Dissent at a Distance

The Janissary Collective

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19. Dissent at a distance

The Janissary Collective (Mark Deuze and Lindsay Ems)

Abstract

The contribution by The Janissary Collective argues that while protest movements and civic groups may indeed benefit from 'mediatization,' their playful character is less the result of a conscious strategy than the outcome of the performativity of means-over-ends focused engagement. This manifests itself in the 'slacktivism' inherent in participating online only. The Janissary Collective takes a skeptical stance towards generalizing the transformative role of new media tools, and proposes to regard today's political and social movements as thriving on the unruly and affective ecologies of media that mostly emphasize the *feeling* of belonging to a community instead of actually being part of one. Participation in these movements is an expression of a playful way of being and therefore a mode of being human.

Keywords: Political protests, social movements, public dissent, mediatization, affect

Asked for advice on what it takes to become president when speaking with a group of fourteen- and fifteen-year-old students on 8 September 2009, United States President Barack Obama answered:

> I want everybody here to be careful about what you post on Facebook, because in the YouTube age, whatever you do, it will be pulled up again later somewhere in your life. And when you're young, you make mistakes and you do some stupid stuff. (Stewart 2009)

Such advice seems to make sense—as employers reportedly check social network sites to research job candidates. Countries including Germany and Spain have attempted to curtail such practices, seeking to make it illegal for

prospective employers to check up on applicants' private postings—clearly assuming that since we live through networks of mass self-communication sometimes we may need to be protected from ourselves (O'Hear 2010). Although such efforts may be noble, there is perhaps something to be said for not opting out, for enthusiastically embracing the recording, storing, and sharing potential of present-day media. Ironically, this insight was also shared by former President Obama; when one considers his statement (on 28 January 2011) in response to the mass demonstrations across Egypt, referring directly to the Egyptian government's attempts to shut down the country's internet and mobile communication services at the time, in which he said:

> I also call upon the Egyptian government to reverse the actions that they've taken to interfere with access to the internet, to cell phone service and to social networks that do so much to connect people in the 21st century. (BBC News 2011)

This call cannot be seen as separate from the global surveillance conducted by United States government agencies and other nations through the services and networks that support but can also potentially subvert social order. Considering the amplifying and accelerating role that mobile phones (outfitted with digital cameras) and online social networks have played, and continue to play in ongoing processes of social change. Such movements include, but are not limited to, events in Ukraine in 2004, Moldova and Iran in 2009, Tunisia in 2010, Egypt in 2011, in Syria since 2012, around the world under the banner 'Planet Occupy' (Schneider 2012), since 2013 in the US under the Black Lives Matter movement, and the #TimesUp and #MeToo movements which were jump-started in 2017. As a result of the widespread visibility of these high-tech social movements, it seems as if the future belongs to those clearly not shying away from telling everyone about their life and passions (Hermida 2014).

There seems to be a direct link between specific kinds of contemporary global protests, our current media ecology, and the role of individualized (yet connected) citizens in everyday life. To some extent, this link is benchmarked by a claim to citizen's power through both physical and virtual action. Escaping neat categorization, much of today's activism exists in a networked, 'foamy' format that lives in and mirrors the infrastructure of the internet. Yet, this mimicry is not just with a series of servers, wires, nodes, and access points—it is also articulated with values and practices that shape technologies, just as much as these values and practices are

shaped by such technologies. Referring to the Occupy movement, Steve Anderson, director of the non-profit organization OpenMedia, wrote in a column for the Canadian weblog *Rabble* (on 1 November 2011): "[the Occupy movement] feels like an ongoing space infused with web values and practices. Their structure of participation mirrors that of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia [...]. Will it last? I have no idea, but I think these social practices are addictive and contagious" (Anderson 2011). One could argue that the viral and networked nature of social protest as well as the commodification of social networks (through digital marketing) reduces people to a faceless multitude (or data clusters representing specific consumer markets)—an aimless horde waiting to be divided and conquered by targeted advertising. In effect, we become zombies. Sarah Juliet Lauro (excerpting her work for the *io9* weblog on 13 January 2012) linked the Occupy movement to a zombie-like quality of contemporary society. She suggests that the collective disruption of public spaces takes its cues from zombies—more specifically, zombie walks occurring more or less regularly around the world: "These events seem to me to incarnate the youth culture's lament for its lack of real social power, and perhaps signal a willingness to change this" (Lauro 2012).

