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VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY REVIEW

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The manners of digital distraction: Competing modes of attention and visual citizenship in Bangkok

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Abstract

This paper is a photographic essay focusing on how people navigate the demands of visual citizenship in both virtual and physical spaces. It posits that theories of digital attention often overlook the bodily and specific material worlds where digital attention and distraction occur. Using photos and ethnographic data from public gatherings in Bangkok, Thailand, following the death of King Bhumibol, the paper examines how moral citizenship practices in virtual communities both intersect with and diverge from public manners of the body. The paper argues that while virtual citizenship practices may sometimes take precedence over in-person social practice, enduring manners and modes of attention in public urban spaces nonetheless shape and inform online citizenship behaviors. The paper argues scholars of visual nationalism and digital attention should focus more on physical modes of attention, including rituals and manners expressed through the body.

KEYWORDS
attention economy, bodily manners, photography, situated digital practice, Thailand

INTRODUCTION

This paper asks a question that emerges from the intersection of traditional anthropological scholarship and social science studies of digital attention: how do bodily manners influence the use of digital devices? To answer this questions, this visual anthropology essay incorporates photography and ethnography from a public event in Bangkok, Thailand. I argue that these photographic and ethnographic examples illustrate how enduring political and moral practices of bodily manners condition how people use digital devices, even when online publics are given priority over physical publics.

The use of digital devices is made possible by the physical and mental practices of paying attention. Digital attention and distraction is a topic of widespread academic and popular concern. What anthropologist Joanna Cook (2018) describes as a “crisis of attention” in the UK extends to international contexts. The World Health Organization (WHO) for example, recognizes gaming addiction as a disease (WHO, 2020). Meanwhile, scholars contributing to the “attention economy” literature have demonstrated that digital products

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and environments rewire human modes of focus and concentration, particularly regarding cognitive overload, distraction, and addiction (Carr, 2010; Hindman, 2018; Paasonen, 2021). Digital and STS scholars across the social sciences and humanities critique the monetization of attention as well as software and hardware designed to entice and track digital communication (e.g., Faraj & Azad, 2012; Özkan, 2021; Willems, 2019). This STS literature includes a valuable consideration of materiality and social practice, where scholars examine the intersections of technologies and public space and consider the way attention and shared referential systems interact with material worlds (e.g., Sefat, 2023). Digital anthropologists also highlight the sensorial and haptic qualities of digital life, attending to the everyday ways in which the materiality of digital devices shape cyborg lives and "digital-material" experience (e.g., Broch & Varma, 2024; Lupton, 2017; Pink, 2014).

This attention to psychological addiction on the one hand, and material and sensory experiences of digital life on the other, largely overlooks the role of the body as a moral and mannered instrument. Anthropologists Pedersen et al. (2021, p. 318) argue that drawing on traditional anthropological studies of the "attentional techniques" of ritual and religion help to address the wide cultural diversity through which attention is practiced. Building on this intervention, this paper focuses on how digital citizenship practices are shaped by the attentional techniques of mannered, material bodies, specifically the techniques of moral practice. I argue that expanding the consideration of bodily materiality to encompass manners and morality paves the way for a deeper appreciation of the diversity of social and political dynamics influencing digital attention. Going forward in this paper I define digital attention as a specifically material and moral practice in which the body's capacities are directed toward digital devices and digital worlds (Figure 1).

This paper is grounded in public events from October 2016. In particular, it considers the first days of public mourning for King Bhumibol. At this time, as shown in the photos, crowds flocked to the Grand Palace in Bangkok to pay their respects. In analyzing these public events, I explore the competing and related obligations of in-person public manners and online citizenship. While the social practices explored here are part of the "post-digital" world in which digital practices are deeply woven into the waft of everyday life, in order to better see the influence of ritual and longstanding manners in the digital space, I purposely distinguish between online citizenship practices, and offline manners of the body. Offline public manners in Bangkok cover a variety of minutiae in practice, from bodily posture to tone of voice. Meanwhile, related acts widely understood as forms of online citizenship, include photographing, editing, posting up-to-date content, and distributing visual news media.

In analyzing public mourning moments in Bangkok, I argue that both ritual and informal moments are deeply shaped by longstanding politics of bodily hierarchy and manners. Ultimately, in public moments, care and attention directed toward virtual moral citizenship took precedence over moral citizenship practices in public urban spaces. That prioritization of virtual publics and citizenship was, however, elevated through practices in concert and communion with longstanding ritualized bodily manners. The following section explores moral, mannered practices of using the body to display and respect images of the monarch in Thailand and related practices of digital citizenship.

