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Technologies of self-mediation: affordances and constraints of social media for protest movements

Book section

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Introduction

Despite the many critiques (Cammaerts, 2008), it also has to be acknowledged that, in line with some of the more optimistic accounts, social media and so-called Web 2.0 applications have played both an instrumental and a constitutive role for activists worldwide in their efforts to disseminate social movement discourses, to mobilize for direct actions online as well as offline, to coordinate direct action, and to self-mediate acts of resistance potentially leading to movement spill-overs. In this chapter I seek to provide a conceptual framework to make sense of the roles that social media play for protest movements and the interplay between affordances and constraints inherent to social media. The affordances, I will argue, map onto what I call a set of self-mediation logics, which in turn correspond to Foucault's Stoic technologies of the self: disclosure, examination, and remembrance.

Furthermore, by adopting the notion of self-mediation, this chapter aligns itself with the mediation tradition as outlined by Martín-Barbero (1993) and Silverstone (2002). Mediation in this tradition is understood to be a dialectical, communicative process that encompasses but also complicates a variety of dichotomies; the production of media and symbols versus their reception or use, alternative media versus mainstream media, traditional media versus new media, and the symbolic versus the material. The latter refers to the double articulation of mediation, as referring both to symbolic power and to the process of technological innovation. From this perspective the notion of mediation is deemed to be productive. Besides this, as Martín-Barbero (1993: 188) pointed out, mediations can also be seen as 'the articulations between communication practices and social movements and the articulation of different tempos of development and practice'.

Throughout this chapter, a number of examples will be provided to illustrate conceptual points. First, however, the notion of technologies of the self and its relationship to self-mediation will be theorized.

Technologies of the self and of self-mediation

It is proposed here that Foucault's notion of technologies of the self is a useful way to theorize the interplay between the affordances and constraints of social media for protest movements and activists. Foucault (1977) spoke of technologies of the self in relation to the way in which individuals internalize rules and constraints. Through technologies of the self, we ultimately discipline ourselves, Foucault explained. However, at the same time, technologies of the self are also those devices, methods, or 'tools' that enable the social construction of our personal identities; they

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1997: 225)

It is thus through the technologies of the self and the construction of personal identities that self-compliance to the structures of coercion is being instilled, but it is also the space where resistance can be given shape and is exercised. Commenting on Foucault's work, Burkitt (2002: 224) contends that the technologies of the self are:

> a form of practical action accompanied by practical reason, which aims to instil in the body certain habitual actions – either moral virtues (that is, right ways of acting in a situation) or technical skills – and, later, to give people the reflexive powers to reason about their virtues or skills, providing them with the capacity to refine, modify or change them.

Foucault identified three distinct Stoic technologies of the self; (1) disclosure, (2) examination, and (3) remembrance. The first, disclosure, relates to what Foucault (1997: 234) called 'the cultivation of the self', the second, examination, is concerned

with the reflexive powers Burkitt talks about; 'taking stock' and making 'adjustments between what he wanted to do and what he had done, and to reactivate the rules of conduct' (Foucault, 1997: 237). The final Stoic technology of the self that Foucault refers to is remembrance, which we can relate to capturing and recording: they are 'memorizations of deeds' (ibid: 247).

Bakardjieva and Gaden (2012) mobilize Foucault's concept of technologies of the self to make sense of Web 2.0's role in terms of self-constitution and in linking up the technologies of the self with other technologies such as the production of signs and ultimately power. By applying technologies of the self not to individual actors, but to collective ones, I take this experiment further. However, at the same time, by doing this, I argue that there is a need for a more complex understanding of what Honneth (2012) recently called 'the I in We', or the way in which we all negotiate and navigate the relationship between our own complex individual identities and a panoply of collective identities.

I will use technologies of self-mediation here as a metaphor, pointing to the way in which, amongst other things, social media platforms and the communicative practices they enable can potentially become constitutive of the construction of collective identities and have become highly relevant in view of disseminating, communicating, recording, and archiving a variety of movement discourses and deeds. Technologies of self-mediation are thus both shaping and constraining action and imagination; they are to some extent determining the horizon of the possible. Technologies of self-mediation are, in other words, the tools through which a social movement becomes self-conscious.

Furthermore, as outlined in the introduction, mediation, as a concept, is chosen carefully. Mediation refers, amongst other things, to the ritualistic characteristics of communication, to an *in-betweenness*, and ultimately to (symbolic) power. Mediation also enables us to analyze the interactions and intersections between dichotomies such as private and public, alternative and mainstream, production and reception, the material and the symbolic, as intricate and dialectical.

