

invisible machines: collective action through digital space

a thesis

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“...any thorough study of political phenomena must be rigorously interdisciplinary. This comprises part of the allure of assemblages, since they can be employed to develop concrete relations between academically separated phenomena, without subsuming them under a single all-determining logic or field of study (sociobiology, and its reduction of the social to evolution, is perhaps the most extreme case of this recently). This means that part of the difficulty of interdisciplinary work is in establishing ‘bridge concepts’ that can connect disparate fields while retaining their heterogeneity. In other words, theory itself must become an assemblage.”

--Nick Srnicek “Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze” [unpublished thesis] 2007 p. 85 footnote 207

dedication

To the memory of Perez Zagorin

acknowledgements

This thesis involved a lot of learning on my part, and a lot of teaching on the part of others. Foremost in this regard was Dr. Michael Heaney, who introduced me to many of the core concepts used in this work and who agreed to supervise my independent study used to prepare for the writing of this thesis. That theoretical socialization focused on three authors without whom much of this thesis would lack grounding; Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam and Charles Tilly. However, the critical concepts used derive in large part from Gilles Deleuze, and in that respect the work of Manuel De Landa, Graham Harman and Nick Srnicek played a vital role both in elucidating difficult concepts and demonstrating their application in particular disciplinary contexts. Ian Buchanan was also enormously helpful in patiently explaining some of the more difficult concepts. Furthermore, I am grateful to Desaix and Buford Anderson for helping me better understand some of the local contexts for the Zapatista movement in Mexico, and how that movement is understood in Mexico today. CC Huang and Cheewoo Kim were instrumental in helping me learn about the situation in South Korea in 2008, and CC also directed me to the text *Digital Activism Decoded*, which has proven an invaluable resource. I am also indebted to thank Parker Cronin and Michael Bloom for providing key feedback on the text itself. My thesis advisors, Laura Ruetsche and Thom Chivens, have been extremely patient in serving as official readers, defense supervisors and providing feedback during the writing process. This thesis would not have been possible without them, as with the support of David Smith, Donna Wessel-Walker and Sara Buss, who allowed me to pursue this in fulfillment of both Philosophy and International Affairs concentrations, and are to be commended for recognizing the value of interdisciplinary scholarship.

introduction

What is a social movement? How does a social movement come to be? How does a social movement influence institutions? Why do social movements, forming in different parts of the world and out of different cultures, appear to use similar tactics? Do social movements use issues to advance the empowerment of their members, or do individuals become empowered through social movements to affect issues that affect their interests? How do social movements respond to political repression? How do they use media and available social technologies to claim legitimacy?¹

These questions demonstrate some of the profound ambiguities intrinsic to the theorizing of collective social entities, questions that begin to sprout up with disturbing persistence after one insists upon a frame of analysis that privileges the empiricism of embodied experience; that accounts for affect, ephemerality and emergence. Does it make sense to talk about a social movement as having agency, possessing wants, desires and goals? How can we speak of political agency in a collective sense? Here I will argue that such questions may productively arise from a prior challenge to the metaphysical assumption of essentially homogenous social units, an assumption which is a necessary requirement for universal notions of objective data in a great deal of social science research. This smooth and featureless social unit frequently grounds the model-based approach to social systems, and enframes the process of generating hypotheses and specifying the experimental conditions under which researchers become entitled to draw definitive conclusions. Yet what justifications for this homogenous metric do we truly have? Are there any empirical features of social space that suggests it can and should be understood

¹ In search for a fitting way to begin this thesis, I plugged in the search terms ‘questions about social movements’ into the search engine Google and found a post attributed to the social movement scholar Fabio Rojas called “a list of problems in social movement theory” from which these questions are generated. See the full post on [orgtheory,2006](http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2006/09/08/a-list-of-problems-in-social-movement-theory/)
<http://orgtheory.wordpress.com/2006/09/08/a-list-of-problems-in-social-movement-theory/>

through the metrical logic of grid-think?² In spite of the homogenous blank unit's hegemony within social science research, there are many good reasons to be suspicious of this presumed metaphysics of same-ness. One needs no arcane instruments or equations in order to observe a surprising degree of variance in social reality, embedded in diverse local contexts and specified moment by moment through the non-linear spider web of multi-valent causation. A cursory glance through the basic fieldwork on evolved cultural practices around the world suggests that in fact *difference* may be more appropriate basic assumption operative principle than that of a universe populated by unitary static identities that seems to underlie the creation and manipulation of these homogenous units of analysis.

Social science's grid-think and the application of metrical conceptual technology to social systems should not deserve insulation from critical scrutiny simply because of its long methodological history, the grand accumulation of studies and citations. The conceptual laboratory approach towards social systems itself has never been adequately justified. It is as if modernist social scientists have formed some compact to pretend that there are no significant differences between evolved social systems and say, mitochondria, or hydrology. As if social systems were insular closed circuits that in no way co-inform the way that they are understood from a theoretical perspective even as theoreticians attempt to work against (or don't) the influence of how certain arrangements of power seem to *want* to be understood. There is no *natural* logic of fitting units to categories, or categories to one another, because there is, at base, no such thing as *social nature*. Only contingent iterations of material relations. Social scientists has been searching for a fantasy world of static knowable objects conforming to totalizing theories of social nature, and in doing so they have created this fantasy world for themselves. The history of scientific mis-steps is littered with the over-eager application of assumed theoretical principles to local contexts where they met with either hubristic catastrophe or

² for a greater examination of the evolution of contemporary grid-think and its relation to violence in modern epistemology see Rey Chow "The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work" Duke University Press, 2006

endless tinkering to no great end. Western philosophy itself has not fared much better. As Graham Harman observes:

The world resists our efforts even as it welcomes them. Even a system of metaphysics is the lengthy result of negotiations with the world, not a triumphant deductive overlord who tramples the details of the world to dust. The labour of fitting one concept to another obsesses a Kant or Husserl for decades, and even then the polished final product will be riddled with errors detectible by a novice.³

The machine of theory-creation for social sciences seems to be in trouble. It seems like we've raised the bar to impossible heights: one must simultaneously presuppose some notional expectation of the behavior dictated by underlying properties *without* scripting reality according to some highly appealing and universally applicable schema composed of homogenous units of analysis. These Ptolemaic rotations drawn first and only in our imaginaries of false mastery to simplify reality to our liking will inexorably fragment into ever-tangled epicycles, escaping our grasp and finally bursting like soap bubbles. The world is more complex than a Newtonian mechanism; the universe of culture exponentially more so. Our experience of highly complex and internally variant social systems should make us highly skeptical at the outset of assuming that a mereology of homogeneity (where the assumed sameness of the parts is axiomatically generalized to the social whole) can adequately represent the chaotic becomings of any collective social assemblage. There is no grand 'social' as such, merely an aggregate of the local.

In this thesis, I shall seek to explore the multiplex dynamics of groups of people who engage in political activity digitally, through the communications technology that grounds the internet, often at great distances from one another. However, at a very fundamental level I am still talking about groups of people, and the properties that emerge from the complexity of these groups. The social distance between two lovers divided by the Pacific Ocean may be significantly smaller than the social distance between two reclusive neighbors sharing the same apartment building,

³ Graham Harman "“Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics”", re.press, 2009 p. 22

or two students at the same school. We perhaps have grown used to thinking about groups of people in a particular way that artificially generalize ascribed qualities of individuals to macrosocial behavior, when in fact the behavior of groups may be radically *internally* distinct. In other words, our grammar for collective entities is the same of individual people, allowing us to attribute a singular consistent subjectivity to the group or organization, syntactically suspending our disbelief that “it” somehow possesses needs, wants and desires (“the Party wants this”, “the Corporation desires that”, “the People require” and so on). This grammar insinuates an odd mereological disjunct by appearing to suggest that the Group is somehow separate and free-floating from its constituents, as if understanding groups as social units necessarily entails understanding them as unified, and internally homogenous.

In many cases, there may be good ideological reasons for creating this conceptual distance between collectivity and constituent, particularly when what “the People want” is in fact only what certain elites want and what most people might happen to want is dangerous to the stability of controlling interests. As Slavoj Žižek has noted, this is the paradigmatic mode of Stalinist propaganda, and became a rhetorical means of coopting the revolutionary democratic potential of the Leninist revolution for the bureaucratic totalitarian form of the consolidated Soviet state. However, it is by no means unique to that historical period, and in fact seems to be historically evolved from the arrangements of medieval feudalism after which, as Žižek argues, the notion of Good becomes an ideological stand-in for the subjectification of the State: “...Good ... assumes the form of subjectivity: instead of the substantial State, we obtain the Monarch who is able to say ‘l’Etat, c’est moi.’”⁴ Because Good functions as an absolute, the relation it constructs between the social subjects of a given state is one of inexorable bound-ness without political agency; like it or not, subjects of the Monarch become *who we are*. Žižek identifies words like “God”, “the Nation”, “the People” and so on as “master signifiers” in the structuralist sense, by which he means that they don’t really refer to anything tangible that can be

⁴ Slavoj Žižek *The Sublime Object of Ideology* Verso; 1989, p.210

experiences as itself, and thus come to function as the point in a social order where the operation of ideology becomes most bare.

However, one need not rely on structuralist analysis (or a Lacanian understanding of the subject) to see that there is something about our vocabulary for collectivities that conceals the internal pluralism for any social formation even as it seeks to reveal an external unit in play with other macro-scale social formations. These group identities can also be understood through the lens of what Gilles Deleuze refers to as “transcendent signifiers”; understood as supra-organisms or and framed in a language of modern idolatry which is already willing to axiomatically sacrifice on its behalf (“in the name of God, Nation, Father”, “to preserve freedom”, “to secure the peace,” “for the greater good.”) The axioms surrounding collectivities come to function as unspoken Zizekian absolutes, but insinuated at a much more mundane level that ground the very conditions of possibility for social action. For it is a much-observed historical fact that once one has accepted certain axioms as *necessary*, one can draw almost any conclusion from them, since they have become reasons in themselves. Anti-state Leninism becomes statist Stalinism, anti-elitist Christianity becomes the Catholic Church’s indulgences, anti-taxation American revolutionaries becomes the IRS and so on. The formation of social organisms as “wholes” or constellated through units is both a form of rhetorical tyranny and a way of romanticizing the calculation to organize collectively. The formula of axioms is less important than that they can be properly inculcated and disseminated, to function at a level so basic that they are essentially *no longer up for debate*. Rationality can only be internally established within a particular set of axioms, but after that in only relates extrinsically to different registers of axioms both social and physical. As Deleuze has argued, this is how such signifiers function to underlie many other collective orders:

Every society is at once rational and irrational. They are necessarily rational in their mechanisms, their gears and wheels, their systems of connection, and even by virtue of the place they assign to the irrational. All this presupposes, however, codes or axioms which do not result by chance, but which do not have an intrinsic rationality either. It's just like

theology: everything about it is quite rational if you accept sin, the immaculate conception, and the incarnation.⁵

The creation and manipulation of units of collectivity that grammatically operate as subjects can be understood as a part and parcel of a larger project of nested sense-making, populating a conceptual world with knowable objects that obey particular rules . No rationality can be intrinsic, it must function in relation to some external arrangement of motivations, whether physical or social. The move here follows the an implicit ideological tradition in the West from medieval times; the goals and needs of a social group (say, for example, a social movement) are determined by the leaders, who also act as the voice of the group in relating the subjective preferences of the holized collectivity. Social movements become organismic in the sense that their constituents are made into organs; some assuming the roles of the passive sensorium (looking, listening; gathering data, collecting intelligence), while others form the active physical components of the musculature (the “leg-work”; striking, collecting signatures, participating in direct action) and those that assume the privileged position of the *cogito* are named the leaders and are responsible for making decisions, expressing preferences, allocating resources and so on. They become the name of the movement in the same way that our identity (the ‘I’) is associated much more powerfully with our conscious states, wants and desires than our eyes, ears, noses and muscles. The subtle grammar of totalitarianism is at work here, constructing a series of implicit axioms, of *absolutes that bind* individuals to a total unit, and yet simultaneously stir the passions of individuals to feel as though they share an unquestionable common purpose in ways that perhaps would be otherwise unachievable.