BODIES AS THE FRAME

The photos in this essay show the careful positioning of bodies in relation to images and the technologies used to create them. These public bodily manners emerge from a history in which visual imaging is deeply linked to political hierarchy. Historian Maurizio Peleggi (2002) documents how, from the mid-19th century, the Thai palace adopted colonial imaging technologies, including photography and film to strategically assert spiritual and courtly authority within Thailand and *siwilai* (civilized) status to foreign powers. Twentieth century technological developments in image making and circulation, such as television,

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FIGURE 1 Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Sanam Luang, Bangkok, Thailand, 14 October 2016, photo by Bronwyn Isaacs.

digital photography, and social media, were later used to circulate royal imagery more widely through forms such as postcards, calendars, news bulletins and documentaries (Pattana, 2005). Successive Thai government leaders and administrators were motivated to participate in this circulation, and moreover, legislate against disrespectful uses of the King's image, in part owing to the expediency of the King as fictive "father" of the nation as a tool of political stabilization (Siani, 2020). After the 1997 Asian economic crisis, the King's image became more deeply linked to economic development and developed associations as a magic talisman with the aura of wealth (Jackson, 2009, p. 364).

The moral and spiritual power of the King's portrait to order social and political relations extended to the decoration of urban space especially in Bangkok. For decades, the King's portrait, full figure or face and shoulders, was placed across a wide variety of built urban architecture in Thailand, such as bridges, schools, banks, hospitals, shops, and private homes. The portraits were used as part of national performances of Thailand's theater state including music, dance and religious ritual (Adler & Wong, 2019). The King's portrait also hung in classrooms and train stations and was displayed at the start of movies in commercial cinemas. In most contexts these portraits were hung or displayed above head height. This practice of showing physical distinction not only to the king but also to his portrait illustrates how bodily manners facilitated spiritual and political hierarchies expressed through visual technologies.

Morally correct use of the body in relation to the King's portrait was on full display following the death of King Bhumibol in October 2016. In Bangkok, there was an intense schedule of public commemoration events. The historically symbolic center of the city, encompassing the Grand Palace and Sanam Luang (a park opposite the palace), became the primary site for

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public gatherings. Sanam Luang has a layered political history in Thailand that, as architecture scholar Koompong Noobanjong (2012) explains, oscillates between moments of democratic renewal and increased authoritarianism. Both a tourist site and a symbolic site of layered national history, Sanam Luang is known as a place of public photography. The events discussed in this essay took place in the days immediately following the King's death, when visitors were able to move more freely around the palace and surrounding roads, devoid of checkpoints and ID checkpoints that were installed in subsequent weeks (Figure 2).

Repeatedly across the photos in this essay, human bodies are used to display images of the monarchy. In one image, a group of women is sitting on the ground holding poster-sized photographs of the King. When I visited the palace in the days following King Bhumibol's death, many women and a few men positioned themselves along the sides of the road in this way, often seated near the front of the crowd. Here, the practice of using the body as a frame for a portrait is a public performance of citizenship and loyalty. The women holding King Bhumibol's portrait perform a practice that expresses goodwill toward his karmic being, as well as a sense of personal connection to the deceased monarch as *por* (father of the nation) and even as a *sammuti deva* (deity by social convention) or a *phra phothisat* (future Buddha) (Jackson, 2009; Siani, 2018). In this photo, the women smile directly at the camera. In holding photographs, the women offer their bodies as sentient, loyal instruments of photographic display.

The Thai political history of courtly and religious manners informs the use of citizens' bodies in relation to photos of the king and royal family. The women using their bodies as living frames create an apparent and perhaps visually appealing incongruity between the formal photographs and their informal position of being seated on the pavement. The decision to sit on the pavement reflects not only the palace's official practices of prostration before the king but also longstanding practices and pedagogies regarding the body in public spaces in Thailand and other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. When anticipating the arrival of persons who are supposed to have spiritual superiority (such as monks or members of the royal family), correct bodily manners as taught in many Thai schools and *wats* (temples) instruct that the bodies of the spiritually or socially “lesser” persons' bodies be placed in a lower and

FIGURE 2 Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Sanam Luang, Bangkok, Thailand, 15 October 2016, photo by Bronwyn Isaacs.