All this points to adopting a post-structuralist approach to understand and make sense of the various ways in which social media are relevant to protest movements. The post-structural paradigm in combination with a mediation approach is particularly helpful precisely because it defines power as diffused and operating at a micro as well as macro level; it also considers opportunities and constraints to be dynamic and two sides of the same coin; and, finally, it foregrounds resistance as intrinsic to the exercise of power, also highly relevant for the field of study in this chapter.

The communicative affordance of social media for protest movements

Gibson (1977), working in the field of ecological psychology, coined the notion of affordances to explain how the environment surrounding an animal constitutes a given set of affordances, which are both objective and subjective. Affordances, Gibson (1977: 75) explains, are a 'unique combination of qualities that specifies what the object affords us', and they represent opportunities or potentialities for a set of actions, which we perceive or not. Also, as we use these objects, they become an extension of ourselves, overcoming the subject-object dichotomy. As Gibson (1979/1986: 41) points out:

> the capacity to attach something to the body suggests that the boundary between the animal and the environment is not fixed at the surface of the skin but can shift. More generally it suggests that the absolute duality of 'objective' and 'subjective' is false.

The notion of affordances became popular in technology and innovation studies to make sense of our relationship with and our shaping of technologies. ICTs such as the Internet, mobile technologies, and the social media platforms that run on them thus hold a set of affordances that are inherent to them but need to be recognized as such by activists. The affordances we can attribute to social media in relation to activists' use of them are intrinsically related to the affordances of other tools of self-mediation such as print media, broadcasting media, or classic telecommunication.

From this perspective, usage of networked technologies by activists and protest movements situates itself at the 'intersection between social context, political purpose and technological possibility' (Gillan et al., 2008: 151).

Communicative affordances of social media for self-mediation

On the one hand, reminiscent of broadcasting and telecommunication, social media enable instant – real-time – forms of communication, which tends to be fleeting (unless recorded or harvested). However, just like print, a delayed asynchronous form of communication is also possible, which is potentially more permanent and easier to archive.

On the other hand, social media afford both public/open forms of communication – akin to broadcasting and private/protected forms of communication – more salient to traditional postal services and telecommunication. Social media combine one-to-many, one-to-one, and many-to-many forms of communication. This produces a matrix of affordances that can be attributed to various types of social media leading to a variety of possible actions for protest movements and activists.

Table 4.1 Communicative affordances

	Real-time	**Asynchronous**
Public/Outward	Streaming, Twittering	Blogs, Comments, iLike, Photo Repositories
Private/Inward	Chatting, VoIP	Email, SMS, Mailing lists, Forums

It has to be said, though, that when it comes to private communication the distinction between real-time and asynchronous communication is increasingly blurring; for example, email is presented as a chat dialogue on mobile devices.

Self-mediation logics

These communicative affordances of various social media platforms can be mapped onto a set of activist self-mediation logics – or the rationale activists ascribe to the use

of a certain type of media for a certain purpose. In my view, we can identify six inter-connected but analytically distinct *self-mediation logics* for activists and protest movements.

The first logic refers to the need for protest movements to disseminate as widely as possible their various movement discourses through a variety of channels. The second logic has relevance for the crucial task of movements to mobilize and recruit for (direct) actions, online as well as offline. The third logic has to do with the need of movements to organize themselves internally, which is increasingly mediated through communication technologies. The fourth logic of self-mediation refers to instant, on-the-spot coordination of direct actions, which also increasingly takes place on or through social media platforms. The fifth logic of self-mediation relates to the act of (self-)recording protest events increasingly facilitated amongst others through mobile technologies. The final self-mediation logic is the need to archive protest artefacts which then subsequently enable connections between movements and the articulation of alternative imaginaries.

The first and second logics align with the first Stoic technology of the self, namely disclosure. The third and forth logics are in tune with examination and self-reflexivity, the second Stoic technology of the self. The final two logics, recording and archiving, enable remembrance, the third Stoic technology of the self.

1. To Disseminate and To Mobilize (Disclosure)
2. To Organize and Coordinate (Examination)
3. To Record and Archive (Remembrance)

Networked technologies play a variety of roles in terms of facilitating or enabling practices of disclosure, examination, and remembrance.

Combining affordances with logics of self-mediation

When we combine the affordances of social media identified above with the sets of logics of self-mediation it becomes apparent that social media play a variety of roles for protest movements at different levels of analysis.