In a talk given at a symposium on zombies at Winchester University (on 28 October 2011), British Romanticist Gary Farnell endorsed the zombie as "the official monster of the moment," suggesting that the zombie signifies "an image of the truth of the current conjunctural crisis of global capitalism" (Farnell 2011). Relating zombies to a link between worldwide protests and the role of (social) media, scholars like Lauro and Farnell feel that zombies put a face on a widespread sense of crisis. Yet, it is not the face of the individual human being concerned about privacy or personhood, but rather the face of people being neither human nor machine. Once we are reduced to a *multitude* in Paolo Virno's sense, we are capable of engaging in a different way with being in the world that is essentially pluriform. Instead of being reduced to a singular mass of *people*, the era of Big Data, omnoptic surveillance and post-humanism reproduces us as a multitude, "a plurality which persists as such in the public scene" (Virno 2004, 21). Approaching the increasing interdependency between technology and life-world from a more positive point of view, Don Ihde reaches a similar conclusion in suggesting that the mediating technologies of the information age make possible an "essential pluricultural pattern" (1990, 156) in people's understanding of themselves and each other. According to Ihde, our global pluriculture gets established through the various ways in which media expose us to ideas, beliefs, cultures, rituals, up to and including culinary and architectural traditions different from our own. In media we cannot help but see and

experience the lives of others (and they can see us, either through surveil-
lance or our ongoing oversharing of it). Perhaps it is counterintuitive to
suggest that the pluriculture of the multitude constitutes a zombie society,
assuming that zombies are all the same (and therefore one). The point,
however, is not that zombies are identical: it is just that their differences
do not make a difference.

The protesters around the world do share certain characteristics that could
remind one of zombies: first, they tend to be based on social movements
without leaders, lacking clear hierarchical structures, and generally having
no clear goals. Social movements such as the Arab Spring, the Indignados
in Spain, the globally dispersed Occupy movement, and the Black Lives
Matter and #MeToo movements have playful properties in that they have
all share certain performative elements (concerts, costumes, cosplay, clever
signage celebrations), that get creatively promoted, expressed, and shared
in media (especially via social media such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram,
and Facebook). In this context, we understand a social movement to be
playful when participation is self-directed and when the activities involved
tend to be meaningful unto themselves rather than evaluated toward some
specific end and can therefore considered to be *autotelic* (Csikszentmihalyi
1990). They are also considered playful when such activities at least to some
extent are somewhat non-serious and somewhat performative (particularly
regarding the omnipresent personal media documenting and sharing the
activities). Second, these and other contemporary spontaneous movements
involve people from all walks of life: from East to West, North to South,
black and white, men and women, old and young—again negating distinct
classifications—at least temporarily as these protest tend to erupt as rapidly
as they dissipate. Finally, not only does the social arrangement of these
protests rely heavily on the use of media (which in turn enable the active
involvement of people not necessarily present)—they seem similarly infec-
tious and as viral as media can be. We argue that what makes our being in
the world in media more resonant with zombie life is its embodiment of the
man-machine hybrid, rather than, as suggested by Parikka (2010), analogous
with insect or bacterial life which similarly contains no structures, clear
leaders and goals (swarms), expresses equality in diversity (the beehive),
and is contagious (like a virus). The zombie forces us to question the false
dichotomy—the endless remix—of the living and the dead.

Like our current media ecology, the nature of zombified social movements
today has a distinctly remixed and remixable character, both in terms of
media praxis—mashing up video and audio, culture jamming, online sharing
and forwarding, up to and including hacking—and insofar as the people

involved, forming a blend of often disparate backgrounds, life phases, and ideals. Following Miguel Sicart (2014), one could argue that participation in these movements—whether online or offline, either on the ground or through telepresence—is an expression of a playful way of being and therefore a mode of being human.

It is our goal in this contribution to suggest that the organization, technologies, and outcomes particular to contemporary forms of social movements and global protests differ in significant ways from those in the past, while stipulating there always has been a co-creative link between public protest, media use, and socio-political context. In other words: while our time is different, it is not necessarily new.