Applying the critical concepts of both social theory and metaphysics should thus not be understood as fatty verbiage, but rather as the crucial methodological work necessary to understand the limitations that scholars ought pragmatically adopt when establishing the units and selection criteria of doing social research. Questions of what can be said to exist (in what

⁵ Gilles Deleuze “Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953-1974” *Semiotext(e)*, 2004 p. 261-263

sense do groups “exist”, in what sense are they merely the expression of some axiom unjustifiably presupposed?) are the lenses through which we audit the social field; they provide selection criteria that allow us to form blocs of sensible objects out of streams of raw data, parsing and establishing elements of the world nested within and between one another. Through the juxtapositional pairing of theoretical concepts with particular cases of collective action, I hope to illuminate substantive counterinstances to dominant theoretical paradigms with the goal of elucidating a frame of analysis that is itself opposed to the very concept of a metrical social unit. Instead, I will argue that a truly empirical frame of analysis ought to view group dynamics simultaneously at multiple levels of detail through an ontology of process rather than definition, asking “what does it do?” and “how does it work?” instead of “what is it?”. Drawing on the work on emergent ontological forms of Gilles Deleuze and Bruno Latour primarily via scholars such as Graham Harman, Nick Srnicek and Manuel De Landa, I shall seek to sketch an approach to theorizing digital collective action which will attempt to undermine the illusion of a singular, unified and autonomous social whole by exposing every unit as an assemblage of constituents, which nevertheless exceeds the sum of its parts in surprising and often unpredictable ways.

There are several key concepts which I will draw on throughout this text which I would like to describe here as best I can, though a great deal of literature exists investigating many of the theoretical underpinnings of these terms which I will not directly engage. First, is the notion in Deleuze’s writing of an *abstract machine*. Deleuze borrows this term from automata theory, where it refers to the theoretical model of a computational device processing strings of symbols through a particular sorting mechanism. Abstract machines are a way of understanding flow, or the processual movement between finite states by way of deterministic criteria. For example, you can imagine a string of random numbers sorted by an abstract machine that separated odd numbers from even numbers. However, for Deleuze, the determinism of the empirical abstract machines are limited by nonspecified space, determined ad hoc or by pure chance. In other

words, abstract machines are almost never as wholly deterministic as the odd/even sorter, but break down and make mistakes just as much anything else. The order of the machine's process is itself captured from the chaotic raw material of pure immanence in the same way that a system of axioms captures a series of rational relations from the terrain of the irrational. In this relationship, the abstract machine functions to determine an immanent code from a material virtual space into a material actual space, in the same way that syntactical concepts evolve within and through conjunction with actual uses of grammar (Where did "ain't" come from? and how did it exist outside of "proper language" even as it continued to thrive for so long?), or the relations between enumerated objects are preceded by the mathematical relations between numbers (The way in which "two cats" is preceded by the concept of "two-ness" which makes the conjunction legible). One may think of an abstract machine as similar to a blueprint for a building, which is then actualized through specific decisions which are left to the builders and construction crew, and includes nonspecified space (e.g. the color of paint for the interior walls, the choice of quarry for the stones) which are progressively specified as the building is completed. The process of the abstract machine is specified in advance, but the result is contingent on any number of factors left to chance. The system as a whole is both deterministic and chaotic, specified and nonmetric.

The second key concept is the Deleuzian concept of the assemblage.⁶ An assemblage is a combination of elements themselves of heterogeneous origin and composition, which form a super-structure which is not a totality. We may think of social entities as such formations, formed through the flows of matter and energy through lengths of historical time in nonlinear combinations. Assemblages are united, but are not unities and can be distinguished as parts or wholes with respect to the level of detail at which one chooses to analyze them. Thus,

⁶ See especially Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society* (London: Continuum, 2006). It is interesting to note that Deleuze and Guattari's original term was 'agencement' which roughly translates to 'layout' or 'scheme', but also includes the suggestion of agency immanent to the arrangement itself, rather than localized around any particular point. see John Phillips "Agencement/Assemblage" in *Theory, Culture & Society* May 2006 vol. 23 no. 2-3 108-109

assemblages can both be said to always have existed with respect to substance, but never have existed with respect to essence. Their existence at a given time is of less interest than their movement between ranges of times, the ways in which they grow and shrink, evolve and become seemingly new while maintaining many of their previous characteristics. One may thus say that every sort of entity is at once an assemblage, composed of assemblages, part of a larger assemblage. Thus, the term ought to be understood as highly generic, and is useful insofar as it carries virtually no mereological baggage in terms of presumed hierarchy in part-whole relations. In other words, it has predominantly negative characteristics, rather than positive properties, relative to the dominant grammar of collectivities.

The third key concept is the actant, furnished by sociologist Bruno Latour. Consider the actant as a void unit of agency, not tied to human consciousness or privileging a particular material locus or subjectivity. The notion of actant is almost entirely empty, since it simply implies that the referent described possessed the potential to affect the process and/or outcome of a movement of material within its local context, wherein power/knowledge is always already networked. To say that an actant ‘caused’ something is to assume that there were already many other causes, since the social space of the actant is already collective. The utility of an actant is in describing the power of an entity to affect the material and ontological conditions of other actants. Unlike an actor or organization or institution, an actant does not possess abstract properties which are concretized in local instantiations, but exists as a singularity in the passage of spacetime, irreducible beyond its concrete contexts of space and place. Actants are ontologically local, and cease to be themselves once removed from space, time and contextual relations to other actants. The transient nature of indexical properties (we are forever passing through ‘now’, forever leaving the familiar ‘here’) mean that actants cannot be said to ontologically endure in any meaningful way, since their identity is embedded within a continuum of persistent change.

I will make use of these methodological concepts in the process of investigating the explosive social action that took place in South Korea in 2008 following the negotiation of a trade agreement with the United States that contained a provision allowing for the shipment to South Korea of beef which had been preserved for a longer time period than American health officials deemed “safe” for consumption. Appearing to have been sparked primarily over fears of contaminated beef and the possible outbreak of “mad cow disease” (bovine spongiform encephalopathy), the scope of the protests confounded Western media, by some estimates reaching numbers unprecedented in recent South Korean history and shutting down the nation’s major urban economies, forcing the government to capitulate. While on the surface, this episode may appear to conform to classical dynamics of social movement theory, insofar as it featured many flesh-and-blood South Koreans protesting in the streets, I will argue that in fact this collective action, which was predominantly organized and disseminated through on-line forums, represents the actualization of a new abstract machine of organizing under-girded by the power of digital social networks, and where the old categories of affiliation, membership and shared purpose no longer apply.

Social movements constellated within digital political ecologies provide a critique of these metaphysical presumptions in the mere facts of their existence, the mode of their operation. Social movements that emerged within and through digital space are fundamentally distinct assemblages from the classical model of social movement. Their members may never have met or even explicitly communicated with one another. Their members may not even identify as members, but rather may take actions expressing solidarity with particular demands or against particular situations. Individuals may be embedded within the concept of the group only in the moment of their action; sending or forwarding an email, re-posting a link, expressing approval or outrage through online comments, or even “voting with fingers” to increase the visibility of specific issues or causes merely by viewing a site or news item. Viewed through this lens, a “social movement” when articulated digitally may bear so little resemblance to the classic object

of theoretical analysis described by Doug McAdam or Scott Tarrow, and that using the same term for both may only add confusion and prevent hamstringing productive discussion about on-the-ground tactics.

However, we must resist the temptation to fetishize the novel *as entirely new*, or what in the context of nuclear technology Gabriel Hecht has referred to as “rupture-talk”. According to Hecht, the technology and the “nuclear age” that it inaugurated have been pervasively described through a perceived rupture with the past; “During those first decades of Cold War, the only consensus in public debates was that, for better or worse, nuclear technology had changed the world forever.”⁷ Hecht goes on to attribute this discursive framing of nuclear issues in Western policy discussions as situated through the perspective self-understood global supremacy that was then being undermined first by advancing decolonization movements in Asia and Africa and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a perceived ideological opponent to traditional power relations of social status and labor. “Rupture-talk” over nuclear weapons was therefore a framing not of the nuclear technology itself, but an expression of anxiety over re-structuring of geopolitics which superficially reduced the hegemony and control of the traditional colonial powers. It was also, Hecht argues, a process of cultural amnesia by which the West was able to distance itself from the horrors of its colonial past, while simultaneously render invisible the colonial arrangements of uranium extraction in West Africa and in the United States on indigenous lands, and the testing of nuclear explosives on indigenous lands globally. There is a similar temptation to use rupture-talk in describing the ways in which digital technology has enabled new modes of dissent. However, this rupture-talk already presumes the perspective of a manager deeply invested in the power relations of the status quo, which identifies a “rupture” with the past through anxiety about whether or not digital social space has made traditional edifices of power obsolete. In other words, to say that “digital technology has changed

⁷ Gabrielle Hecht, “Rupture-Talk in the Nuclear Age: Conjugating Colonial Power in Africa” *Social Studies of Science* 32/5–6(October–December 2002) 691–727
<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~hechtg/articles/rupture-talk.pdf>

everything” to some degree presupposes certain valences of managerial anxiety about fluctuations in social space, while simultaneously obscuring the persistence of violent power relations that digital technology has not up-ended.

Witness the rupture-talk, for example, following the use of Twitter as a forum for dissent during the social upheavals in Iran in 2009, heralding a “revolution” in the country, and Twitter as the new “medium of a movement”.⁸ The event has even been dubbed “the Twitter Revolution” in the American media. The internet, brought to oppressed peoples of the world by American military know how, has finally outwitted those fearsome mullahs! The Western media’s fetishistic focus on the technical novelty of social networking in a political context even provoked some low-key chiding, as the causes of the defeated protestors were soon forgotten, while Twitter was carried off for yet another victory lap in the self-congratulatory consciousness’ of editorialists and media critics.⁹ One former Bush aide even suggested awarding Twitter the Nobel Peace prize.¹⁰ It is not difficult to see how such a techno-fetishism betrays exactly the sort of smug hubris of rupture-talk that makes those who are its objects uncomfortable. As Hamid Tehrani, an Iranian blogger wrote: "The west was focused not on the Iranian people but on the role of western technology. Twitter was important in publicising what was happening, but its role was overemphasised."¹¹

If “Twitter has changed everything” in new democratic social movements in Iran or later in the Arab Spring, then perhaps the West can finally wash its bloody hands of that unpleasant colonial legacy that seems to continually resurface. Or the botched installation of the US-backed Shah in Iran that became a key impetus for the Islamic Revolution. Or the decades-long

⁸ Lev Grossman “Iran Protests: Twitter, the Medium of the Movement” TIME, June 17, 2009
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1905125,00.html#ixzz17wJTETjB>

Washington Times “EDITORIAL: Iran's Twitter revolution” June 16, 2009
<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/16/irans-twitter-revolution/>

⁹ Business Week “Iran's Twitter Revolution? Maybe Not Yet” June 17, 2009
http://www.businessweek.com/technology/content/jun2009/tc20090617_803990.htm

¹⁰ Mark Pfeifle “A Nobel Peace Prize for Twitter?” Christian Science Monitor, June 6, 2009
<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0706/p09s02-coop.html>

¹¹ Matthew Weaver “Iran's 'Twitter revolution' was exaggerated, says editor” The Guardian, June 9, 2010
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jun/09/iran-twitter-revolution-protests>

financial and geopolitical support for the brutally repressive dictators that the Arab Spring was aligned against. These are legacies which the actual digital activists on the ground have not forgotten, which is at least one important reason they are less compelling candidates for the Nobel Peace prize than a Western corporation. From the perspective of a Western social media user, the importance of Twitter and the constant discussion of how innovation is changing social space provides self-evident justification for declaring a “rupture”, which of course the West gets to take a good deal of the credit for. From the perspective an Iranian activist, social media represents perhaps little more than a set of potent new tools in the same struggle, a struggle in which the West is hardly blameless.

