towards a conclusion, the digital database traps the viewer in a loop of perpetual crisis. This algorithmic structure fundamentally alters the viewer’s temporal experience, ensuring that the trauma remains immediate and refusing to be relegated to the past tense of history. The act of scrolling, therefore, becomes a modern vigil- a refusal to look away from the expanding database of human suffering.

Analysis: The Ethics of the Digital Archive

The rise of accounts like @gazapoets, @wawog_now, and @gaza.guy represents a shift toward “living archives.” Unlike traditional archives, which are retrospective and static, these accounts are synchronous. They document history *as it happens*. However, this brings ethical complexities. The “scroll” mechanism, designed for dopamine loops, juxtaposes images of horrific violence with advertisements for skincare or comedy skits. The user “swipes” past a bombed neighbour- hood to see a cat video. This friction what could be called “The Discordance of the Feed” is a unique feature of digital war narration, despite this commodification, the “Remix” offers a form of resistance against erasure. When the physical infrastructure of Gaza libraries, universities, archives is destroyed, the digital cloud becomes the only repository of culture.

The “numerical representation” of the poem ensures it survives even if the paper it was written on burns. The “modularity” allows it to be scattered across thousands of servers, making total erasure impossible.

Conclusion

The digital narratives emerging from the Gaza conflict represent a critical evolution in the history of anti-war activism. By moving from the static page to the fluid, programmable screen, these stories engage the viewer in a Read/Write relationship with history. Lev Manovich’s principles reveal that this is not chaos; it is a structured, algorithmic form of storytelling. The Numerical Representation of images allows them to be enhanced and circulated; Modularity allows for the remixing of text and video; Automation democratizes the production tools while imposing algorithmic gates; Variability ensures the survival of the narrative through infinite versioning; and Transcoding fundamentally shapes how we perceive human suffering through the logic of the computer interface. As we scroll and swipe, we are not merely consuming information; we are participating in the “Remix” of global memory. The digital frontline forces us to acknowledge that in the twenty-first century, the act of witnessing is an act of co-authorship. The story of Gaza is no longer just one man’s history; through the algorithmic amplification of the digital crowd, it unfolds as a global, indestructible history.

Limitations and Future Research

This research is limited by its reliance on the assumption of the affective impact of digital storytelling. While we can analyse the structure of the narratives, we cannot fully measure the psychological depth of the audience’s engagement whether the “swipe” represents true empathy or fleeting voyeurism. Future research must empirically investigate the “active viewing habits” of the digital generation. How does fragmented exposure to trauma affect long-term political mobilization? Furthermore, a study on how cross-platform remix algorithms shape the collective memory of conflict comparing the “archive” of TikTok vs. X would provide deeper insights into the future of digital historiography.

Works Cited

- Alareer, Refaat. "If I Must Die." *Light in Gaza: Writings Born of Fire*, Haymarket Books, 2022.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. University of Toronto Press, 2017.
- Cummings, E.E. "Buffalo Bill's." *The Dial*, January 1920.
- Gaza’s Creative Allies. "America: The Situation." Instagram Post,

@gazascreativeallies, 10 Aug. 2025.

Genette, Gérard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Cornell University Press, 1980.

Lessig, Lawrence. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2008.

Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media*. MIT Press, 2001.

“Matin on Instagram: ‘If I Must Die... Last Poem by the Recently Slain Poet #refaatalareer Recited by #briancox.’” Instagram,

www.instagram.com/reel/C0xpTfwt888/?igsh=cmNybThoMW1uMzB4.

Accessed 7 Aug. 2025.