New social movements

It seems that hardly a day goes by without news coverage of some type of activist social movement being staged throughout the world. While the notion that we live in a 'movement society' (Meyer and Tarrow 1998) is not new, the pace and frequency of these group actions seems to have intensified. Not surprisingly, there has been a surge of research and popular debate on the connections between newer networked media, citizen engagement, and movement dynamics. Popular and academic interest in what makes these movements tick is fueled by their often dramatic and playful character—including zombie walks, cosplay, and gaming telecommunication systems by organizing protests via social media—challenging the status quo. These and other forms of public (and publicized) dissent can serve society as an equivalent form of our news media when they refuse to perform the tasks we expect of them: we seem to become aware most only once there is a breakdown. Social movements that propel forms of dissent in the public's eye, in effect, bring forth society, make it visible and open it up to intervention. As Snow and Soule put it, "understanding our own society, as well as the larger social world in which it is embedded, requires some knowledge and understanding of social movements and the activities with which they are associated" (Snow and Soule 2009, 5-6).

The newer networked media presence—the tweets from the streets, the dramatic YouTube videos, the Facebook groups—in many of these movements is unmistakable. Generally, mediated communication is important for its role in several key features of movements, such as social networking, collective identity formation and maintenance, sharing of ideas, and playful protest. The communicative power of newer media would seem to add

particular affordances for movement participants. Protests and dissent in many forms can be coordinated and communicated globally, quickly, and more easily with newer networked media (Cottle and Lester 2011). Yet, we must caution against generalizing the transformative role of new media tools in social movements (Bennett 2003). Traditional media continue to play a critical role in defining, framing, and narrating dissent. There exists a reciprocal relationship between legacy media, mobile and networked media, and social movements, where each has a shaping role on the cognitions, attitudes and behaviors of the others. This ecological view of mediated dissent posits that 'old' and 'new' media work in concert as movements emerge, climax, and fade in particular cultural contexts:

> Social networking and other forms of Internet-based communication may provide new means to participate, new styles of protest and new ways to mobilize support, but they cannot fully relocate the mediated politics of dissent away from mass media news platforms. All political actors are now present in both the 'old' media and what Manuel Castells calls 'networks of mass self-communication,' and all undoubtedly will continue seeking to find bridges between the two. (Cottle and Lester 2011, 291)

The world of social movements and dissent seems to be changing with those bridges. That is because recent social movements "both draw upon and also challenge the socio-technical properties of the new media" (Loader 2008, 1921).

The formative features of social movements can be conceptualized in terms of five key elements. Movements tend to be collective efforts to challenge or defend some existing cultural, political, or economic authority. They are somewhat organized, in the sense that they usually include informal networks with shared beliefs and some solidarity. Movements tend to be sustained over time, although activities and participation may ebb and flow. Most social movement research emphasizes non-institutional means of mobilization and protest. It is further important to emphasize the fluidity of contemporary social movements in terms of membership, tactics, structure, and aims (Della Porta and Diani 1999; Snow and Soule 2009).

Mediatization (Hjarvard 2013) supports the features of social movements, in terms of both mobilization and media coverage. In the context of our lives as lived in media (Deuze 2012), it can be said of social movements that if they do not make it into media, then they do not really exist. When movement participants engage with newer media as part of their strategies and tactics, could this media use instantiate different social movement dynamics?

Recently, various social movements have emerged with characteristics that are out of sync with dominant social movement theory. These characteristics include: no clear hierarchy with often multiple (and varying) crowd-sourced leaders; no clearly defined demands or goals; no clear nation-based ideological framing; no coherent collective identities based on national politics; diversity and heterogeneity within an already fluid group; and, last but not least, a heightened role for emotions and identity dynamics. Moreover, all of these characteristics find expression in the kind of media such movements tend to use: generally mobile, networked, remixed personal media (next to, and at times instead of, mass media).

Walgrave's (1998, 2001) trenchant analysis of the Belgian White Movement may have set the stage for discussions about movements that start off as emotional movements only to become more instrumental and conventional later on, a pattern that seems prevalent today. Emotions have long been important for understanding social movements, but emotions have not been the target of much research on social movements, perhaps because of the difficulties with obtaining measurements and conducting analyses. Emotions are not only tough to operationalize, they are challenging for movement participants to talk about as well. Fortunati (2009) wonders whether this oversight in the social sciences has made the way in which people, media, and society are analyzed seem to be without a heart. She advocates for an increase in the investigation of (electronic) emotion.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there is a surge in research into affect theory since emotions are increasingly being considered as an important purpose of social movements, even as a key reason for their existence or maintenance (Polletta and Amenta 2001). People often participate in movements in order to meet affective and emotional needs that cannot easily be fulfilled elsewhere. Social networks, important catalysts or even requirements for collective action, are themselves built on affective bonds (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001). In other words, people join a network because it makes them feel good. These affective ties hold the network together, paving the way for group action (Ibid.). Feelings for a group can make participation itself pleasurable and meaningful, even if separate from the movement's aims. It is through emotions, then, that people can potentially discover their capacity for collective action.