This example illustrates the importance of situated cultural frames to social movements, insofar as they provide publics with a way of interpreting and contesting the meaning of social action. Following Irving Goffman pathbreaking work in *Frame Analysis*, theorists such as David Snow et al. have persuasively argued that there is nothing about a particular instance of political oppression, police brutality, publicized case of corruption and so on that somehow intrinsically begets movement participation, rather social movements are constantly engaging in tactical contests of meaning over the interpretation of grievances which allow them to become politically meaningful. The painstaking construction of over-arching interpretational frameworks is, for Snow et al., co-productive with mobilizing to achieve short-term activist goals as movement participants “...jointly develop rationales for what they are or not doing.”¹²

While there are no deterministic criteria for predicting how the tactical interplay between social movements and authorities will play out in digital space, the notion of a political opportunity structure developed by Peter Eisenger will prove a useful point of departure for understanding confrontations between once-marginal actants working in concerted solidarity

¹² see Gamson, William *Talking Politics* (New York: University of Cambridge Press) 1992
Snow, David, Rochford, E. Burke. Jr. Worden, Steven, Benford, Robert "Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation." *American Sociological Review* 51: 464-481, 1986

against the entrenched interests of powerful elites.¹³ While political opportunity theory does not tell the whole story, we can understand it as functioning on multiple levels of material conditions and inter-subjective perceptions of those conditions in terms of necessity (but not sufficiency) for effective social movement action. I shall devote a significant portion of this text to describing the texture of emergent political opportunity structures in digital space.

In describing the ways in which digital technology has radically altered the *possibility* of contentious politics and collective becomings, I shall attempt to avoid falling into this trap of assuming the perspective of a Westernized control-society bureaucrat, anxious about the future of the nation-state. There are certainly many cases of digital social movements behaving quite similarly to more conventional social movement, as in the case where well-established activist groups create an online presence that reflects and enhances the organizing power for “conventional” collective politics. Grassroots political campaigns such as those organized around the 2008 election of President Barack Obama in the United States illustrate this latter approach perhaps most vividly. However, it is precisely this extreme variance in the emergence, evolution, and praxis of online social movements undermine the viability of theoretical approaches which consider “social movements” as homogenous collective entities defined by essential and ahistorical properties. Terms like “membership”, “participation”, and “shared purpose” mean fundamentally different things for movements that emerged through digital network space, and they come with different individual expectations and collective possibilities. Only by problematizing the assumptions of “social movements” as stable conceptual entities, as well as the theoretical project of social taxonomy writ large that seeks to sort movements into “types”¹⁴ can we avoid the pitfalls of assuming homogeneity at the outset, and thereby begin to articulate fluid theoretical frames that are better able to account for empirical variance.

¹³ David S. Meyer, Protest and Political Opportunities, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 30: 125-145 (Volume publication date August 2004), (doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.30.012703.110545)

¹⁴ “Types” in the same ways that modernist biologists were once inspired by Linnaeus to sort every creature into the conceptual basket provided by a Latin name, arranged on a tree of nested categories, epitomizing Harman’s description of metaphysics as “fitting one concept to another”.

There are particular cases where digital collective action really does present entirely new opportunities for contentious politics, confounding most classical expectations of social movement organizing. I will explore these dynamics through an examination of the on-line guerilla efforts of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), and their use of participatory 'tactical media' to thwart efforts by the Mexican government to assert control over the Chiapas region of Southern Mexico. In the EZLN, we see a hybrid or parallelized form of digital organizing that nevertheless escapes the control of directly involved stakeholders to frame the conflict within localized terms. In particular, this case study will examine the participation of the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT) in organizing electronic acts of civil disobedience against the Mexican and American government websites using the software FloodNet to crash the websites via an electronic "sit-in" in 1998. This case study will also explore the embedded contestation in framing these acts as justified civil resistance to an unjust policy of military intervention on the one hand, and renegade acts of "cyberterrorism" on the other. We will see how even though the EZLN and EDT adopted unconventional technical means in pursuing their goals, that the organizational structure of the movement closely resembles a conventional picture of affiliation, group membership and cohesion of purpose, with a centralized (if anonymous) vanguard leading the way.

Understanding the response of elite media and governmental apparatuses is absolutely crucial to see how the social meaning of these collective actions were contested and continue to be contested as new social movements and develop strategies in the hopes of achieving future victories. The assumption that social movements must act as cohesive, unified social actors with a set list of specific goals must be problematized in light of the empirical evidence surrounding the successes of these digital collective actions where gains were achieved by allowing for fluid experimentation, spontaneous alliances and the accumulation of political will around unforeseen critical masses of dissent.

chapter one: lifecycle of a digital movement, south korea, 2008

In June of 2008, South Korea was unexpectedly plunged into mass social turmoil, following ROK¹⁵ President Lee Myung-Bak's decision to lift the ban on imports of American beef two months earlier. The streets of Seoul were choked with protestors numbering between 100,000 and a million, waving signs, singing songs and holding candlelit vigils. By some estimates, the protests numerically superseded the movement that democratized South Korea in 1987. For over one hundred days, these protestors increasingly brought business as usual to a grinding standstill, obstructing key flows of economic traffic and ratcheting up pressure on the Lee administration to reassess South Korea's economic relationship with the United States. Politicians in the South Korean legislature, known as the Blue House, were unable or unwilling to satisfy the protestors demands until the political mobilization of massive crowds had climbed to a fever pitch in late June, triggering a power struggle in the Blue House and raising profound questions about the future of US-ROK ties. The international media was flummoxed. How could tens of thousands of South Koreans take to the streets over an issue as seemingly arcane and peripheral as the nitty-gritty details of a beef import agreement? In dozens of articles the protests were characterized as an outburst mass hysteria, an irrational reaction to the miniscule risk of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), more commonly referred to as "mad cow disease". Particularly in the US media, South Koreans were portrayed as scientifically ignorant and nationalistically oversensitive to trade agreements with a nation whose troop presence on the border with their Northern neighbor has been a perennial sore spot. In July, the government renegotiated the terms of the trade agreement with additional protections against mad cow disease, and the protests petered out.¹⁶

¹⁵ ROK will be used occasionally in place of "Republic of Korea"

¹⁶ BBC "S Korea-US deal on beef exports" June 21, 2008
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7467035.stm>

This may seem an odd case to begin a text about social movements in digital space. On the surface, this has all the makings of a classical protest, a disorganized crowd of loosely affiliated actants uniting around a common goal. However, beneath this surface veneer, the organizational dynamics of the contention in South Korea in the summer of 2008 prove to be far more complex, deeply integrated within a multivalent social assemblage that was strongly grounded in digital space. In late June of 2008 I traveled to Seoul from Beijing where I had been living with my girlfriend for the summer prior to my third year of college. The trip was a matter of necessity and Seoul was a destination of chance; we were required to leave the country in order to renew our visas, and while we had planned to go Hong Kong there happened to be a discount on plane fare to South Korea on the day we purchased tickets. Upon our arrival, we found the city in the throes of one of the largest mass demonstrations the region has seen in the past half-century. The experience of entering this situation with an almost complete lack of information proved extremely valuable. I had never visited South Korea, nor had I previously studied its political culture or society and thus had few consciously formed preconceptions about what I ought to expect. That summer I had been trying to sell essays to a blog called *Black and White* whose editor was interested in getting stories firsthand from China in the build-up to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. It wasn't difficult to persuade him that the events that were transpiring in Seoul merited coverage. Compared to seasoned journalists covering the issue I was clearly inexperienced, and relative to American commentators who had been analyzing ROK politics for year I was virtually *tabula rasa*. Recognizing these limitations, I resolved to approach the issue with an open mind, to retrieve as much primary evidence as I could, and to thus begin to answer the question that was befuddling American commentators from the Wall Street Journal to National Public Radio. Why had South Koreans chosen to take to the streets *en masse* over the issue of the possible contamination of imported US beef?¹⁷

¹⁷ Parts of this chapter use information and data aggregated in that essay, see Edmund Zagorin "Beef Protests: How Mobile Technology Has Politically Empowered Thousands of South Koreans" *Black and White*, June 27, 2008

The short answer is deceptively simple; the protests were not, in fact, really about beef at all. The street-level demonstrations represented the actualization of a complex virtual social network, organized primarily by South Korean youth in digital space. The perception of the “eruption” of the anti-beef social movement pervasive in the international media had far more to do with the fact the South Korean public’s discomfort with the trade deal had largely been under-reported, creating the perception that it suddenly appeared, as if from nowhere. In fact, tensions had been building for months since immediately after the deal was signed before reaching the multitudinous scales of late June. Before that, negotiations over the US-Korean Free Trade Agreement under the Bush Administration had allowed for the formation of a well-developed anti-trade coalition adept at mobilizing their members and creating provocative media events, albeit with limited political success.¹⁸ While the anti-trade coalition in Korea, largely consisting of unions and social groups representing farmers, was not able to stir public sentiment to the heights that successfully de-mobilized renewed negotiations for the FTA (the fate of which is now seen to largely hang with the political will of the 112th US Congress)¹⁹, it nevertheless stirred the passions of its own members to extreme acts and elicited public sympathy. Consider, for example the initially unsuccessful suicide attempt of the KCTU member Heo Se-wook through self-immolation, which was explicitly connected with the perception of the FTA negotiations as “secretive” and “undemocratic.”²⁰ As the former president of the Korea Institute of International Economic Policy Choong-yong Ahn put it: “[w]hile the absolute numbers of protesters against the deal in Seoul were not very large, the emotional intensity

<http://blackandwhiteprogram.com/report/meat-protest>

¹⁸ Jamie Doucette “Korean Neo-Liberalism and Empire,” Znet, 7/11, 2006

<http://www.zcommunications.org/korean-neo-liberalism-and-empire-by-jamie-doucette>

¹⁹ Yonhap News “Congress urged to expedite process for Korea FTA's ratification” 4/7/2011

<http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2011/04/07/52/0301000000AEN20110407000400315F.HT>
ML

²⁰ see the press release by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions “KCTU union member attempting self-immolation as an act of resistance KORUS FTA!” openpublished on Bilaterals.org, as well as the intended suicide note “Farewell Note by Bro. Heo Se-wook, a union member of KCTU” published at the same location

<http://www.bilaterals.org/spip.php?article7731>

reached its height with the tragic self-immolation of a Seoul taxi driver outside the talk's venue in a Seoul hotel.”²¹ Episodes such as these demonstrate the perception within Korean civil society and of a well-established group of extremely committed stakeholders, nevertheless marginalized and mistreated over the issue of trade.²²

During the few days we spent in Seoul, I had the opportunity to interview one of the protestors, a friend of my girlfriend who had once lived in the US, named Cheewoo Kim. Discussing the evolution of the demonstrations, he urged me to focus on the *process* of its development as more significant than its stated goals, saying:

“You have to look at how these protests began. At the end of April it was just young kids protesting, organized online, worried about bad American beef getting into their school lunches. It gave the government a headache because there was no way to stop them, so they tried to get control through the schools, through the teachers, by punishing kids. Then college kids got involved and then it started getting much bigger.”²³

There are several dynamics in play in Kim's observation. First, the boundaries of the movement appear initially at the divisions between different strata of South Korean society, primarily segmented by age. However, the beginnings of the discussion in terms of school lunches and between students may also imply a high degree of gender segregation, as many South Korean schools socially segregate students by gender in both school and classroom.²⁴ The movement must therefore expand outward to encompass new members, raise awareness and find new sympathizers by collapsing the perceived divisions of these social strata. Once members of a particular group have begun participating in the movement, it eases social barriers of entry for other members of a particular social strata to then join as well. This

²¹ Choong-yon Ahn “The Long Road to Korea-US Free Trade Deal” GlobalAsia, Vol. 2 No. 1 Spring 2007 http://globalasia.org/articles/issue2/iss2_11.html

²² As I will discuss in Chapter 2, the point here is not to develop a direct causal relation between different sets of discrete events, but rather the examine the cultural reservoir of frames available to organizers and participants interested in bringing their message to a wider public and making the digital meme of their message “go viral”.