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more humble position. This requires adjusting the relative positioning of the height of the body, such as bending over or sitting so as to position one's head as noticeably lower than that of "superiors" such as those who are senior in age or professional title.

During Bhumibol's reign, the Thai palace, in conjunction with the national government and the Bangkok city administration, organized many large public commemorations for the King, such as those celebrating the anniversaries of his accession to the throne. At such events, the King and Queen gave public audiences to thousands from high above the crowd on the balcony of the Anantha Samakhom Throne Hall (Noobanjong, 2012). When everyday citizens had the privilege of meeting the King in his palace, the official mode of address was to prostrate the body and approach him by crawling on the ground (Jory, 2021, p. 71). Attention to the king's physical and spiritual elevation over his subjects was reinforced in the official royal language. One of the most well-known forms of pronouns that speakers should use when speaking to the King is *dtai faa pra baat* (the dust under the king's feet), reinforcing a moral and ontological distinction through a metaphor that ties physical prostration to political and moral humility.

The relationship between the public body, monarchy and images in Bangkok is thus expressed in public language and bodily practice as a matter of spiritual and political practices of manners, citizenship and morality. In his history of Thai manners, Patrick Jory (2021:4) notes,

> conservative, in fact, courtly conception of proper conduct has largely defined Thai manners since the 1960s. Expected forms of deportment are an example of this with regard to: how one positions one's body height and maintains an appropriate distance in relation to one's interlocutor, the slowness and evenness of one's movements, the placement of the hands, the pleasantness of the facial expression, the gaze of the eyes, the softness of one's speech ….

The principle of neat, elegant, and appropriately humble use of the body while "courtly" in pedagogy thus expands beyond the treatment of the monarchy and monks to many public manners of the body, particularly in formal and institutional spaces. Correct gestures, facial expressions, speed of movement, and height are all part of orienting the self to others. The careful *wai*, the well-known Thai greeting of palms pressed together in greeting, respect, thanks, or parting, for example, is a loaded moral action, the absence or inaccurate use of which can cause offense or parody (Herzfeld, 2009).

The women holding photographs of King Bhumibol demonstrate a bodily position that upholds the strict political, social, and spiritual hierarchy. The photos they hold are protected behind plastic shields so that the image is not tarnished by any outdoor elements. Even this intimate materiality of holding physical photographs has a co-present virtual audience, however. The images of the women holding portraits were circulated online to Thai citizens through a foreign media gaze (see, e.g., BBC, 2016). The link between their bodies and digital practices is also clear in the shared patterning between body frames, both physically and virtually. This circulation operated as "picture theory," revealing the centrality of visual technologies "in theories of the self and its knowledges" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 49). Through digital circulation, photographs of the King and photographs of mourners holding those photographs became a widely recognized set of images and image practices through which the Thai national identity was re-circulated.

The way the women hold the photos resonates moreover, visually and politically, with the practices of citizens posting images of the deceased King on their individual social media accounts. On social media accounts citizens used not their bodies but their respective profile pages to display images of the King to their extended followers. These posts and their associations of political hierarchy were also amplified and sometimes modeled on artistic representations of the King's life displayed on site at luxury malls and spread on social media by large banks, malls and agrifood corporations (Isaacs, 2025; Siani, 2020b). In both physical

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locations and social media circulation, individuals practiced a polite form of bodily and digital display that signaled their citizenship within the national political community.

THE AMBIVALENCE AND SURVEILLANCE OF MANNERS

Focused attention is a key practice in learned respectful behavior toward the King's portrait, in part because they are practices open to judgment and surveillance (Figure 3).

In one photo a young woman stands outside the palace wall, examining photographs sold by a walking vendor whose sole items for sale are poster-sized photographs of King Bhumibol. In this space, the movement of vendors selling photos of the King continues the presence of royal portraiture in everyday commercial spaces such as markets, roadside stalls, and taxi cabs. In these informal commercial spaces, images of the monarchy coexist with everyday economic activities, including lower-status tasks such as hawking and transportation. Within this class of work, hawking without an accompanying cart or stall, as practiced by the woman in this photo, is considered the lowest-status form of street selling (Isaacs, 2014). On the day this photo was taken, the vendor in the photo, wearing a denim shirt and thin blouse, was dressed more informally than many of the mourners in their crisp new black clothes, and walked slowly up and down the street opposite the palace where mourners were congregating. Other vendors walking the area sold foil mats so that people could purchase to sit on the grass, handheld fans featuring illustrations of the King's face, and snacks such as ice-cream.