Emotions may be the main reason people participate in movements in the first place, which in turn makes the kinds of dissent recently witnessed around the world—whether it is the Arab Spring, UK riots, street protests in Brazil, or the Tea Party Movement—harder to classify along earlier lines.

The link between contemporary media, new social movements, *glocalized* forms of dissent, and emotional immersion as a catalyst is further explored by Jodi Dean. In her article 'Affective networks' she maintains that people's use of social media, like Twitter and Facebook, constitutes an affective network, eliciting feelings of community. Dean writes:

> Affect [...] is what accrues from reflexive communication, from communication for its own sake, from the endless circular movement of commenting, adding notes and links, bringing in new friends and followers, layering and interconnecting myriad communications platforms and devices [...] Every little tweet or comment, every forwarded image or petition, accrues a tiny affective nugget, a little surplus enjoyment, a smidgen of attention that attaches to it, making it stand out from the larger flow before it blends back in. (2010, 21)

According to Dean, these affective attachments to media are not enough to produce actual communities, but the feeling of community matters since they enable mediated relationships that can take a variety of evolving, interconnected forms.

Could these new mediated emotions catalyze collective actions? Papacharissi and Oliveira (2011) argue for the importance of understanding affect in media use during contemporary social movements. Using centering resonance analysis and discourse analysis, the authors analyzed storytelling forms on Twitter for a period of time during the Arab Spring. Based on their findings, they characterize Twitter feeds during the Arab Spring as affective news streams, since they "blend opinion, fact, and emotion into expressions uttered in anticipation of events that have not yet been reported in mainstream media" (Papacharissi and Oliveira 2011, 24). Such affective news streams sustain and nurture affective involvement, connection, cohesion, and awareness. This is especially relevant, the authors suggest, in authoritarian regimes where speech is heavily controlled. In such oppressive contexts, these affective statements in social media can become political statements and a challenge to authorities (Papacharissi and Oliveira 2011).

The idea that aggrieved groups, brought together by shared, mediated emotions yet lacking substantive plans for social change might occupy the streets, infuriates some observers. In an opinion for the *New York Times*, columnist David Brooks (2012) responded to the viral YouTube video, 'Why I Hate Religion But Love Jesus.' Brooks used the performance art video as a window to explore the state of youth activism, protest forms, and social change. He argues that ill-informed, media-saturated youth lack the

historical knowledge, contextual understanding, and well-laid, directed plans to carry out social change. He opines: "If you go out there armed only with your own observations and sentiments, you will surely find yourself on very weak ground." Yet, armed with just those mediated sentiments, people around the world seem to be discovering a momentum for collective action. They are strangers who meet to become a fluid 'we' in media. Powered by these affective ties, social movement dynamics, including knowledge building and sharing, can and do emerge. Perhaps some are just not comfortable with this order or, rather, disorder. The unruly nature of these affective ecologies bypasses the scripts, standards, and protocols of news industries, political parties, and social institutions. Their post-gender qualities (dynamically combining feminine elements of inclusivity and exchange with more masculine characteristics of confrontation and aggression) also escape carefully established ways of sense-making processes. Perhaps the newer forms of dissent, in conjunction with charged emotions and social media, are indeed as irreducible as zombies are.

It may be too reductive to label the recent collective actions throughout the Middle East, Northern Africa, Latin America and the United States as media-fueled emotional movements. There is no mistaking the triggering, expressing, and sharing of emotion that newer media, and social media in particular, have allowed in these contexts. This circulation of affect (Dean 2010) in media, intense and alluring as it is for people, is ripe for cultural analysis. And perhaps we need some unreason to really make sense of the cases before us.