²³ Interview with Cheewoo Kim, conducted by Edmund Zagorin, June, 2008 published in the essay “Beef Protests: How Mobile Technology Has Politically Empowered Thousands of South Koreans” Black and White, June 27,2008 <http://blackandwhiteprogram.com/report/meat-protest>

²⁴ Alexander Wiseman “A Culture of (In)Equality?: a cross-national study of gender parity and gender segregation in national school systems” Research in Comparative and International Education ISSN 1745-4999 Volume 3 Number 2 2008

preference for social affiliation with similar individuals is known as “homophily” in sociology and network theory, and increases in probability the more similar traits a given group of people share (e.g. age, gender, socio-economic status) and has been further demonstrated through empirical research specifically on social movements.²⁵ In other words, it is easier for a college student to join a movement which already includes other college students, than it is to join a movement which includes few social peers. This is because many movements form through the iterative coalescence of several different socially evolved peer networks, forming a supra-network capable of moving towards certain defined attractors while also producing and reacting to local circumstances. These evolved peer networks are integrated into complex social systems which form loops of dynamic interaction with one another (consider the complex social space defined within and between genders in the Korean school system, and how information moves within this network) and therefore cannot be understood in isolation. If a student engages in an act of quotidian protest or resistance at school, the parents of that student are not insulated from the social frames motivating their child’s actions. If the parents feel that they have a stake in the movement through their child’s advocacy, then the movement crosses a gap in social space, lowering the barriers to entry for other parents, oftentimes across different strata of socioeconomic segments. This is at least one reason why student-driven movements have historically had such potential for mass mobilization.

Dense social connections can be a powerful enabling condition for social movement growth, as the message can spread in the same manner as contagious disease, where successful messages gain momentum and durability by quickly “going viral”. The same process of identifying loose social limits through segmentarity and then overcoming barriers to entry for groups outside the

²⁵ see Miller McPherson, Lynn Smith-Lovin, and James M Cook “BIRDS OF A FEATHER: Homophily in Social Networks” *Annu. Rev. Sociol.* 2001. 27:415–44, as well as Peter J. Burke “Interaction in Small Groups” in “The Handbook of Social Psychology” ed. John Delameter, p. 369 and also the summary section in Theresa Petray “Homophily and diversity: The use and effects of bonding versus bridging networks by Townsville Aboriginal activists” PhD paper [unpublished]
<http://www.tasa.org.au/conferences/conferencepapers08/Indigenous/Petray,%20Theresa,%20Session%208%20PDF.pdf>

initial scope of movement also appears significantly at the divisions between the adult genders and social classes (based on profession and access to capital and politically powerful social networks) which are pronounced in South Korea, as with many other market economies. The significance of the viral model of information for social movement framing is that it allows us to understand *how* new cultural frames enter population segments through particular individuals who may act as brokers or who may be exist at the intersection of several different social groups. Thus, while social space itself may be stratified along numerous criteria of identity, and social groups themselves may be fairly insular even when composed of diverse members, information and political messages can still spread quickly if the right information ecologies exist in which social networks are embedded.²⁶

Identity matters. However, first we must be clear about what *specifically* we are looking for. Is the goal of this analysis to understand the typical or average identity of the activists, or to understand the idealized identity of social protest which may or may not have animated a portion of the individuals participating in the demonstration? While important for analyzing the movement's historical significance within its local and transnational political contexts, I will seek to show that the demonstrations in Seoul in the summer of 2008 in fact historically represent quite a bit more than their political consequences to the Lee Administration and the Blue House. For what these demonstrations showed *par excellence* was the power of digital networks to organize massive groups of people in a highly developed urbanized society more quickly and more directly than anyone had previously thought possible. This was not a demonstration to the South Korean government, but to an audience of global inhabitants of digital space to whom it represented a concrete instantiation of a new paradigm of collective organizing, where the constitution of network relations through mediated cultural space represents the emergence of a novel collective form.

²⁶ see Ronald S. Burt *Brokerage and Closure: Introduction to Social Capital* University of Chicago, 2004 see also Dale Ganley and Cliffe Lampe "The ties that bind: Social network principles in online communities" in *Decision Support Systems* 47 (2009) 266–274

The significance of the divisions between socially stratified groups in Korean society uniting around a common message is neither a story of the forging of new identities or transgressive social relations. Rather, it points us to the immanent conditions of a space of social formation which itself allowed for and enabled the facilitation of the emergence of solidarity between otherwise disparate groups. In other words, there is something about digital space itself that allows otherwise alienated segments of a population to come together for a common discussion. If we understand the mass demonstrations that erupted in June through the lens of conscious oppositionality and a coherent membership identity, we have already begun asking the wrong questions. Instead, we must look to the material basis by which the movement was able to fluidly to incorporate otherwise divided strata of the South Korean public, overcoming deeply entrenched structural co-isolation and loggerheaded interests in order to achieve collective action. Digital space, as constituted within online forums and social clubs, played a vital role.

Personal identity in digital space is intrinsically weaker as discussion participants are disconnected from the immediate cultural presentation of their bodies, and discussion is inexorably mediated by a space which is *already collective*. This may disconnect discussants from socialized preconceptions about persons from their gender, age and socioeconomic status. The face only signifies textually within a chat room. Embodied identity is bracketed around icons and avatars, and the identity of discussants in a forum is *literally* produced through dialogue. In digital space, identity does not exist as an abstract parallel to physical presence but rather acts as an integrated continuum within the overall production of self-representation and social signification to others. This is particularly true for individuals who have been deeply socialized within digital space itself, either by sustained frequent use or by early introduction in childhood. Such an understanding of social identity in digital space is particularly true for those comfortable with its naturalization as a communication technology used for leisure, rather than merely a tool of labor. John Palfrey and Urs Glasser refer to these individuals as “digital natives”, youth and young adults who grew up not only with the possibility of using digital

technology to communicate with their peers, but for whom the use of that technology demands a degree of identity-creation (along with the associated options for experimentation) in digital space²⁷. While digital nativism has been around since the personal computer (and some would argue even earlier) it has become an even more dominant form within mass social space since the advent of mobile technology, which allows users to remain perpetually connected and to act digitally at will. In South Korea, these digitally native youths are known as “thumb people”, a playful moniker that refers to the facility with SMS text messaging where an individual can type faster than they can speak (or just about)²⁸. This aspect of digital socialization does not imply the production of a static identity, but rather functions as a mutant surface of individualistic representation conforming instead to the expectation that certain aspects of one’s digital self will be regularly changed and updated. Core components of digital nativism conform to the fast-paced level of innovation in bubble-era high technology, which create expectations that participants “adapt or die” to new interfaces and platforms as they become ascendant.²⁹ To restate the cliché of innovation in terms of digitally constituted identities; change is the only constant.

Digital natives are adept at a particularly adaptive sort of individual and collective identity formation. Because language in digital social space is both performative (chat-rooms are created and named, things said in them characterize how discussion progresses and segments) and iterative (each iteration of a conversation, meme, post or re-post alters the local context to strengthen the repetition of a particular message for different anonymous audiences) the process of identity-creation is immanent to each interactive digital space. “Web 2.0” digital space, driven by user-generated content, socializes users to become responsive to conventional

²⁷ John Palfrey and Urs Glasser “Born digital: understanding the first generation of digital natives” Basic Books, 2008 p. 21-22

²⁸ see Edmund Zagorin “Beef Protests: How Mobile Technology Has Politically Empowered Thousands of South Koreans” Black and White, June 27, 2008

<http://blackandwhiteprogram.com/report/meat-protest>

²⁹ New Media Knowledge “Adapt or die, content providers warned” May 12, 2011

<http://www.nmk.co.uk/article/2011/5/12/adapt-or-die-content-providers-warned>

peer group structures iterated through comments, re-posts, feedback and so on while allowing a degree of playfulness and heterogeneity. This playfulness is much clearly demonstrated when digital sub-cultures are considered in contrast to embodied cultural spaces which present the image of an identity rooted in biology/morphology and socio-economic conditions and where the audience costs of nonconformity may be extremely high. In other words, identity in digital space presents a distinct opportunity structure for affiliating oneself with a social movement or a political message, an affiliation which may be initially effortless but may have the effect of communicating that message across otherwise impassable (or at least difficulty passable) social boundaries.

Movement identities, which are fluid to begin with and may only initially encompass a few slogans, images or discussions, can be easily incorporated within individuals' and groups' digital identities, thereby facilitating the transmission of key concepts and relevant social frames quickly throughout a social system. These dynamics are particularly at play in virtual worlds where individuals and peer groups create co-signifying avatars by arranging imagistic combinations to create a virtual embodiment that can be altered at will, with a few clicks or keystrokes. In a country like South Korea where commentators often joke that Starcraft³⁰ is the national pastime, attending to these *dynamics of social space* is crucial for understanding the evolution of complex signifying and mobilizing systems (e.g. social movement frames) within that space. This is not to equivocally argue that South Korean digital space automatically translates into enhances social movement activity, or to privilege the existence of a certain technology over the social understanding of its use. However, it is important to note that barriers to social movement activity which are often all-too-present in stratified social space may be lowered in digital space precisely because the transactions costs of individual communications are virtually nonexistent.

³⁰ Starcraft is a multi-player military science fiction game developed by Blizzard Entertainment and is one of the all-time most popular computer games as measured by global sales.