When royal dignities passed by in car convoys at the mourning site, all the people present followed police instructions to sit, but the rest of the time the atmosphere was festive, busy, and informal. Attending mourners smiled and chatted with strangers and made picnics with friends on the grass. At the mourning site, careful and attentive care of the king's portrait was on display. However, practices such as selling the King's portrait while walking on the street or waving the King's portrait on a fan– are also informal activities, reminiscent of popular Thai festivals. As anthropologist Malavika Reddy (2025) describes, Thai festival events create “fun” and playful atmospheres where merriment and merit-making seamlessly intertwine.

FIGURE 3 Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Sanam Luang, Bangkok, Thailand, 15 October 2016, photo by Bronwyn Isaacs.

These more informal practices point to the diversity of political orientations and class-based practices toward the monarchy and Buddhism in Thailand. Although courtly manners inform political and social hierarchies, there are many reinterpretations and resistances to these manners in everyday life.

The photograph of the hawker and the portraits she sells are obscured by light and the angles of the women's bodies. One portrait features an image of the King where sweat drips from his face. This is one of the most famous photographs of King Bhumibol and was broadly promoted by the palace as epitomizing the monarch's hard work and devotion to the nation (Puangchon, 2020). Such images sold in the mid to the late 2010s were often altered using digital editing tools such as special borders, added text and recoloring.

During the last decades of the King's reign citizens created their own respectful portraits of the King using both physical and digital mediums. By the mid 2010s sharing images celebrating the King was a highly visible practice within Thai social networks. I observed these practices while undertaking fieldwork with young, middle-class Bangkokians working in media production between 2014 and 2017. Certainly, not everyone, or even the majority of middle-class Thais, frequently posted images of the King on their social media platforms. Indeed, scholar of comparative politics, Aim Sinpeng (2021), has noted that loyalty to the monarchy was often publicly expressed only when it was expedient and did not always have deep ideological roots.

After Bhumibol's death, many young people who had not previously posted the King's image online, used digital tools to create their own individual digital illustrations of the King and posted them alongside short words of mourning on their social media pages. Broad public participation in making and responding to these online posts, as anthropologist Claudio Sopranzetti (2024, p. 215) argues, is a case of "affective governance, one that framed which political actions were possible or not." That is, regardless of individual opinions or feelings, the public display of love and respect for the King was highly managed. Manners informing bodily and digital display of images of the Thai monarchy are thus marked not only by loyalty, but also the ambivalence and intimidation stemming from legal and public surveillance. The constitutional law of *lese-majeste* makes defaming and insulting the monarchy illegal. State violence, both by law and extrajudicial violence against critics of the monarchy, deepened the risks of non-cooperation (Isaacs, 2025) At the time of the King's death, some Thai citizens publicly rebuked and attacked other those who they deemed as failing to properly act or dress in participation with national mourning (Stengs, 2020). There were few or no safe and legal options for expressing public dissent to the monarchy. Participants in these public events may comply outwardly while holding diverse political opinions.

CARE OF THE PUBLIC PHOTOGRAPHER

The morning after King Bhumibol's death was formally announced, I arrived at Sanam Chai Road, a road running parallel to the palace wall, on the morning of October 14, 2016, and it was already filled with thousands of people seated knee to knee on the ground. People were peering down the length of the road, hoping to catch a glimpse of Ratchadamnoen Road ("The King's Walkway"), where the King's hearse was expected to pass on its way to the royal compound later that afternoon. Joining the orderly, softly humming mass of bodies, I sat and prepared to wait. Settling in on the warm bitumen of the road, between a group of elderly behind me and young people ahead, we acknowledged each other's presence with quiet glances and shy smiles. The group of young people in their 20s seated in front of me shared their names and explained that they worked as accountants in the same office. Conversations with those around us were hushed and limited. Few people were visibly eating, but we shared discreet snacks, such as a small packet of seeds. As the hours passed, our bodies shifted in discomfort. Meeting another's eyes or sharing an apologetic grin, the young adults began to stretch their arm into another's space, leaning their head on another's shoulder. The police

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frequently asked people to lower their umbrellas, which were intermittently raised to block the sun. At every request, the umbrellas went down, but when it appeared the King's hearse was nowhere near, the umbrellas would quietly reappear, used to provide shade in the heat for anyone nearby. After a few hours, a young woman who introduced herself as Pleng rested her back along my legs. As shown in the photos, there was no escaping the gaze of the small, surrounding eyes of camera phone lenses; each participant's body became the subject of digital photographs in the co-present virtual communities (Figure 4).