The asynchronous affordances of public forms of communication fuel strategies of *disclosure*. Here movements use technologies of self-mediation to construct and sustain collective identities, to articulate a set of demands and ideas and in effect to become self-conscious as a movement. At the same time, their asynchronous nature also enables the capturing and recording of movement discourses, protest events, slogans, and the subsequent memorization of them, the combination of which in turn enables *remembrance*; here technologies of self-mediation play a crucial role in archiving the past, and through that transmitting practices, tactics and ideas across space and time. Subsequently, these disclosures and remembrances are amplified through as many channels and platforms as there are at a given moment, with a view to garnering support, recruiting new sympathizers and mobilizing for action. Neither remembrance nor disclosure processes are bounded by national boundaries anymore; they can gain global attention and bypass national censorship strategies. All this can potentially lead to what in the social movement literature is called 'movement spill-overs' (Meyer & Whittier, 1994) These spill-overs occur across time and space, and potentially contribute to the sustaining of collective identities and of commitment to the cause. From this latter perspective, the dynamic between disclosure and remembrance also ties in with the 'beyond protest' theme of this book.

A pertinent recent example of this asynchronous self-mediation process, facilitated and to some extent even propelled and sustained by social media as a technology of self-mediation, is the way in which movement discourses, protest tactics, slogans, and symbols oscillated between Anonymous, WikiLeaks, the Arab Spring protests, the Indignados in Spain, Occupy Wall Street/LSX, the Pirate Parties, MoVimento 5 Stelle in Italy, and the V for Vinagre protests in Turkey and Brazil. A good example is the appropriation of the V for Vendetta mask by protesters across the world (cf. Figure 4.1). I am not hereby claiming that these movements align totally – on the contrary, but they do pick and choose from a similar and above all mediated set of symbols, tactics, ideas, and critiques.

Figure 4.1 The appropriation of the V for Vendetta mask in various parts of the world

Anti-Scientology Protest, New York, 10 February 2008

Source: David Shankbone (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:David_Shankbone/Miscellanea)

Gezi Park Protests, Istanbul, 8 June 2013

Source: Burak Su (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gezi_parkı_-_Flickr_-_Burak_Su_(106).jpg)

Source: Wikimedia Commons. All content on this page is freely licenced. Furthermore, permission to use the two pictures in Figure 4.1 has been obtained from the photographers.

The asynchronicity which social media affords is also relevant to private forms of communication. This mainly refers to the establishment of internal communication channels between the core and periphery of a movement and within the core of a movement. As such, this very much relates to a permanent process of *examination* and adaptation to new circumstances and self-reflection on the precise articulation of movement discourses and at times also mediated decision-making. This asynchronicity in private communication also enables (some) participants of protest movements to better balance their political engagements with everyday life and family, social, and professional commitments. A few years ago a radical environmental activist explained it as follows:

> Most of the activists and sympathisers have a full-time job. Being called up during working hours for urgent co-ordination or actions would be considered too intrusive … Sympathisers that are being informed and mobilised through email can decide themselves when to dedicate time and attention to 'the action'. As such, they can easily adapt their action-rhythm to the highs and lows in their own personal and professional timeframes. (Quoted in Cammaerts, 2007: 276)

Besides asynchronous communication, social media also affords real-time public communication. When it concerns public or outward forms of communication, this enables activists and protest movements to in effect broadcast in real time, reaching those who want to tune into their stream or twitter feed. This can obviously be linked to the logic of *disclosure*. A recent example of this was the way in which Greenpeace streamed their direct action in July 2013 against drilling for oil in the Artic by sending six women to climb the Shard, a landmark building in London resembling ice.

Another more intricate example was the way in which mobile phones and social networking platforms became, in effect, broadcasting tools in the hands of protesters in the Middle East during the Arab Spring. Mainstream media broadcasters across the world began using the protesters' feeds to make sense of what was happening on the ground (Hermida et al., 2012). Protesters' strategies of *disclosure* became part of mainstream media archives, feeding *remembrance* and documenting atrocities committed by state actors through synoptic tactics of sousveillance or the 'many

watching the few' (Mathiesen, 1997). Furthermore, through the use of social media platforms, 'individualized, localized, and community-specific dissent [turned] into structured movements with a collective consciousness about both shared grievances and opportunities for action' (Howard & Hussain, 2011: 41).

Real-time social media is also increasingly used as a tool for 'on-the-spot' *examination* when we approach it from the perspective of the coordination of offline direct actions. In 2010, students in the UK were actively using Google maps to update the positions of the police throughout central London thereby providing all protesters who had access to smartphones with real-time information to avoid being kettled or contained by police (Cammaerts, 2012). Along the same lines, activists using flash-mob tactics for political purposes also rely on the real-time affordances social media offers to mobilize and direct their sympathizers towards possible targets; in the UK context we could refer to UK Uncut, an organization targeting high street retailers, banks and multinationals for not paying any (or very little) corporate tax in the UK by (briefly and thus symbolically) occupying their branches and using social media to coordinate their direct actions.