As we will see, these immanent social dynamics served as an important enabling function in overcoming communicative barriers between stratified population segments, particularly those marked by exclusion or marginalization from official political discourse and South Korean civil society. An analysis and literature survey by the South Korean scholar Han Do-Yun confirms that this was particularly true in the context of gender, which is one of the most rigid identity boundaries in modern Korean society, noting:

Many married women who were not previously interested in politics or social issues learned about the issue of American beef import and the ensuing street demonstrations through Internet social communities where they used to share common interests on topics such as cosmetics, food, interior decoration, furniture, clothing, TV stars, etc. This social origin of new actors shows a fundamental change of the movement's characteristics.³¹

Students protesting against beef in lunches in Korean schools were thus able to quickly and easily begin mobilizing concerned citizens reacting to an inflammatory television report³² on the risks of BSE in US beef, and to do so on a scale that most traditional social movements might take years to organize with great difficulty. The message of the protest spread quickly, changing the political opportunity structure for other actors to get involved. The near-immediate speed of digital communication enabled a low transaction cost for the dissemination of inflammatory frames surrounding the issue. The positive disposition or interest of large numbers of individuals towards a political issue tends to become amplified under certain social network arrangements. As Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler have argued in their recent book *Connected*, behaviors are infectious throughout social networks through patterns which are by no means deterministic but certainly seem to affect probability.³³ For example, they have documented with significant study contagion as a property of obesity within social networks; if

³¹ Han Do-Hyun "Contemporary Korean Society Viewed through the Lens of the Candlelight Vigils of 2008" *Korea Journal*, Autumn 2010, p.7

³² Han Do-Hyun "Contemporary Korean Society Viewed through the Lens of the Candlelight Vigils of 2008" *Korea Journal*, Autumn 2010, p.7

³³ see Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives* Little Brown & Company, 2009

your friend's friend gains weight, there is an increased probability that you will as well.³⁴ Obesity is not literally contagious, but the information and social habitudes that predispose one to engage in activities which facilitate weight gain are mobile within social space, and migrate through network connections even if individuals are not themselves conscious of it. While particular political views may not be similarly contagious through social networks, the South Korean case seems to demonstrate that the level of an individual's political activity (measured as a degree of intensity, regardless of partisan affiliation) may be socially contagious, reaching epidemic proportions through the types of networks found in digital space.

There are several network properties that digital communities tend to exhibit which accelerate the dissemination of information generally, particularly through a digital social network such as the chatrooms described above. First, is the *density* of these networks, which is to say that most members of a digital social network *who identify as a distinct social group* are connected to all other members of the group. The point maybe obvious but it is nonetheless important; if you've ever played a game of "Telephone" in which a message must be relayed *through* many different participants, one after the other, you know that such communication entails a certain degree of distortion and the risk of social fatigue means that the original message may never get to every participant intact or at all. The fact that these dense networks operate via many-to-many communication systems where dissemination can be simultaneous to multiple individuals further decreases the social distance that a message has to travel. Second, is the *symmetry* of many of the types of ties that exist in digital space, which is to say social ties that imply reciprocity. The classic example of symmetrical ties is marriage; it is not possible for a person to be married to another person without that person also being married to the first person. In digital space, Facebook offers a good example³⁵; it is not possible for me to be your

³⁴ see Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives* Little Brown & Company, 2009

³⁵ Jeff Ginger "Performance and Construction of Digital Identity" *The Facebook Project* [pending completion] August, 2008 <http://www.thefacebookproject.com/research/jeff/publications/masters.html>

friend on Facebook without you also being my friend on Facebook³⁶. However, the same dynamic holds at the level of collectives in chatrooms, fora and other virtual communicative space at the level of collectivities; if we are members of the same digital agora then our digital social tie is typically reciprocal. Where embodied social space consists in heavily striated hierarchical structures at least partially grounded in embodied identity (race, gender, age, socioeconomic status and so on), digital space may offer a refreshing antidote and an outlet for dissensual³⁷ experimentation outside the implicit censorships of everyday life.

Furthermore, the *perception* of the spread of information also became a motivating factor in accelerating its spread, as more people became interested in “what everyone was talking about”. This is a phenomenon that network theory scholars have observed in terms of interpersonal ties known as a “positive network externality”³⁸, and economics scholars have observed in studies of so-called “viral” marketing. As the popular e-commerce author Ralph Wilson has suggested, viral communication does not rely on centralized dissemination technologies, but rather spreads through “word-of-mouth”, which on the internet can mean many different communicative

³⁶ Twitter is probably the most obvious counter-example to this argument, since it explicitly designates assymetric relationships through “Follower” and “Followed” and in principle allows for one-to-many networks of communication. However, as some critics have argued in discussing the Iranian election controversy and the social movements that became internationally visible during that time period, Twitter was chosen as a communicative medium *precisely because* it mirrored traditional one-to-many forms of communication and allowed centralized control of opposition leaders message. see Chapter Two.

³⁷ The opposite of consensual, used here to signify that achieving consensus need not be a goal for social movements in digital space.

³⁸ This is generally described as a positive feedback phenomena whereby the network becomes more attractive for outsiders to join as it increases in size. see Yi-Nung Yang “AN INTRODUCTION TO NETWORK EXTERNALITIES” Dissertation at Utah State University Department of Economics, August 1997

<http://people.chu.edu.tw/~yinyang/ch1.htm>

This phenomenon has been particularly applied to the viral growth of social networking sites such as Facebook, and digital user communities such as P2P music sharing, particularly when there is a membership barrier to entry.

see Robin Wright “Zuckerberg: Non-Evil Non-Genius?” *The New York Times*, October 5, 2010

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/05/zuckerberg-non-evil-non-genius/>

see Atip Asvanund, Karen Clay, Ramayya Krishnan, Michael D. Smith “An Empirical Analysis of Network Externalities in

P2P Music-Sharing Networks” Carnegie Mellon research paper, 2002

<http://www.heinz.cmu.edu/research/74full.pdf>

pathways within and between multiple overlapping social networks³⁹. While the term “viral” does to some extent carry a negative connotation, Dr. Wilson suggests that from a goal-oriented economic perspective, the efficacy, efficiency and speed of the virus is precisely what makes it an enviable comparison, writing:

“...you have to admire the virus. He has a way of living in secrecy until he is so numerous that he wins by sheer weight of numbers. He piggybacks on other hosts and uses their resources to increase his tribe. And in the right environment, he grows exponentially.”⁴⁰

Viral communication grows in part by migrating between media and distinct channels of social technology. Digital discussions were by no means contained to on-line forums, but spilled over into the home, workplace, bar and street, migrating between physical and virtual mediums as the additive density of internet chatter about the beef issue increased. On-line forums may have further motivated an outbidding phenomenon, where subsequent posters in a comment chain were encouraged to re-raise the level of rhetoric of previous posters in order to gain prominence in the discussion. Alternately, anonymous posters may hide their identity precisely because online comment-chains offer an outlet to vent their aggression and vitriol. Either way, online forums may motivate a rhetorical form of positive feedback which may quickly build social pressure for collective action, by creating audience-based incentives among the individual participants⁴¹. This out-bidding process is referred to as “flamewars” or “flaming” among initiates of digital culture, and is defined in the Glossary to *Digital Activism Decoded* as “[t]he act of posting deliberately hostile messages online, generally in chat rooms and on discussion

³⁹ Ralph Wilson “The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing” *Web Marketing Today* February 1, 2000 <http://scr.csc.noctrl.edu/courses/ims375/readings/TheSixSimplePrinciplesOfViAlMarketing.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ralph Wilson “The Six Simple Principles of Viral Marketing” *Web Marketing Today* February 1, 2000 <http://scr.csc.noctrl.edu/courses/ims375/readings/TheSixSimplePrinciplesOfViAlMarketing.pdf>

⁴¹ I am indebted to Adam Zagorin for suggesting the concept of on-line “out-bidding” as a salient feature of digital organizing. Most people who have seen outrageous comments posted by anonymous individuals in forums or in the “Comments” section of online publications, to an extent that many sites employ an active moderator or a mechanism of collective censorship for hate-speech and/or obscenity, know that discussions of hot-button political issues (such as the beef question in Korea) would hardly be immune from free-for-all muckraking.

boards. ... most “flamewars” start out as a heated debate over a political or social issue ...”⁴²

While many social movement theorists dispute the benefit of this propensity of digitally embedded discussions for organizing, it seems to motivate quicker confrontations, which may speed the development and organization of direct actions as activists feel challenged to “put up or shut up” by anonymous provocateurs.

It is not entirely surprising that a mass demonstration in South Korea would have its rhizomes deeply entwined in digital space. In 2008, the nation had the highest broadband penetration in the world, with 70% of the population over the age of six online, and more likely than not to possess an extremely-fast xDSL connection, which meant that getting a signal sufficient to effectively communicate and socialize in collective digital space was virtually guaranteed.⁴³ The near ubiquity of strong connections, wireless hot-spots and internet cafes further meant that even before technology went affordably mobile, it was already present for use at many distinct loci for casual socializing. For comparison, this connection was typically 10-20 megabit-per-second, or 10-20 times faster than the average US connection.⁴⁴ Connection speed is important factor to consider as an enabling condition for mobile digital organizing because it allows peer-groups to quickly share music, photos and video files from mobile locations, a capability that we will see as an enabling factor persisting across many different cases of social movements organized through mobile technology, and in particular the recent mass democratic uprisings in the Arab world⁴⁵. However, in South Korea the tendency to keep in constant

⁴² Talia Whyte and Mary Joyce “Glossary” in *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*, IDEBATE Press, 2010 p. 218

⁴³ National Internet Development Agency of Korea, “Survey on Computer and Internet Usage,” December 2005, <http://isis.nida.or.kr/english/sub04/sub04_index.html>. as cited in Jon Phillips “New Media in Seoul After Midnight” LEONARDO, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 182–183, 2006

⁴⁴ Jon Phillips “New Media in Seoul After Midnight” LEONARDO, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 182–183, 2006

⁴⁵ There have been countless episodes wherein the mere release of footage captured on a cellphone has been the inciting factor in protest, from the footage of Saddam Hussein’s execution to ‘souvenir pictures’ taken by Israeli troops of Palestinian prisoners, appropriated by digital denizens to foment outrage. see Patrick Jackson and Olivia McLeod “Mobile phone captures Iraq’s cruelty” *BBC*, January 7, 2007 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6225337.stm>

and also see The Guardian “Israeli soldiers’ ‘trophy’ pictures” August 17, 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/gallery/2010/aug/17/israel-palestinian-territories#/?picture=365845330&index=1>

communication with one's social group was already previously motivated by a strong culture of virtual world participation. The social media market dominance of a single platform, Cyworld, was also key factor in ensuring that virtual worlding was not fragmentary from a network perspective and moreover in creating a *continuous virtual space*. Estimates suggest that 90% of the 16-33 year old demographic at least possessed a Cyworld account, which functioned as social representation of the individual in digital space, similar to a Facebook profile⁴⁶. While network connections in virtual space could be established as "weak ties", in order for them to become robust, extended and durable communication and coordination would be required. As with most social networks, Cyworld and its adjoining fora represented primarily a competitive/cooperative structure for social opportunity, where individuals were motivated to communicate more with members of their weak-tied social network in order to build the connections socially to ensure the possibility of social mobilization (e.g. mobilizing a social group of not-yet-friends to meet at a *norae-baang* for a night of karaoke).

In other words, weak ties established between individuals from disparate social contexts became the basis for a competitive incentive to cooperate on meet-ups in the embodied social field, in order to build one's network over time. However, the mere presence of weak ties by itself increases the propensity of social movements to spread, by lowering barriers to the spread of information. As the network scholar Mark Granovetter has argued, while weak ties may not immediately facilitate tight-knit solidarity or social cooperation, they are in fact *more valuable* for disseminating crucial information across a wide range of actors necessary to mobilize mass demonstrations.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Jon Phillips "New Media in Seoul After Midnight" LEONARDO, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 182-183, 2006

⁴⁷ Mark Granovetter "The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited" in *Sociological Theory*, Volume 1 (1983), 201-233 with particular reference to the initial section, where in discussing individuals who have *few* weak ties, he argues that "...such individuals may be difficult to organize or integrate into political movements of any kind, since membership in movements or goal-oriented organizations typically results from being recruited by friends. While members of one or two cliques may be efficiently recruited, the problem is that, without weak ties, any momentum generated in this way does not spread beyond the clique. As a result, most of the population will be untouched."