In Bangkok, the practice of manners includes careful forms of public physical touch. Complying with this practice of public consideration requires focus and attention owing to the social demand to consider the comfort of other bodies around you. As someone whose bodily manners had been shaped by living in Australia, the UK, and the USA, I had to first notice and learn to inhabit the moral worlds that come with such expectations of physical touch. During 2016 and 2017, I worked alongside Bangkok-based video production crews. During this time, I became increasingly familiar with the way simple activities, such as sitting near others or sharing a table, were done with care to maximize the comfort of the group. In the industry in which I worked, careful physical touch, such as massage and back rubs, was used daily to relieve the pains of daily labor and express care and encouragement. In touching others, there was not always an expectation to request permission, but colleagues would be attentive to others' level of comfort when they reached out to others' bodies, for example, to help tidy their clothes or massage their shoulders to relieve physical pain. Such group care is not merely a social convention, but as anthropologist Felicity Aulino (2019) argues, the phenomenological experiences of individuals in Thailand are linked to the harmonious

FIGURE 4 Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Sanam Luang, Bangkok, Thailand, 14 October 2016, photo by Bronwyn Isaacs.

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experiences of the group as a "social body." According to Aulino's description of the social body, appropriate political and social attention to the needs of the group in Thailand expresses status hierarchies, even as it is simultaneously an ethical expression of caring for others.

This care of the social body that is both ethical and hierarchical is on display in the photos in this essay. It is seen in the noticeable practice of careful managing the body in order to care for others' physical needs. A spectrum of ritualized and moral practices around the body extends from formal ritual spaces such as *wats*, where Buddhists kneel low before monks, to the presence of daily ritualized activity within more secular spaces such as workspaces, homes, and public transport. At home, work, or public spaces, spiritual activities include monks visiting for daily alms collection, celebrations of workplace opening, business anniversaries or special events, and daily attendance at shrine houses. In these moments, Thai citizens as everyday workers, students, and customers pay careful attention to bodily materiality in order to move, speak, and look in ways that meet the moral demands of the social and spiritual hierarchy.

At the palace wall waiting for the King's hearse to pass by, the care of other bodies in the crowd was part of the pattern of well-mannered bodily behavior. In all the photos in this essay, gestures, dress, and facial expressions demonstrate bodies of the self and others are arranged in space relation to each other. When the police standing on the side of the road issued an instruction, they used their voices, which carried over the crowd without amplification. No microphones or megaphones were required. All around us, it appeared as if the crowd of thousands complied outwardly with signs of nationalism and devotion to the monarchy, regardless of any private opinions or ambiguity. As shown in the photos, our bodies were sitting close, alert, and sometimes touching. Harmony was created through physical patterning across a large group. Every now and then, through the morning and afternoon, one person or another around us would stand up and marvel at the size and uniformity of the crowd around us. Photos were taken, mostly using mobile phones. Most spectators kept their phones close to their bodies and frequently in their hands. We watched the arms and hands around us edit photos and post them to social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, Line, and Facebook. On our own phones, I and those next to me looked at our social media feeds, where, like a reflective river, we saw the crowd of which we were part mirrored back to us. The photos of today's crowd were pushed to the top of our feeds, buoyed in this reflective stream by large numbers of likes and comments.

As members of the crowd, we were also the subjects of the photographs. In this I argue that the physical consideration toward the social body practiced in Bangkok public space extends to the public's virtual communities. Regardless of personal preference, the individuals in the crowd allowed themselves to be photographed without public complaint or disturbance. As participants we thus practiced photography while also accepting that we were the subjects of photography. Our service to other public bodies extended to their virtual activities and profiles. Our physical bodies were used to care for others around us, including their online producer citizenship activity. Coy smiles acknowledge that existing public manners accommodate the practice of public photography and practices of care and consideration for others in public space extend to accepting media producer activities. Allowing for and participating in crowd photography can thus be understood as an act of care and consideration of public others. Such care is, however, overlayed by the hierarchical politics of public imagery in Thailand and the importance of the body in this politics. The photographs in this essay include facial expressions, many of which appear bored, in the Thai sense of "bua." A more encompassing concept than the English word "bored," Thai *bua* refers to both not having anything fun to do and the exhaustion and frustration that comes from participating in a drawn-out situation that cannot be politely challenged owing to expectations that individuals should follow those in charge and also care for the group.