Contemporary media and dissent

Scholars in a number of disciplines investigating the relationships between new social movements, dissent, and newer networked media tend to pitch their intellectual tents in one of two camps. Some argue that media have had a significant impact on social movements' successes or failures (Castells 2007; Shirky 2008; Allagui and Keubler 2011; Elseewi 2011; Howard, Agarwal, and Hussain 2011; Segerberg and Bennett 2011; Wall and El Zaheed 2011). Other observers emphasize the social forces responsible for the uprisings and downplay the importance of communication tools (Agre 2002, 2003; Christiansen 2011; Etling, Faris, and Palfrey 2010; Hofheinz 2011; Newsom, Lengel, and Cassara 2011). Still others argue that both of these two perspectives are essential to understanding recent phenomena, somehow suggesting one should move back and forth between the tents in both of the camps (Hara and Huang 2010; Aouragh and Alexander 2011; Shklovski and Kotamraju

2011). Interestingly, all authors (even those who call for a more holistic approach) view these two entities as separate in their discussions of social media and social change. This has implications for what kinds of questions investigators ask and what types of findings they achieve. By sidestepping this distinction and, by instead seeing media as both technological and emotional infrastructures that reveal the motivations and actions of the people and institutions using them, researchers can begin to observe and analyze the circulating intensities that instantiate current social movements.

By observing and analyzing the use of social media tools in recent social movements in this way, it becomes clear that social media are extremely versatile tools put to use in multiple ways by different groups of protesters and governments; there is not only one single use or result of Twitter-use in protest events. Social forces and technical forces are intertwined. Technical forces are social forces that have been fixed through a decision-making process for a certain time period into a non-biological infrastructure. They are decisions with lasting impact. Social forces are constantly changing with fluctuations in the local ecosystem. This is a new advantage for observers and analysts of human behavior. When a tool can be used in multiple ways to achieve a wide variety of different outcomes, one can look at the way the tool is used and the resulting outcome to identify the user's intentions and ambitions. Social media tools today help make protester's actions, motivations and expressions more visible on a global scale which can be benfitial in a way that was not possible before.

For example, news media in the United States became transfixed by the protests that broke out after the 2009 Iranian elections. They broadcasted updates continuously despite the limited access Western journalists had to events on the street. Because of this limited access, news outlets became very dependent on the information generated by Iranians. The BBC's Persian-language television channel reported receiving about five videos a minute from amateurs, even though the channel was blocked within Iran and 4,000 emails and hundreds of phone calls a day (Landler and Stelter 2009). Along with this information, news outlets turned to Twitter for information including images and video along with eyewitness accounts of events on the streets. On 16 June CNN's Wolf Blitzer and Abbi Tatton used conversations on Twitter to help them construct a view of what was unfolding on the ground in Iran (Tatton 2009). In a similar case, a BBC web article also embedded user generated video footage of a man wounded after the Revolutionary Guard fired shots on the streets of Tehran (BBC News 2011). Perhaps the most frequently circulated story from the Iranian protests plays out in a video of an Iranian woman named Neda Agha-Soltan, dying after being shot while

walking with her singing instructor on the street. A bystander caught her death on video and posted it to the internet. This video became the source of much inspiration for Moussavi supporters in Iran and around the world (Fathi 2009). The video link was distributed frequently through Twitter.

Moreover, the United States government asked the CEO of Twitter to leave its service up in Iran during the 2009 protests when it was scheduled to be taken down for regular service maintenance (Landler and Stelter 2009). This was an explicit diplomatic move on the part of the United States government who was acting out politically against its enemy, the incumbent Ahmadinejad regime, by securing the communication tools of the anti-government protesters on the streets in Iran.

On the other hand, the United States government went so far as to arrest Elliot Madison, a protester who was tweeting the location of police blockades in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania during the 2009 G-20 Summit protests just a few months later (Goodman 2009). In the G-20 Summit protests, the use of Twitter by protesters was altogether different. In Iran, Twitter was used primarily to get information out to Western journalistic outlets, as evidenced by the small number of Twitter users in Iran at the time and the large number of tweets in English instead of Farsi. At the 2009 G-20, Twitter was used by protesters to avoid the police in the streets. Elliot Madison was one of these protesters. When he was arrested, he was in a hotel room that was raided by a brigade of armed police officers. His charges were for hindering apprehension or prosecution, criminal use of a communication facility, and possession of instruments of a crime. Eventually all of these charges were dropped (DMLP 2010). It was intended he be used as an example of what protesters should not do.

These apparently contradictory moves show that the Obama administration's actual goals were not to secure the freedom of speech of Iranian citizens, as it was claimed (Landler and Stelter 2009), nor to stop violence in the streets of Pittsburgh (Singel 2009). Instead, the United States government was trying to gain some leverage over its international adversaries and suppress dissent at home. The governments' actions can also be considered to be attempts to extend this control over communication channels and information flows across media.