It is crucial not to make the mistake of seeing these large networks of weak ties in digital space as separate or isolated from the comparatively smaller networks of stronger ties in embodied social space, and particularly not to ignore the areas of overlap and causal feedback. The virtual worlding of a substantial demographic segment of Korean society did not come to substitute for traditional fora for socialization, but rather came to complement the formation of internally integrated social groups, gathering and keeping in touch within digital space while generally living within a 1-2 hour radius of one another.⁴⁸ This demographic level of virtual socialization and pressure for constant communication reflects an equally staggering market saturation of mobile technology. According to Han Ki Chul, director of the Emerging Technologies Research Institute, over 70% of the Korean population has a 3G mobile phone, which given the number of elderly and young children in the population, “means that everyone who could have a phone, has one.”⁴⁹ Korean social networks, particularly within dense urban areas such as Seoul, can thus be understood as sensitive receptors and likely amplifiers for messages framed as socially relevant. Embodied social activity in areas such as Seoul thus bares an ambiguous and continuous input-output relationship with its virtual co-relative, as information spreads between groups while migrating between virtual and embodied social technologies of communication. Mobile technology means that the absurd distinction often erected between digital space of newly proliferating identities and “properly political” space can no longer be treated seriously.⁵⁰

In May and early June of 2008, the government’s reaction to concerned citizens demonstrating about the dangers of mad cow disease did not help the situation, particularly the use of riot-control measures such as aggressive police presence and water-hoses. By taking the protestors quite seriously from the outset, they crafted repressive responses (particularly in the

⁴⁸ Jon Phillips “New Media in Seoul After Midnight” LEONARDO, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 182–183, 2006

⁴⁹ Han Ki Chul, interview, Daejon, South Korea, 28 June 2004. as cited in Jon Phillips “New Media in Seoul After Midnight” LEONARDO, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 182–183, 2006

⁵⁰ see for example Slavoj Zizek in Sabine Reul and Thomas Deichmann “The one measure of true love is: you can insult the other” November 15, 2001
<http://www.spiked-online.com/articles/00000002D2C4.htm>

case of student demonstrators) that only inflamed public opinion and motivated new groups to join the protests, further feeding the positive psychological dynamics of in-group growth, and increasing the perceived costs of being “left out”. The expansive and inclusive nature of solidarity meant that segments of the population who may have ordinarily felt alienated from organizing political action felt it necessary to take an interest in the demonstrations. Rather than being an ameliorating factor, each new counter-measure became a new mobile point of condensation⁵¹ for a broader constituency of the South Korean public to get involved. As Do-Hyun argues:

From a sociological perspective, one important aspect of the protest is that it fostered significant interaction between the real world and the world of cyberspace. Chung and Kim (2009) have empirically shown how online communities and communication are closely related to the offline protest and gatherings that followed.⁵²

However, this may be once again a case of theory catching up with social reality at a crucial moment of visibility. If anecdotal reports about Korean society reflecting the prevalence of

⁵¹ Through out this text I will refer to such points of condensation, which refer directly to the notion in Slavoj Zizek’s work of “metaphoric condensation”, where he argues that the particular demands of protestors reflect a desire for resonance with a more universal appeal, as he writes, “Let us recall the standard example of a popular protest (mass demonstration, strike, boycott) directed at a specific point, that is, focusing on a particular demand (‘Abolish that new tax! Justice for the imprisoned! Stop exploiting that natural resource!...’) – the situation becomes politicized when this particular demand starts to function as a metaphoric condensation of the global opposition against Them, those in power, so that the protest is no longer actually just about the demand, but about the universal dimension that resonates in that particular demand...” from Slavoj Zizek *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, 1999 p. 204 – in this case a metaphor for the recurrent trope of South Korea’s “humiliating diplomacy” in the face of American demands, particularly on trade, that many perceived to have precipitated the 1997 Asian financial collapse and the harsh crackdown against social movements that occurred in its wake. Thus, generalized protest condenses around a specific demand, when in fact the protest is resonant with more universalizable frustrations against the inequalities arising out of neoliberal restructuring and the “undemocratic” conservative repression of attempts to re-balance the scales by South Korean workers. See International Business Times News “US-South Korea FTA: Whose win is it anyway?” 12/6/10 See also Jamie Doucette “Korean Neo-Liberalism and Empire,” Znet, 7/11/2006 <http://www.zcommunications.org/korean-neo-liberalism-and-empire-by-jamie-doucette> and in particular the contextualization of anti-trade struggles with the perceived stratification of Korean society around globalized market interests and the consumption of Western elites, as he writes: “Korean groups are mobilizing here against what they see not only as an unequal negotiating framework between the US and Korea, but also against growing social polarization in the wake of escalating market reforms since the 1997 financial crisis.”

⁵² Han Do-Hyun “Contemporary Korean Society Viewed through the Lens of the Candlelight Vigils of 2008” Korea Journal, Autumn 2010, p.6, citing Chung, Il-Joon, and Sang-Don Kim. 2009. “Inteonet gamseong-i ollain hangui chamyeo-wa oplain siwi chamyeo-e michin yeonghyang: 2008 nyeon chotbul jiphoe bunseok” (The Impact of Internet Emotions on Online Protests and Offline Demonstrations: An Analysis of the 2008 Candlelight Rallies). Hanguk-gwa gukje jeongchi (Korea and International Politics) 25.4.

virtual social activity are to be believed, then this actual-virtual correspondence was used for mundane social mobilization as a matter of everyday gatherings, and became an extremely useful *repertoire of contention*, to use Charles Tilly's term, taken from the reservoir of everyday social practices and appropriated for disseminating critical information about the relevant issues and organizing mass demonstrations. This positive feedback relationship allowed the demonstrators to overcome barriers in digital space to re-frame the issue of contaminated beef in many different terms that could speak to the concerns and local contexts of specific groups (e.g. union workers, teachers, parents and so on). However, this frame specialization occurred simultaneously with the emergency of a larger general frame, a sentiment of positive social mobilization for its own sake. If trade agreements had soured the public mood and attracted the ire of unions for their "undemocratic" nature, then the remedy was no mere set of demands, but rather taking democracy to the streets in the form of direct action. In other words, the stated goal of many of the protestors was simply to protest, in the hopes of making the government of aware that the will of the people was not to be ignored.

This framing question became absolutely crucial for building the demonstrations through connections developed in virtual worlds, drawing on the same impulses for casual social mobilization that pervaded many everyday Korean fora. As I walked the streets of Seoul in those turbulent late June days, the atmosphere would have surprised most Western commentators, learning of the protests through headlines such as "Beef Protest Turns Violent in South Korea", an example taken from the New York Times which was echoed across the international media.⁵³ In fact, the atmosphere of the demonstrations was one of carnival, a jubilant festivity spattered

⁵³ Choe Sang-Hun "Beef Protest Turns Violent in South Korea" *New York Times*, June 30, 2008

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/30/world/asia/30korea.html>

I should note that I am not suggesting that there was no violent actions that took place in the context of these protests, however the media framing of protest violence in general, and in the case of South Korean demonstrations in particular tends to a) focus exclusively on the violent elements of large demonstrations, even when those elements are proportionately minor and hardly representative and b) blame the protestors themselves entirely for the violence and identify the "unrest" as the source of the violence, ignoring the role of repressive police tactics and the decisions of policy elites which frequently provoke or inflame the violence of demonstrators.

with pop choruses from mobile radios and (slightly drunken) singing and even dancing and cheers redolent of symbolic Korean-ness. Many demonstrations across Seoul thus represented an outpouring of South Korean national pride, not at the behest of their government but in spite of it, an articulation of nationalist identity *against* the mere apparatus of the governing institutions. Most protestors were neither angry nor particularly resentful; they rather saw the demonstrations as an opportunity to mobilize their friend-group from virtual space in tandem with many other South Koreans for a good time and hearty expression of solidarity with what was widely perceived as a just cause. This collective sentiment was not improvised for the issue of beef imports ad hoc, but tapped into a feeling of emotional collective unity that had been forged in the streets of Seoul during the 2002 World Cup. During our interview, Cheewoo Kim said that the demonstrations most closely resembled these throngs of football supporters, individuals re-articulated as an embodied mass collective in the jerseys of the ROK Red Devils: “Everyone came out with red T-shirts, young and old. We felt proud of being Korean, and [of being] powerful. Korean people are aware of how much power they have now.”⁵⁴ The core of this political constituency, according to Kim, was college students, energized with re-articulation of a politically self-aware collective identity. This comparison was echoed in the recent study of scholar Han Do-Hyun, where he wrote:

“...the protest was not confrontational. Instead, it was more like a community festival, resembling the Red Devil activities of the 2002 World Cup co-hosted by Korea and Japan when hundreds of thousands fans poured out into the streets to cheer on the national team. The uncensored self-expression and joy expressed by the Red Devils is mirrored by the participants of the candlelight protest of 2008 .”⁵⁵

Here, once again, we see social identity as a powerful *repertoire* available for political appropriation within the cultural milieu, evocative of powerful nationalistic symbolism and

⁵⁴ Interview with Cheewoo Kim, conducted by Edmund Zagorin, June, 2008 published in the essay “Beef Protests: How Mobile Technology Has Politically Empowered Thousands of South Koreans” Black and White, June 27, 2008

<http://blackandwhiteprogram.com/report/meat-protest>

⁵⁵ Han Do-Hyun “Contemporary Korean Society Viewed through the Lens of the Candlelight Vigils of 2008” Korea Journal, Autumn 2010, p.6

shared memories of collective sentiment. What began as a social identity for mobilizing football supporters became a malleable frame of contention for mobilizing supporters for a much wider demonstration. By late June many traditional social movement organizations, such as unions and teachers organizations had seen the same opportunity for broader resonance of their own messages, and had begun using the beef protests as a venue to expand their own coalitions. The more particular messages of the protest, specialized to different sub-populations, thus became ascendant. By the fever pitch, where the sheer number of people moving in crowds on the street led to confrontations which were reported as abstract “violence”⁵⁶, a whole host of groups had taken advantage of a politically engaged public and abundant media access to advance their own messages. Many of the original organizers of the protests realized that they could not control the composition or activities of their new constituents, but (perhaps correctly) concluded that the more, the merrier. Needless to say, from a journalistic perspective, the result was perplexing. Perhaps the best summary of this heterogeneous form of coalition-building which simply operated around shared opportunity (rather than shared message or political goal) was best summarized at the time by Korea Times reporter Kim Tae-jong, who wrote:

Organizers are seemingly unable to control what those attending the candlelight vigils say during the protests. Doctors, pharmacists, nurses and dentists demanded the government scrap its plan to privatize public medical insurance. Students and teachers denounced the new education policies that put greater emphasis on English immersing methods. Basically, the coalition takes a stance that it will not attempt to control the slogans of various civic groups but their ultimate goal is the renegotiation of the beef deal.⁵⁷

The coalition became steadily more powerful as the number of demonstrators rose. Their bodies blocked the streets of Seoul and brought the engine of the Korean urban economy to a screeching standstill, as one might experience during a prolonged holiday caused by snow. The

⁵⁶ “Violence” in media discourse covers a wide range of actions which are often presumed as negative on the part of readers. However, if we follow the argument in Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” in *Selected Writings Vol 1* Belknap/Howard, 199 p. 244-248, we see that violence itself is only a means, not per se from a notion of inflicting physical suffering but quintessentially a violation of social norms and expectations which are understood to imply moral rules. In the same way that the negative association with “crime” implies a question of whether or not the law itself is just, the typically negative association with “violence” implies a question as to whether or not the power relations structuring the a given social space should be violated.