Only a few years prior to this event, live reporting would have almost exclusively belonged to the domain of professional media industries. By 2016, citizens as "producers"

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publicly blurred the line between producer and consumer, audience and creator, and reshaped the meaning of citizenship as it is lived and practiced. The metapicture self-awareness of the crowd indicates an understanding of being themselves the public event—smiles at the camera show they know what the photographer is about. In these public moments, online and offline citizenship practices are strongly co-constitutive. The politics of posting royal imagery online are intimately tied to the affective governance of what occurs in physical urban spaces. In regard to the priority given to practices of photography for virtual distribution, however, longstanding established pedagogies and learned bodily behaviors around bodily manners are diminished by the increasing claims of co-present digital citizenship practices and responsibilities (Figure 5).

These virtual expectations are displayed across the collection of photos in this essay. Across the photos there is a repetition of bodily acts of focus and attention. This body patterning is concert with the use of digital devices. In one photo, a man extends his arm to capture everyone in his group. The photos show a clear intimacy between people and their phones and other digital devices. This intimacy, as expressed through the body, reflects the social intimacy that digital devices, particularly mobile phones, enable. Soon after the emergence of smartphones as consumer products, anthropologist Mizuko Ito and media scholar Daisuke Okabe (Ito & Okabe, 2005) drew attention to the use of these devices to extend intimate connections. Coining the term "visual co presence," Ito and Okabe described the way that people enact close personal relationships with others not physically with them. Central to these relationships, as they emerged in the early 2000s, was the use of the visual medium, such as photos of everyday activity sent to update intimate others about their day.

FIGURE 5 Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Sanam Luang, Bangkok, Thailand, 14 October 2016, photo by Bronwyn Isaacs.

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By 2016, visual-based digital communication included a range of visual images circulating across a range of polymedia, including stickers, gifs, personal videos, and digital illustrations (Figure 6).

Photos in this article clearly show Thai citizens, who, judging from their diverse clothing and physical presentation, represent a range of ages and classes, taking photos in front of a large portrait of King Bhumibol. Seated within the crowd, it was evident that many people posted these photos on social media soon after taking them. The deliberate acts of public photography and online circulation were focused on digital media citizenship. Using the photographic and circulation capacities of their phones, and in some cases, other equipment such as cameras, citizens participated in acts of visual media creation and circulation that affirmed their political belonging and right to broadcast the public event to others. In so doing, they practice a visual co-presence—simultaneously present to online communities through their sharing of visual images. Two decades after Ito and Okabe discussed visual co-presence, digital photo sharing is less intimate, and more public. On social media, many digital citizens now share photos with broad publics of socially close and "distant" and unknown others (Costa et al., 2022).

The photos in this article point to how visual co-presence in Thailand extends beyond intimate others to social relationships on a wider scale. As members of a crowd, everyone in attendance was, to some degree, a photographic subject. My own online and offline ethnographic experiences at the time converged with published studies that suggest many young Thais post to social media to large networks and often with few privacy controls (Gulatee et al., 2021; Laohabutr et al., 2022). In Thailand, many users have a higher number of friends

FIGURE 6 Ratchadamnoen Avenue, Sanam Luang, Bangkok, Thailand, 14 October 2016, photo by Bronwyn Isaacs.

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or followers on their respective social media feeds that encompass socially distant or even unknown others. For example, media scholar Vikanda Pornsakulvanich (2018) found that college students in Bangkok had an average of 1179 "friends" on Facebook. This contrasts with young people in Australia, who in the same year were found to have an average of just under 400 friends (Statista, 2018). Photos are distributed among shared networks, such as friends or followers. In Thailand, platforms such as *Twitter*, *Facebook*, *Instagram*, *YouTube*, *Clubhouse*, *TikTok*, and messaging platforms such as *Line* are used by Thai citizens to disseminate their "producer" content. The photos being made and sent were not typically intimate social exchanges, but they were socially productive in another, more public sense. This public value is reflected in the photos in this article, where citizen photographers act like professional news crews, signaling that they have a role and mission requiring the use of, or indeed demanded by the presence of, the camera. There is generally a lack of signaling, excuse making, or accommodation of physically present others during the acts of photo taking.