The last category – private real-time communication – is most suited to fit examination practices or the organization and coordination of protest movements, at times replacing face-to-face encounters between figureheads of movements and enabling point-to-point communication between two or more members of the movement to discuss strategy and tactics or to examine movement discourses and action, and to make adjustments if need be. Decisions on these important matters tend to be easier in real time rather than through an asynchronous communication process. It also has to be said that despite the affordance of real-time multi-point group communication through, for example, a 'conference call' on Skype, many activists and movements tend to prefer face-to-face meetings and decision-making processes over and above mediated ones. This is certainly the case for more radical and anti-systemic movements who are often the object of state repression and surveillance (cf. Diani, 2001).

This last point brings us to the constraints which are inherent in the use of social media by collective actors and which I argue also need to be carefully assessed in

order to get a fuller picture of the role social media play for activists and protest movements.

Constraints of social media for protest movements

If, as Burkitt (2002: 235) posits, 'technologies of the self are forms of production as well as means of domination', then it follows that technologies of self-mediation also encapsulate a set of constraints, which is in line with a post-structuralist account of power. Besides the productive characteristics of technologies of self-mediation there are thus also disciplinary ones. While for analytical purposes I treat the constraints separately from the opportunities, they operate in conjunction with each other.

Technologies of self-mediation thus not only afford, but at the same time also constrain and limit. In line with a Foucauldian perspective on power, these constraints should not be defined exclusively in negative terms, but as 'the conditions and relationships amongst attributes which provide structure and guidance for the course of actions' (Kennewell, 2001: 106). As such, constraints are by no means 'the opposite of affordances; they are complementary, and equally necessary for activity to take place' (ibid.). This concurs with a view of the relationship between structure and agency as being productive or generative, and whereby power inevitably invokes strategies of resistance (Foucault, 1978). Such strategies of resistance are employed by activists (as outlined in the previous section) as well as by those actors that resist activists' efforts towards change, which is more the focus of this section.

As such, the relationship and links between technologies of the self and technologies of domination are invoked here – i.e. 'the points where the techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination' (Foucault, 1993: 203). Foucault denoted this point of contact between technologies of the self and technologies of domination as governmentality, shaping not only the possibilities of action for subjects but also instilling a sense of self-control and limitations of the possible:

> Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which

> assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself. (ibid.: 204)

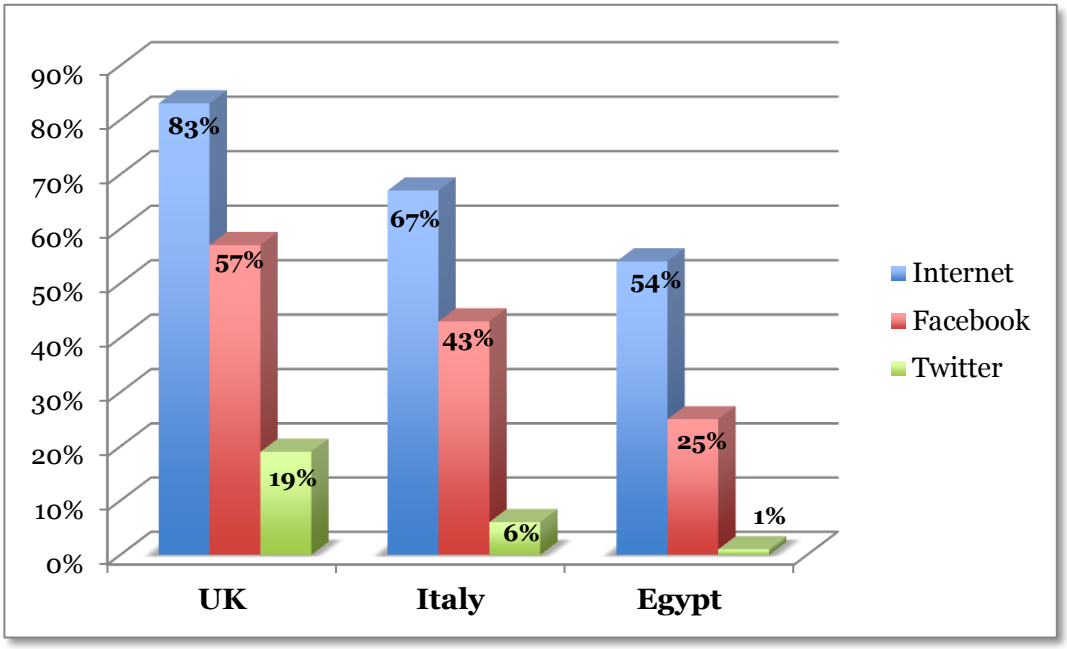
Before dealing with the particular constraint of state repression and surveillance, some other constraints in relation to social media and protest movements will be addressed first. In this regard, structural issues relating to access and reach will be addressed, but also tensions between the individualistic nature of social media and the collective identities protest movements aim to build. Furthermore, besides state control and surveillance we also need to acknowledge that social media and the Internet in more general terms is first and foremost a corporate and hyper-commodified space.