An additional affordance made possible by the new socio-technical arrangements of today, is that people who are not geographically located where the protests are taking place can still participate in the protest events. In effect, these online protest participants are providing resources in the currency of emotional support, interest and sympathy. These are invaluable resources that help motivate the physical participants to keep fighting even when it seems that they might not achieve their goals. In this way, new

communication tools and the socio-technical arrangements in which they are embedded provide ways for people to participate in protest events from a distance—their non-presence becomes a significant (and sustaining) element of the social movement. Online participants help those on the ground circumvent firewalls. They re-tweet, forward and share information from protesters on the ground with their social networks. They learn about police brutality and express sympathy on personal forums such as Facebook and Twitter newsfeeds. All of these actions contribute to the multi-faceted form of today's social movements. Two essential components, however, can be identified. One is geographic and offline, the other is online and virtual. One cannot exist without the other. Mediated participation fuels motivation and determines the functional potential of the geographically located protests. That the online component is essential to today's movements is understood by the autocratic regimes outlined above. In efforts to suppress and dissolve the movements, there was an attempt to curtail communications via the internet and/or SMS by taking down infrastructure and/or content.

These ever-changing circulating intensities are now visible and recorded for observers of human behavior in new ways. The channels of information flow—the infrastructure and how messages travel—shed light on how human power struggles play out. Today, we can see the utilization of social structures more visibly, which can have implications for future outcomes of protest events and social power struggles between governments and dissenters in the connected world.

Conclusion and discussion

Although turning to media in moments of social upheaval and unrest is not a new phenomenon, the traits of today's media technologies and the social arrangements that have emerged in conjunction with our media provide new channels through which to witness, participate in and take responsibility for today's social movements. Social movements both shape and reflect qualities of the media that are used to motivate and sustain them. Just as our media can be seen as neither dead nor alive—as neither the internet, nor our cell phones or what we do with them determines our lives, yet at the same time our lives have become quite unimaginable without them—contemporary forms of mass protest for social change feel like zombie movements. There are—or seem to be—no leaders, no hierarchies, few or no particular individuals running the show, even though there definitely seems to be a show taking place. This mediatized aspect

of public (and, to some extent, private) life is paramount, tending to make forms of social protest more about the disruption of social order in and of itself rather than the achievement of some clear goal beyond it. Sherry Turkle (2011) is among those warning that our emotional life is becoming increasingly performative and controlled by the influence of technology. Media may act as amplifiers and accelerators of affect in the context of new social movements, and in the process also act to amplify the playful aspects of participation, such as the at times non-seriousness of joining in, the 'slacktivism' inherent in participating online only, and the gaming of the telecommunication system.

The protesters, as a relatively amorphous and generally temporary collective, seem pretty good at tearing things down—yet tend to be less than effective at building anything anew. Instead of capitalism's central tenet of creative destruction, we observe a purposeless passion at work—signaled as a crucial quality of the multitude by Virno (2004), engaged as we are in production time without producing anything (analogous with Marx's concept of activity-without-end-product). Similarly, the performativity of means-over-ends focused engagement can be seen as a playful act of citizenship. Raw emotions drive these new movements, locally spurred on by viral forms of engagement from anywhere on the planet. The good, bad and the ugly become visible in power negotiations like never before—we can see each other (trying to) live. Next to mass media reporting hastily (and somewhat grudgingly) on outbreaks all over the world, a new system of communicative practices emerges, based on peer-to-peer connectivity and a phatic digital culture (Miller 2008) consisting of small communicative gestures that are distinctly social and produce communal forms, but are generally not intended to transmit substantial information. Most importantly for scholars, new socio-technical configurations represent new lenses with which to observe human activity, forcing us to question age-old assumptions about (possibly false) dichotomies between engagement and apathy, participation and witnessing, production and consumption—and indeed between affect and effect in processes of (mediated) social change. The zombie, both as an analogy and a metaphor, is a helpful conceptual tool to question such categories. In media, there is a new visibility of everyone's actions (Thompson 2005), both among the powerful and the powerless. This emerging struggle to publish and publicize our lives makes socio-technical configurations the new artifacts that reflect our current social state at this point in time, providing a new object for media studies.

It is impossible to generalize about the transformative role of new media in dissent around the world. What we can analyze and discuss, though,

are fissures in power and why particular groups of people in particular contexts seem to discover and widen those cracks. As we have discussed, this is ultimately not just a story about social life but about media life (Deuze 2012), about mediated outbursts of anger, fear, hope, play, courage, sacrifice, and creativity.

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