SIMULTANEOUS MANNERS, SPLIT ATTENTION

Despite some claims to be grounded in materiality, the attention economy literature largely splits the discussion of virtual attention from the physical surroundings in which virtual attention takes place. STS scholar and sociologist, Sherry Turkle (2011, p. 155) argued that networked and mobile technologies led to a "new state of the self", one "tethered and marked absent" and where multi-tasking became a virtue. Anthropologists, after studying smartphone use in different geographic locations have argued smartphones lead to a "death of proximity" owing to the tendency of people to exit their physical surroundings and go "home" to the communities on their smartphone device (Miller et al., 2021). There is little scholarly consideration, however, of how bodily manners are changing or continuing and what this means for the public expressions of citizenship and nationalism. In the events featured in this essay, the use of phones to engage in virtual communication and citizenship is better understood not as a "death" of proximity but rather as a practice of online absorption and attention, the manners of which takes priority over but do not erase the manners of the physical social body.

In the photos in this essay, actions of photography and media making, whereby people stood up to photograph others, were treated as normal exceptions to otherwise calm and quiet crowd activity. Standing to take photos was permitted. The only exception to this was when the King's coffin moved down Ratchadamnoen Road, everyone bowed their heads, raised their hands in a high *wai*, and chanted the *song phra charoen*. At that moment, I thought I would try and stay kneeling and film the event rather than raise my hands in the *wai*. A woman behind me, however, pulled me down so that my head was level with hers and my camera facing the ground. In this key movement, the presence of the King's body reoriented the hierarchy of metapractices back toward a traditional expectation of manners, where manners of bodily citizenship within the immediate physical environment ranked above the creation of media for virtual publics.

After the coffin passed, there was a continued effort to move in an orderly, respectful, and aware fashion, using queues, lines, and walking without hurry. Despite this, photographic activity has increasingly taken precedence over awareness or attention to others in social urban spaces. People within the milling crowd would stop in crowded spaces to use a good angle and viewpoint for taking photographs. In particular, people photographed the palace wall, mounted police on horseback, and themselves or friends standing in front of the King's portrait. The longstanding practices of care for other bodies in public space allowed Thai citizens to use their bodies as citizen journalists. Virtual citizenship was prioritized and accommodated through the social body of the public group.

When citizens become media makers and post photos online, they are present to both virtual and physically immediate communities simultaneously. In this, they share something

with those who are participating in moments of ritual and memory making. For example, anthropologists Scott Stonington (2020) and Aulino (2019) describe how carers in Thailand may distance their emotions and focus on the work in front of them, as part of engaging in ritual and ritualistic acts of care. In her study of *mae chee* (Buddhist nuns) in northern Thailand, anthropologist, Joanna Cook (2010) explains that the nuns understand spiritual wisdom as something that cannot be experienced without cultivating mindful attention. Without training the senses of the body, particularly the capacity of *jai* (the heart), one might hear Pāli sermons but not understand them. Attention is thus understood as an ethical practice in which the physical and ethical self are symbiotically trained. In another ritual example from Madagascar, anthropologist, Michael Lambek (2016) describes how the Sakalava live with the burden of their deceased ancestors in the present. According to Lambek (2016, p. 51), the Sakalava practice a dual focus when they bring multiple temporalities together in the same moment through ritual, allowing one to serve as a commentary on the other.

This split consciousness is not unlike, I argue, what occurs as citizens participate in dual forms of attention, both physical and virtual. Creating and circulating visual news media content on social media is a highly deliberate activity that requires a concentration of focus in which citizens located bodily in urban areas attend to two spaces, one physical and one virtual, each with their own moral expectations in the same moment. This dual attention therefore shares some properties with modes of ritual attention, particularly the practices of concentrated attention and attending to realities that are not physically present with the individual's immediate body in space. A ceremonial ritual moment may have a related but different ethical framework or ontological ground to that of everyday life. Similarly, the virtual world and in-person public are deeply different at the level of interpretation and experience. The manners of care and consideration in each are related but clearly distinct.