Access and narrowcasting

Despite some voices heralding the ubiquity of networked technology and of screens in our everyday lives, we should not forget that digital as well as skills divides in the West and beyond remain a reality when it comes to access and types of usage of the Internet and of social media platforms. True, penetration rates have been rising consistently, but it would be an illusion to think that access to social media is universal. Furthermore, those who do have access and the skills do not necessarily use the Internet and social media for political purposes. All this can potentially hinder processes of disclosure and especially limit the reach that social movements have.

Across the EU, 24% of households do not have access to the Internet at home (Eurostat, 2012). In the UK about 17% of the population above 15 years old has never used the Internet. The penetration rate of Facebook amongst over-15-year-olds is deemed to be 57%, while if we consider Twitter the penetration rate reduces to 19% of 15 years and older. For Italy, 33% of the population that is 15 years or older does not use the Internet, Facebook has a penetration rate of about 43% amongst over-15-year-olds and Twitter about 6%. In Egypt, however, Internet penetration amongst over-15-year-olds is at 54%, while Facebook attracts a mere 25% of the population older than 15 years and Twitter just about 1%. (cf. Figure 4.2)

Figure 4.2 Penetration of Internet, Facebook, and Twitter amongst those older than 15 years



Source: BBC (2013); eMarketer (2013); IndexMundi (2013); Mourtada and Salem (2013); ONS (2013); and Telecom Paper (2013)

In this regard, we should also take into account that the use of social media requires a set of skills and prior knowledge, which some argue requires new forms of literacies and leads to new forms of illiteracies. These skills situate themselves at the level of production and dissemination of movement discourses through social media as well as the reception of these discourses (Hall, 2011; Livingstone, 2008).

Besides this, even if we consider access to be less of an issue and the skills divide to be closing, then there is still the problem that only a minority of Internet users are interested in politics when they go online. While almost 60% of Internet users in the EU purchased goods online in 2011, only about 20% read or posted opinions on civic or political issues online and a mere 7% took part in online consultations or voting (Seybert, 2011).

In addition to this, social media typically require citizens to opt in through liking or through following a particular feed. As such, the use of social media, especially in terms of disclosure, could be approached as a form of narrowcasting. This implies that

there is a high probability that activists and protest movements that exclusively use social media only reach those who are already more or less aligned with the aims and goals of the movement; through social media, movements mainly preach to the converted. All this explains why many scholars point to the continuing importance of mainstream media in communicating beyond the likeminded when it comes to the logic of disclosure (see Rucht, 2013).

Social media promote individualism first and foremost

While social media is presented as inherently 'social' and geared towards sharing with others, building networks, it is at the same time all rather 'Me'-centric. In many countries the word 'Selfie' was voted new word of the year in 2013. The navel-gazing act of taking your own picture and uploading it on social media is symptomatic of the primacy of individualism in our current technology-obsessed societies. Social media and the ubiquity of screens in everyday life arguably feed fragmentation and individualism, which makes the articulation of firm connections between the individual and society more difficult. This in turn is potentially detrimental to building the strong collective identities deemed to be of crucial importance to protest movements (della Porta & Diani, 2006).

In addition to this, there is increasing evidence that the ubiquity of screens in our everyday lives is leading to an extreme fragmentation of attention spans and has drastically reduced the ability to focus, concentrate, and memorize. This can be related to the arguments being developed by Carr (2011); the way the Internet is wired changes the way we think and, crucially for this chapter, the way we remember.

There is an intrinsic tension and conflict here between the individualistic nature of social media platforms – it is 'I'-Like, not 'we'-Like – and the need for movements to build and sustain collective identities and to organize collective actions. The fragmentation of attention spans is arguably mirrored by a radical fragmentation of demands and causes online. The 'global web movement' Avaaz.org was launched in January 2007 and has in the meantime started almost 146 million different actions. There is also the common critique that the cost of participation in these kinds of online actions is minimal and therefore easier to disregard by the powers that be. This

explains why some observers speak of slacktivism as being inconsequential (Morozov, 2009). In this regard, we could also refer to Bennett and Segerberg's (2012: 744) arguments relating to changes at the level of collective action, group affiliation, and organizational participation, all influenced by multifaceted processes of individualization.

The radical fragmentation of demands and causes as witnessed online is in my view a symptom of a much broader problem, namely that of the de-ideologization of social, economic, and political struggles. Bauman's (2001: 9) account of what individualism amounts to in our times is highly appropriate here; he contends that

> The distinctive feature of the stories told in our times is that they articulate individual lives in a way that excludes or suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which a society as a whole operates.