⁵⁷ Kim Tae-Jong “Protesters Want U.S. Beef Safety” *Korea Times* 6/14/08

pressure on Lee Myung-Bak's ruling coalition increased. In successively more desperate attempts to control the situation they finally renegotiated the agreement to meet the protestors' demands, fired all but one of the top aides and the entire cabinet publicly offered to resign.⁵⁸ However, the demonstrations had taken on a life of their own, and the protestors would not be appeased so easily. For another week they raged through Seoul, and then, dissipated just as suddenly as they had come. Substantial protests still occurred for weeks afterward, but they were numerically insignificant in comparison with what had proceeded, with numbers in the 0-10,000 range as opposed to the 10-100,000 and even hundreds of thousands range. Beef imports resumed as planned, with renegotiated safeguards in place, and within two years the Republic of Korea became the third largest importer of US beef.⁵⁹ The rising tide of public skepticism was mollified in no small part by symbolic action taken on the part of Han Seung-soo, Prime Minister of South Korea who personally ordered 260,000 won⁶⁰ of US beef to eat with his family, as a public signal of the confidence of government officials in the safety of the meat for consumers⁶¹. This symbolic act gesture was important not merely as a gesture towards concerns with the beef itself, but in confirming the importance of public sentiment in the policy-making process that earlier repressive responses to the demonstrations had lacked. The government now appeared to be responding to the democratic will of the Korean people, at least provisionally, and the protestors knew that policy-makers would tread more carefully in the future, particularly in their approach to policy process and in the value they placed on making the case for trade reforms to the Korean people. In short, the demonstrators had won, achieving a remarkable victory that only months earlier would have seemed impossible, or at least extremely unlikely.

⁵⁸ "S. Korea, U.S. agree on beef deal; protests continue" Associated Press, 6/22/08

⁵⁹ Xinhua News "S. Korea becomes world's third largest U.S. beef importer" 7/16/10
<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/90851/7068926.html>

⁶⁰ The won is the South Korean currency.

⁶¹ Anna Fifield "Seoul struggles to defuse US beef protests". Financial Times. July 2, 2008
<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4fc507ec-4852-11dd-a851-000077b07658.html>.

chapter two: the contentious politics of studying contentious politics

The 2008 South Korean demonstrations are an important case with which to begin our discussion of social movement formation and evolution in digital space. While they are by no means the first or only instance of such organizing strategies proving successful, the scale of the demonstrations and the speed of their formation in embodied social space represents an important ongoing paradigm shift from traditional social movement organizing strategies. The viral cycles of contention which feature information relevant to social movement organizing traveling quickly through large networks of weak ties have become an abstract machine through which many other struggles, enabled by the presence of vast networks of mobile technology and formation of social linkages through mobile communication, have crystallized and evolved. These movements include among their prominent examples: monks organizing transnationally through Facebook in Burma/Myanmar⁶² (also referred to as the “Saffron revolution”), the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama⁶³, the protests surrounding the 2010 Iranian elections

⁶² If a history of Facebook is written, this will be recalled as one of the largest and fastest-growing groups, surprising because of its responsiveness to material political conditions (rather than the random generative cycles of typical meme-dissemination) with some reports indicating membership growth over a thousand per hour, continuously for days, reaching the size of at least 300,000, enabling the planning of solidarity and support events in 41 cities, in 51 countries on 5 continents. See Burma Campaign UK “Facebook Support the Monks In Burma Reaches Over 300,000. Yoko Ono sends message of support” October 2 2007

<http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/news-stories/Facebook-Support-the-Monks-In-Burma-Reaches-Over-300000.-Yoko-Ono-sends-mes>

also see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007_Burmese_anti-government_protests

⁶³The social media aspect of the 2008 Obama Campaign is an excellent example of how social networks and new media become additive and integrative rather than substitutive and dislocating in terms of grounding social space within previously existing repertoires. In Obama’s case, the tremendous grassroots mobilization through Organizing for America made use of many conventional organizing tactics for which digital social networks as quotidian as email chains and as complex as integrating the new platform, called myBarackObama (which allowed users to create and individualized user profile and find other like-minded organizers in their local area to collaborate on political and fundraising events with) into the everyday ground-level dynamics of activists and the calculations of high-level strategy managers. The campaign also made use of SMS networks and created internal campaigns for Obama supporters, such as YrMama4Obama (<http://yrmama4obama.com>) which encouraged interested voters to receive real-time updates from the campaign. See Mary Joyce’s “Preface” to *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*, IDEBATE Press, 2010 p. 7, as well as Brannon Cullum’s “Devices: The Power of Mobile Phones” in the same volume.

(referred to as the Green Revolution, or the “Twitter revolution” in the Western media)⁶⁴ and the mass demonstrations emerging into prominence at the beginning of 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Syria and elsewhere in the Islamic world (now being referred to as the “Arab Spring”, in reference to the uprisings in Czechoslovakia in 1968 against the Soviet satellite regime which ended with a Soviet military intervention, which was known as “Prague Spring”)^{65,66}

⁶⁴The contestation of framing this struggle around social media, particularly in the Western press and 24-hour news cycle where “experts” on technology (rather than Iranian culture and politics) were quick to credit Twitter with enabling the mass demonstrations. This framing has provoked a great deal of ire from Iranian activists, and obscures more than it reveals about the social dynamics and real dangers involved in the organization of massive groups of demonstrators in spite of a vast and violent security apparatus and surveillance complex centralized in the Iranian state. However, a great deal of this second-order analysis, which makes use of both empirical data gathered from activists and takes a critical approach towards the media’s techno-triumphalism, reveals that in many cases informal off-line networks were just as important for disseminating information as Twitter or Facebook (posts from opposition leaders often urged supporters to spread the word of demonstrations through these more conventional networks) and that SMS text messaging and other Web 1.0 technologies formed the basis of much of the strategic vision of the organizers. Insofar as Twitter did become a substantive instrument for relaying information in real-time, it is because its one-to-many structure allowed opposition leaders to incorporate it in the same way they had once approached traditional media, by sending instructions to their followers and providing updates on the status of their campaigns. See Hahmid Tehrani’s “Digital Activism in Iran: Beyond the Headlines” June 20, 2009 <http://www.digiactive.org/2009/06/20/iran-beyond-headlines/> see also Guarav Mishra “Iran’s Twitter Revolution – Myth or Reality?” *WorldFocus*, June 18, 2009 <http://worldfocus.org/blog/2009/06/18/irans-twitter-revolution-myth-or-reality/5869/>

⁶⁵ Corresponding with spikes in winter wheat prices, mass social unrest which began in Tunisia in the early months of 2011 quickly built momentum, spreading through both grassroots offline networks of activists who had been consolidating support of fragmentary anti-authoritarian opposition groups for decades, as well as new transnational connections and tactics forged in digital space. The “revolutions” began without warning and grew much faster than anyone predicted, to date toppling two autocrats, spurring substantial concessions from governments in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and fomenting a political chaos in Libya as Moamar Qaddafi has escalated violence against civilians and the United States and France have militarily intervened with air support for a no-fly zone and bombing campaigns against Qaddafi’s forces, a situation which may eventually devolve to a protracted civil war. While the ongoing nature of these upheavals, as well the security problems associated with participating individuals publicly disclosing data about their organizing strategies make it difficult to understand the extent to which digital activism played a significant role, unquestionably the points of condensation in several of the power struggles have formed around single abuses against individuals which were surreptitiously captured on camera and posted to YouTube, generating widespread public outrage and backlash, and fueling an escalating cycle of contention. However, there is hesitation among activists to frame organizational tactics around digital media, for fear of Westernizing their social movement frame of populist resistance. See Sami Ben Gharbia “The Internet Freedom Fallacy and the Arab Digital activism” on *Tlaxcala*, January 1, 2011 <http://www.tlaxcala-int.org/article.asp?reference=3228>

see also Phillip N. Howard “Digital media and the Arab spring” February 11, 2011 <http://blogs.reuters.com/great-debate/2011/02/16/digital-media-and-the-arab-spring/>

see also Edward Cody “Demonstrators turn out around Middle East” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, April 2, 2011 <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/11092/1136536-82.stm>

⁶⁶ There are many other examples which I have not listed here, such as the use of viral social media in Moldova used to highlight instances of confrontations between security personnel/police and

Together, the emergence of these movements represent a paradigm-shift in the *process* of organizing, a shift which necessarily affects both the multi-tiered social space occupied by participants and the theoretical structured space through which academics come to understand social movements as ontological entities. The term “paradigm-shift” has a particular meaning here, derived from Thomas Kuhn’s work on scientific revolutions, where he demonstrated that the normal work that scientists do typically serves to reinforce, rather than destabilize, conventional representations of natural laws often *against* available counter-vailing evidence. However, this is a caricature of a much more complex argument. In fact, the crucial point of Kuhn’s work is precisely that there is almost *always evidence that points in both directions*. In examining a series of data-sets overlapping the same area of study, one may find evidence which both supports and contradicts the theory in varying degrees. However, it is the theory or “paradigm” itself which serves as a primary reading tool which allows the data to be understood through axiomatic criteria of relevance. Kuhn is quite clear on this point: “...there is no such thing as research without counterinstances.”⁶⁷ Paradigms thus perform a crucial role at the microsocial level of data-interpretation, by forming criteria of relevance⁶⁸ that allow scientific observers to efficiently sort and interpret data *either* as anomalies that a theory or set of paradigmatic expectations ought not tarry with, or as a troubling legitimate counterinstance which demands that the paradigm be altered in order to ensure a full range of explanatory value. Kuhn’s analysis is historical, and he notes that the work of “normal science” is almost never in this latter category, but rather at best comprises a series of minor modifications which cause the

demonstrators/dissenter. In this list I have sought to highlight a few prominent examples which may provide a useful point of reference for a general audience, a list which seeks to be anecdotal without being exhaustive. The aim of this section is not to examine series of case studies in order to identify the similarities of organizational dynamics, but rather to highlight *difference* itself as an operational principle in activist scholarship which is both generative of novel articulations of organizing tactics within local contexts while illuminating the utility of abstract anti-theoretical concepts which seek to undermine, rather than reinforce the academic tendency to homogenize or holize particular examples within overarching historical narratives. The omission or inclusion of these particular examples is therefore not central to the lines of argument being advanced in this section.