As seen in the photos, dual attention practices are noticeable in the contrast between bodily postures and faces toward screens. A repeated bodily pattern is apparent: one of people's bodies absorbed with handheld digital devices. The focus of eyes, faces, and bodies is on phones, tablets, and cameras. Another repeated theme is the use of personal digital devices for photography. Each photographer stands carefully in close proximity to the others, surrounded by the crowd. Some stand shoulder to shoulder, with their knees overlapping and arms raised over their heads and shoulders. Many faces are raised in expectation, waiting for a sign to appear in front of the crowd ahead. Some near the wall stand, while others seated on the ground are raised on their knees. The photos show straight postures amidst the intimacy of knees brushing against backs and arms reaching tentatively so as not to swipe the side of another's face, eyes averted from faces, and other indications of careful attention to other persons in the crowd. There is care in how bodies occupy space, not impinging on others beyond what is necessary, and holding the body in such a way as to not be a burden to others. Despite close proximity, individuals give strong consideration of the bodies around them, attempting to not cause discomfort or difficulty to others. In some photos anyone not looking ahead appears to be holding a phone, their eyes directly involved with the screen.

In these photos, the additional work of contributing to online communication while being mannered in public is carried out through deliberate attention. The ontological significance of this attention may be further considered a form of split ontology. For example, Aulino (2022) describes how Thais may both believe and not believe in ghosts, which are both there yet do not exist– a duality that suggests opens one up to multidimensionality and split ontological experiences. Similarly, in rituals, where participants are feeling *bua* (bored), they may attend to the mannered social demands of the immediate public space while also being aware of their ongoing identity and obligations to virtual citizenship. People can co-manage these fields of practice by both splitting and prioritizing their focus, in this case, on the virtual world, even as they remain present and have responsibilities to others in urban space.

In one photo, a group of young adults stands close together, their bodies lightly touching. Their faces, however, are turned away from each other as peer themselves in reflected back in miniature, on their friend's phone. Lit by streetlights, figures in black look down through their

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camera viewfinders and phone screens at the ceremonial commemorative candles burning in front of them. Each person with a camera, phone, or tablet has temporarily removed themselves from the shared crowd's social body. They momentarily ignore the otherwise careful positioning and attention of others. When preparing to take a photo, photographers are not entirely inattentive to those around them as they arrange themselves for the shot. Gazing into the digital viewfinders, however, the photographers momentarily step out of the street and into the virtual space of the digital photograph. They have split and directed their focus into the virtual social world with competing forms of citizenship. They do so with just as much care and learned display of the body as with the careful forms of sitting, walking, gazing, and speaking practiced during public in-person commemoration.

CONCLUSION

Based on the photos and ethnography in this article, I argue the moments analyzed here reveal how moral practices of bodily manners shape and facilitate digital visual citizenship. Longstanding and publicly practiced manners are reflected in forms of online image display which are also forms of social, mannered action. The public moments addressed in this essay highlight a clear emphasis on connecting with individuals who are not physically present. In managing these absent others, media makers do not abandon the manners of the physical social body. Rather the manners and social hierarchies persist through photographic media creation, operating concurrently in two social realms: the urban public streets of Bangkok and the virtual space of social media. While manners and social hierarchies endure in both spaces, there is a noticeable disruption to physical space by the virtual. Consequently, a priority emerges where nurturing social relations including the citizenship claims and production in virtual space takes precedence over those in public urban space. However, caring for the physical social body is not abandoned during the divided attention that social media citizenship demands.

While the virtual often takes precedence over the physical body, online citizenship practices draw on the moral weight afforded to practices and politics of physical manners. They coexist in a hierarchical and vampiric palimpsest, the digital drawing moral and political animation from what is practiced in physical space, while also layering these practices in sustained split attention. The manners of physical space and virtual citizenship thus support each other, even as it appears that the importance attributed to bodily manners is diminished. The body's moral capacities, including bodily manners are frequently ignored in the animated and often anxious studies of digital attention. This paper urges a re-examination of the moral body as a crucial mediator of divided attention and online citizenship practice. Bodily rituals and manners are understood as shaping digital publics. I argue this reconsideration aids in understanding not only human experiences of attention but also locally informed capacities and limits of online citizenship, assisting in the interpretation of digital phenomena such as affective nationalism, social media protest and participatory digital politics.

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