<UIP>A good illustration of this is Change.org, a 'social good company' that offers individuals and organizations the opportunity to set-up and sign online petitions, some of which are sponsored. The company claims to have a 'business model that provides value to both our users and our advertisers'.[1] Change.org is a certified 'B Corp', which is a new label that is given to social enterprises that use 'the power of business to solve social and environmental problems' and that thereby 'redefine success in business'[2]. One of Change.org's most recent success stories was a campaign to 'Keep a woman on the English banknotes'.[3]

Phenomena like this thrive through the viral characteristics of social media platforms, but at the same time they reflect the emptying of signifiers such as (social) change and reform of their radical meanings; they decouple emancipatory struggles from the structural inequalities and the unequal distribution of resources that form the basis of most injustices. To put it bluntly, capitalism is seen here as the solution rather than the problem.

Social media are commercial/corporate spaces

This de-ideologization of social struggles and lack of examination in relation to the use of social media for activist purposes is not entirely unsurprising given that the Internet and social media in particular are first and foremost corporate spaces promoting capitalist values and geared towards creating added value rather than advocating for radical social change or protecting collective interests. The fact that social media are profit-driven spaces is reflected in the way in which corporate actors unashamedly commodify the digital footprint we leave behind online (Fuchs et al., 2012). As such, everything we do in these corporate spaces is monitored and controlled by these companies.

While social media platforms are often heralded as liberal spaces – advocating freedom of speech, facilitating democratic struggles against authoritarian regimes, fueling revolutions, etc., when it comes to radical protest in Western democracies the Internet and social media platforms in particular often become illiberal and repressive spaces. Usually, the justification provided by Internet companies for such repressive actions relates to breaches of their terms and conditions of use.

In the wake of the WikiLeaks disclosures of the US diplomatic cables, Amazon Web Services (AWS), the company hosting its content, blocked access to the WikiLeaks site. They denied this was due to government pressure, but stated instead that AWS 'does have terms of service that must be followed. WikiLeaks was not following them. There were several parts they were violating'.[4]

In addition to this, Twitter closed an account of the hacktivist collective Anonymous (#Anon_Operation),[5] who had mounted a campaign to support WikiLeaks and Assange. Furthermore, PayPal, Moneybookers, Visa, MasterCard, BankAmerica, and the Swiss bank PostFinance also closed, froze, or restricted the accounts of WikiLeaks. Again, the main justification used by these corporations was that WikiLeaks had breached their terms and conditions. PayPal, for example, sent out a press release on 3 December 2010, stating that the account of WikiLeaks was

> permanently restricted … due to a violation of the PayPal Acceptable Use Policy, which states that our payment service cannot be used for any activities that encourage, promote, facilitate or instruct others to engage in illegal activity.[6]

Another example of corporate clampdowns and purges was the sudden and unannounced removal by Facebook of a large number of political groups that rallied against the UK government's austerity measures and were mobilizing against the royal wedding of William and Kate (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 List of deactivated political Facebook Groups (28–29 May 2011)

Anarchista Rebellionist	Free Ricardo Palmera group	Ourland FreeLand
Anti-Cuts Across Wigan	Freedom Isa StateofMind	PROUD TO BE A MEMBER OF THAT
ArtsAgainst Cuts	Frfi Students	LEFT-WING FRINGE GROUP CALLED WOMEN*
Beat'n Streets	Goldsmiths Fights Back	Rochdale Law Centre*
BigSociety Leeds	IVA Womensrevolution	Rock War
Bootle Labour	Jason Derrick	Roscoe 'Manchester' Occupation*
Bristol Anarchist Bookfair*	Leeds City College Against Fees and Cuts	Save NHS
Bristol Ukuncut	London Student Assembly	Sheffield Anti-libdemconference
Camberwell AntiCuts	NETWORK X	Sheffield Occupation*
Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament	Newcastle Occupation*	Slade Occupation*
Canadians don't care about the Royal Wedding*	No Cuts	Socialist Unity
Canadians Rallying to Unseat Harper	No Quarter Cutthewar	Southwark Sos
Central London SWP*	NO STEPHEN HARPER WE WON'T SHUT THE F*ck UP	SWP Cork
Chesterfield Stopthecuts	North East Walkout	Teampalestina Shaf

Claimants Fightback	North London Solidarity	Tower Hamlet Greens*
Cockneyreject	Not Stephen Harper 2011*	UWE Occupation*
Comrade George Orwell	Notts-Uncut Part-of UKUncut	Westiminster Trades Council
Don't Break Britain United	Occupied Oxford	Whospeaks Forus*
Ecosocialists Unite*	Occupy Monaco	WOMEN WHO R CREEPED OUT BY STEPHEN HARPER*
First of May band	Open Birkbeck	York Anarchists

Note: *These groups were up again by May 2011

Source: *Source*: Open Rights Group (http://wiki.openrightsgroup.org/wiki/FB_takedowns)

Facebook justified the removal of these political groups by stating that Facebook profiles can only represent individuals, not (anonymous) organizations:

> As you may know, Facebook profiles are intended to represent individual people only. It is a violation of Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities to use a profile to represent a brand, business, group, or organization. As such, your account was disabled for violating these guidelines.[7]

All this shows the vulnerability of radical activists when relying too much on the corporate structures that own the Internet, the popular social media platforms, and the companies that facilitate financial transactions online. At any time these companies can decide to close down spaces of contention and the use of these platform by activists. This also potentially impedes remembrance as activist content online can disappear without prior warning.

However, processes of examination and self-reflexivity mean that this also leads to an increased awareness by activists of the dangers, as a student activist from University College London (UCL) attests:

> Ultimately, the anti-cuts movement in the UK will need to start organising through self-hosted, open source platforms to avoid reliance upon the very corporate power structures we are aiming to challenge.[8]

It is not only radical activists but also ordinary citizens who suffer from this type of corporate censorship. Around the time of the 2011 royal wedding in the UK, Lucy Willow from Cornwall uploaded a video of her pigs on YouTube (cf. Figure 4.3). The title of the video was William and Kate, the names of the two pigs. In March 2012, the video was removed by YouTube, who argued that the music which accompanied the images contravened the copyright of Warner Media Group. Why then was this taken down, while the over 6.5 million video-clips on You Tube using the world-hit 'Gangnam Style' are not?

Figure 4.3 Still from removed You Tube clip called 'William and Kate'

Source: Permission has been obtained from the author

Social media is highly susceptible to state control and surveillance

One of the affordances described above relates to inverse surveillance or sousveillance. However, this does not mean that the Foucauldian Panopticon has disappeared. On the contrary, the Internet and social media in particular are highly susceptible to state, as well as corporate, surveillance (Fuchs et al., 2012; Leistert, 2013). Our digital footprint is recorded and commodified by corporate actors, but it is also the object of omni-optic surveillance practices by state actors. Some countries have developed dragnet surveillance strategies whereby all the data that is produced by their citizens, but also by citizens in other countries, is being collected and recorded, enabling security services to access all types of data produced by those they seek to follow, monitor, or track down.

These types of omni-optic or ubiquitous surveillance practices are not only prevalent in authoritarian countries, but as much – if not more so – in mature democracies. Given the disclosures relating to the US programme PRISM, set-up by the NSA,[9] but also of TEMPORA, directed by the UK's GCHQ[10], and of a similar programme run by the secret services of France (DGSE)[11], it is becoming increasingly obvious that we are close to realizing the dystopian vision of a truly Orwellian surveillance society; about 30 years later than 1984. We have been '[s]leepwalking into the surveillance society' (Hayles, 2009).

The main rationale provided by democratic leaders for this frightening degree of state surveillance is national security and the war on (Islamist) terrorism. However, in recent years ample evidence has emerged of these anti-terrorism laws and discourses being used against unions, anti-capitalist groups, as well as radical environmental groups (Monaghan & Walby, 2012; Salter, 2011). It goes without saying that anti-systemic or radical protest movements and those that are active in organizations aligned with such movements are also prime targets of these forms of very intrusive state surveillance.

Furthermore, it is becoming ever more apparent that the US and the UK have backdoor keys to the encryption software provided by Microsoft, Google, Yahoo, other email-providers, social network platforms, banks, e-commerce services, cloud

services, etc. (Ball et al., 2013). Even the open-source alternatives, which were considered to be very secure up until recently, are now deemed to be highly vulnerable.

Software relying on the Tor-network to remain anonymous is used by many activists, NGOs, journalists. Tor was originally built by the US Navy to secure government communication and it 'helps to reduce the risks of both simple and sophisticated traffic analysis by distributing your transactions over several places on the Internet, so no single point can link you to your destination'. [12] Following the recent disclosures by Edward Snowden, however, cryptographers are convinced that earlier versions of Tor, which 90% of users are still using, are now insecure, hacked and readable by the NSA (Graham, 2013).

Another worrisome tactic democratic countries are increasingly contemplating and in effect also implementing is the strategic and temporal shutdown of networked services. Unlike Hosni Mubarak's decision to close down the Egyptian Internet for three days during the Arab Spring (January 2010), Western governments do not envisage closing down the whole of their Internet infrastructure, but seek to intervene, rather, at a localized level in places where dissent is taking place. In the wake of the UK riots in 2011 there were strong calls by MPs and government to have the ability to close down all social media platforms in times of social unrest. David Lammy, the Labour MP for Tottenham, where the riots started, blamed Blackberry Messenger as 'one of the reasons why unsophisticated criminals are outfoxing an otherwise sophisticated police force' (quoted in Prodhan & Sharp, 2011: n.p.). Furthermore, during an emergency debate in the UK Parliament a few days later, Prime Minister David Cameron stated the following:

> Everyone watching these horrific actions [the riots] will be struck by how they were organised via social media. Free flow of information can be used for good. But it can also be used for ill, and when people are using social media for violence we need to stop them. So we are working with the police, the intelligence services and industry to look at whether it would be right to stop people communicating via these websites and services when we know they are plotting violence, disorder and criminality.[13]

A few days after the UK riots, in the US, the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) police services actually shut down cell services at four San Francisco stations in an attempt to disrupt protests taking place against the killing of Charles Blair Hill by police at the Civic Center station. This in return prompted a reaction by Anonymous starting an #OpBART-campaign targeting the San Francisco subway system (Goodman, 2011; Spencer, 2012).

As all these examples demonstrate, surveillance by the state is first and foremost geared towards monitoring disclosure as well as hindering coordination and examination efforts by social movements and activists.

Conclusions

Social media certainly hold a set of affordances that are highly beneficial to protest movements and activists. These affordances enable activists to develop a range of self-mediation strategies through asynchronous and real-time communication, inward and outward oriented, and less constrained by time and space. These affordances map onto a set of logics of self-mediation which in turn can be related to the Stoic technologies of the self as identified by Foucault – (1) disclosure, (2) examination and (3) remembrance. Mediation is a crucial component of how these technologies of the self operate in terms of facilitating the dissemination of movement discourses, the organization of social movements, and the coordination of protest events, the recording of movement discourses and protest artefacts, and the long-term archiving of them. This last role also has relevance for the 'beyond the protest' theme of this book.

While these affordances and opportunities inherent to them are real and used profusely by protesters across the whole world, they are also vulnerable and at times problematic. At the level of disclosure, questions regarding the actual reach of social media remain pertinent. The Arab Spring was arguably fuelled more by the amplification of protesters' strategies of disclosure through mainstream media than by social media as such. We also need to actively opt in, which can potentially lead to

the emergence of ideological echo chambers (Boutyline & Willer, 2013) – mediating discussion amongst the likeminded and impeding amplification beyond them.

Movement discourses also tend to be geared towards the building of collective identities, and they would generally advocate for collective solutions and call for collective actions. This is at odds with the individualistic and capitalist values inherent to the rationale and raison d'être of social media platforms. Facebook only accepts and recognizes individuals on its platform, not collectivities. This also aligns with their advertisers, who are interested in the details of the online behaviour of individuals, not of collective actors. The use of social media platforms may also lead to a decoupling of social and political struggles with ideology, and feed a lack of examination and self-reflection.

The corporate nature of social media spaces also means that these spaces are permanently watched and potentially closed down, either because the companies exploiting those spaces are easily swayed by government pressure or because they use the small print of their terms and conditions to close down whatever they do not like; for an online political group or a blog, all its contacts and content can suddenly be removed from the public space, hindering remembrance.

This also exposes a tension between on the one hand a liberal discourse of freedom of speech and democratization when it comes to authoritarian regimes – think of claims such as the Twitter Revolution, and on the other hand the repressive behaviour of these same corporate actors towards anti-systemic dissent in Western democracies. All this has detrimental effects on the ability of activists to disclose, amplify, and archive movement discourses and protest artefacts through social media.

Finally, state surveillance and repression is a genuine constraint when it comes to disclosure and examination mediated through social media. Activists are increasingly aware that everything they do online can potentially be under the extreme scrutiny of the security forces. In a sense the very notion of private communication for activists might not exist anymore, certainly not online. However, examination will subsequently lead to new communicative practices which take these constraints into account.

Surveillance also brings the Foucauldian concept of the Panopticon back into the fray, as well as the broader philosophical question as to what social media as technologies of the self do. Foucault argued that through technologies of the self we regulate our bodies, constrain our thinking, and become aware of the stipulated expectations of how to behave in a society. Is a similar mechanism at play for social/political actors, for technologies of self-mediation such as social media? Are social media constraining collective actors more than they are enabling them? Do corporate as well as state actors regulate what is acceptable and what is not? Do they limit the amplification of radical discourses, reward good behaviour, and discipline bad behaviour?

In many respects, the answer to these questions is a resounding yes. Foucault (1978: 94) does also leave us with a way out, though, allowing us to overcome the pessimism of the intellect. While power (and surveillance) is omnipresent, so is resistance. In a sense, throughout history we can witness a permanent dialectic between the appropriation of and experimentation with various forms of media and mediations by resisting subordinate actors, and the subsequent attempts of dominant forces in society to close down these emancipatory fissures, after which new ways to circumvent and pervert the limits and controls are sought. Long may it continue!

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Notes:

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