⁶⁷ see Thomas Kuhn *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1962

⁶⁸ An excellent introduction to the relation between criteria of relevance and scientific truth can be found in Manuel De Landa *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* Continuum, 2002 p. 7

theory to become ever-more complex and cumbersome. The famous example Kuhn uses is from the history of astronomy, where the Ptolemaic model assumed geocentrism as its core premise, and was long-guarded by the powerful edifice of the Catholic church. However, difficulties in the Ptolemaic model would perpetually arise in tracking the movement of the planets, which ought to have traced straight lines across the sky over the months but in fact traced continuous circles. Rather than abandon the geocentric paradigm, astronomers invented the notion of “epicycles”, a theoretical addition to the Ptolemaic system used to make the movement of the planets compatible with the paradigmatic explanation. By the time Galileo had come along however, other problems had been identified with the Ptolemaic model, and the paradigm had achieved sufficient complexity and theoretical cumbersomeness that scholars were more ready to abandon it in favor of the Copernican heliocentric model. Kuhn makes a persuasive case that it is only in these exceptional cases that entire communities of knowers rapidly shift to a new way of understanding the world.⁶⁹

The understanding of paradigm-shift is crucial here because it has implications both for the ways in which social movements organize and the epistemological practices by which social scientists study and come to understand social movements. My thesis will thus primarily focus on an argument for paradigm-shift among a community of expert or academic knowers who seek to present a coherent understanding of contemporary social upheavals to a general audience, and outline some possibilities for what this new paradigm must successfully encompass. This new paradigm, as with all supposedly novel explanatory systems, is not “new” in the sense of being newly born or original to this writing, but in the same way as apparently “eruptive” social movements has existed sub-rosa for quite some time, having grown out of the poststructuralist concern with the tendency of modern scholarship to objectify and essentialize its subject matter, Bayesian concerns about meta-data probability, empirical uncertainty in the

⁶⁹ for analysis of the social incentives for conventional explanations see also Will Wilkinson “This Is My Dataset. There Are Many Datasets Like It, but This One Is Mine. . .” *Overcoming Bias*, February 7, 2007 http://www.overcomingbias.com/2007/02/this_is_my_data.html

application of general principles to specific cases. However, these legitimate concerns are generally theoretical in nature. The most significant impetus for this paradigm-shift has become the almost total irrelevance of contemporary political science methods for the emergent collectivities of activists, and a concurrent return to the tradition of activist-scholarship among real-world practitioners. This tradition is exemplified by scholars who produces practical diagrams of power and programs for action that are embedded within the local contexts which they seek to describe, and through which they seek to empower marginalized collectivities. Furthermore, I would suggest that this new paradigm will gain currency within formal theoretical circles in light of the failure of current political sciences to meet the self-set basic standards of Popperian falsificationism, or in simpler terms, the failure to adequately predict or explain the most significant geopolitical events of the past three decades.⁷⁰ These failures of foresight include, perhaps most significantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the post-Cold War ethnic conflicts of the 1990s and, today most obviously, the emergent forms of social upheaval taking place all over the world but perhaps most noticeably in Arab nations⁷¹. In other words, with few exceptions, most political sciences lack even the most basic ability to meet their own goals of identifying and generalizing essential properties across wide ranges of cases and make risky predictions based on those expectations which then provide data which can falsify their theories.

However, in order to successfully argue for a new paradigm, a detailed theoretical examination of the current prevalent understanding of social movements within the social sciences will prove necessary. I will further need to demonstrate that the cases I have identified as being paradigmatic of a new condition of social formation are not mere “anomalies”, which can be explained as exceptions to the previous rules. As my argument unfolds, it will become clear that the “new” paradigm I am calling for is hardly novel, and in fact has existed as a minor

⁷⁰ see Steven Bernstein, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein and Steven Weber “God Gave Physics the Easy Problems” ” *European Journal of International Relations* 2000; 6; 43

⁷¹ see Nick Srnicek “Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze” [unpublished thesis] 2007

disciplinary approach towards studying social formation within academic discourses for many decades. The theoretical task will be to apply the methodological approach of this minor discourse to the macrosocial shifts that have occurred more recently in the social world of organizing through mobile technology and virtual worlds. This will not consist in picking generalizable concepts and applying them to particular case studies, but will rather inhere in examining the instances where prevalent academic discourses on both historical time and social movement theory run up against Kuhnian counterinstances which may seem difficult to resolve by modifying the current paradigmatic approach. By illuminating these cases of indistinction and overcomplexity, I hope to then suggest ways in which minor discourses, particularly those produced by actants who are themselves involved in social movements and, in particular, episodes of digital activism, offer a perspective with supplies unique explanatory value. However, before doing this I must successfully make a case that the dominant ontologies of political science, which informs prevalent commentary on social movements, have deep structural flaws that would prevent them from adequately offering explanations of contentious political phenomena, even under rare ideal circumstances.

I do not believe that this case is that difficult to make. Political science has been a discipline whose theoretical discourse has been dominated by post-facto analyses of socially constructed representations of “events”. These event-images have been necessarily socially constructed through a research process which privileges the data of certain actors over others, and is guided with typical reference to a quantitative model which predicts actors’ behavior. Simply because the event-images have been socially constructed implies nothing about their accuracy, in the same way that the fact that an image is mediated by a pair of eyeglasses does not degrade the veracity of its content. However, among the community of knowers within the political sciences disciplines, event-images are constructed through representational data collected through research methods that often privilege *socially significant actors* (i.e. leaders of political institutions, researchers who have developed expertise in a segmented component of area

studies, individuals who are recognized as “experts” by general audiences and are consulted by popular media outlets to explain and interpret “events”, such as the 2008 protests in South Korea) over *causally relevant actants* (i.e. groups and individuals who participate and organize at the micro-level for collective action which constitutes, from a theoretical perspective, the milieu of what one might refer to as “imperceptible politics”⁷²). Thus, political science is often situated relative to the perspective of ruling elites, and reflects the interests of managers of populations and spectators of power-politics, rather than accounting for the perspective of actants who participate in everyday value economies of social space. Since it is this latter milieu which often features key figures of antiestablishment social movement mobilization, and since social movements are often causally responsible for igniting sweeping social change, it should not surprise us that well-regarded and highly credentialed institutionalized knowers so often miss the boat. The approach of these institutionalized knowers is symptomatic of what Michel Foucault has criticized as “expert knowledge”⁷³, in which discourses are dominated by scholars who have amassed social capital to disseminate and normalize their viewpoints through disciplinary networks of power. Through these networks, novel social phenomena and unprecedented combinatorial structures are subsumed within hegemonic terminology and discourses of the dominant community of institutional knowers. In other words, new events simply end up becoming evidence of old theories.

However, this critique of “expert knowledge” is not solely of the province of poststructural theorists of power relations, or “Continental philosophers”, but also has come under the scrutiny of a new edifice of powerful knowers in the economics community, and particularly specialists in the specialized discipline of foresight studies. Making use of a series of studies in the field of “biases and heuristics”, a field that studies how expert knowers apply commonplace wisdom and logically fallacious intuition to the evaluation of probability, artificial intelligence scholar Eliezer

⁷² see Vassilis Tsianos, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Niamh Stephenson *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* Pluto Press 2008

⁷³ see Michel Foucault *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Pantheon Books: 1970

Yudkowsky has documented how even Nobel Prize-winning economists systematically underestimated the risk structure of particular scenarios based on a dynamic practice of producing and relying on conventional wisdom about investment strategies.⁷⁴ Yudkowsky further explores this instance in the case of political scientists who are particularly prone to what he terms “the conjunctive fallacy”, whereby scenarios are made compelling by their narrative specificity, while logically each additional detail and level of specification decreases the predictive value of the scenarios, which ought to encompass and account for a degree of emergent chaos in the unfolding interaction of complex social systems. Exalting Bayesian analysis, which reflexively accounts for the likelihood of particular forecasts over a variable range of possible outcomes, Yudkowsky offers a useful approach for assessing the batting average of predictive knowers. Unfortunately, political scientists and international relations scholars who have a material interest in providing information useful to policy planners and achieving professional success through the vindication of their theories do not fare particularly well.

In this case, we may understand the “normal science” of analyzing social movements (and socio-political phenomena more generally) as involving the composition of abstract models which map the transcendent relations between idealized actors (consider, for example, rational choice theory as a perfect illustration of this practice). This normal science then makes up the difference between these models and local contexts by (arbitrarily) assigning and calculating values of relative interest in order to map the likely outcomes of particular situations⁷⁵. These models are rarely accurate, even when assigning values *counter-factually*. This is not because the individuals who execute this paradigm are intellectual nincompoops (as a rule, far from it) but rather because they have burdened themselves with a task of Sisyphean complexity, and are thus forced to rationalize their (lapsed) expertise through a superficial aping of the methodology

⁷⁴ Eliezer Yudkowsky ““Cognitive biases potentially affecting judgment of global risks” Forthcoming in Global Catastrophic Risks, eds. Nick Bostrom and Milan Cirkovic Draft of August 31, 2006

⁷⁵ see Nick Srnicek “Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze” [unpublished thesis] 2007 p. 1-2

of many natural sciences. However, this approach serves little purpose greater than allowing these scientists of society to assume the venerated and mystical aura associated with a white laboratory coat and a rack of test tubes; becoming so-called gurus of the social field. However, as Phillip Tetlock noted in his mammoth study of expert predictions in the social sciences, these so-called experts have a general predictive accuracy *below* monkeys throwing darts.⁷⁶ Meta-data studies of expert predictions, such as those conducted by Scott Armstrong and Kesten Green, further suggest that the supposed “expertise” of an individual knower has close to zero influence on the value of their predictions, and in some cases can hamper their likelihood of accuracy, writing:

Unaided judgmental forecasts by experts have no value. This applies whether the opinions are expressed in words, spreadsheets, or mathematical models. It applies regardless of how much scientific evidence is possessed by the experts. Among the reasons for this are... Bias: People have difficulty in obtaining or using evidence that contradicts their initial beliefs. This problem is especially serious for people who view themselves as experts.⁷⁷

Political science is an oxymoron; politics is not a science. At best it is a craft, and at best the speculations of these expert knowers approximate the value of socially relevant artwork, except without the aesthetic appeal. Such revelations may have disturbing implications for those who want the words of these expert knowers to remain highly regarded, on the level of “science” in terms of rigorous attention to empirical data, responsiveness to contextual change, and to meet the high standards set by Karl Popper’s hypothetico-deductive methodology. Popper’s falsificationism provides a bright-line between scientific truth in a way that he claims distinguishes physics from psychoanalysis. This supposition of physics as a legitimate science distinct from psychoanalysis rests largely on the basis of physics’ ability to make risky predictions which could prove a theory false, rather than merely searching for evidence which

⁷⁶ see Phillip Tetlock “Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?” Princeton University Press, 2005

⁷⁷ Scott Armstrong and Kesten Green “GLOBAL WARMING: FORECASTS BY SCIENTISTS VERSUS SCIENTIFIC FORECASTS” *Energy & Environment* · Vol. 18, No. 7+8, 2007
<http://www.forecastingprinciples.com/files/WarmAudit31.pdf>

would confirm the theories application. Sadly, as Yudkowsky documents, “confirmation bias” (which is exactly the malady of Freudian psychoanalysis which Popper takes issue with) is alive and well in political science methodologies, and may even constitute the bulk of what may count as Kuhnian “normal science” within political science disciplines. Peer review doesn’t appear to help much either. As Robert Pfeifer and Carl Hoffman have documented, peer review either has almost no effect and may often exhibit a negative correlation when the topic of the peer reviewed research is considered “hot” or presents an opportunity for increased competition and professional advancement among scholars.⁷⁸

Why is this the case? The simple answer is that the subject matter of these disciplines is so impossibly complex that it makes predictive accuracy impossible, but it also makes the methodological approach of developing and testing models (particularly when those models are premised upon static entities and linear relations) hopelessly useless. In the essay *God Gave Physics the Easy Problems*, Steven Bernstein et. al. argue that many of these problems at the level of basic data interpretation and analysis by suggesting:

In international relations, ... it is often impossible to assign metrics to what we think are relevant variables (Coleman, 1964: especially Chapter 2). The concepts of polarity, relative power and the balance of power are among the most widely used independent variables, but there are no commonly accepted definitions or measures ... Yet without consensus on definition and measurement, almost every statement or hypothesis will have too much wiggle room to be 'tested' decisively against evidence. What we take to be dependent variables fare little better. Unresolved controversies rage over the definition and evaluation of deterrence outcomes, and about the criteria for democratic governance and their application to specific countries at different points in their history. ... The lack of consensus about terms and their measurement is not merely the result of intellectual anarchy or sloppiness - although the latter cannot entirely be dismissed. Fundamentally, it has more to do with the arbitrary nature of the concepts themselves.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Robert Pfeifer and Carl Hoffman “Large-Scale Assessment of the Effect of Popularity on the Reliability of Research” PLoS ONE 4(6): e5996. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0005996 June 24
<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0005996>

⁷⁹ Steven Bernstein, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein and Steven Weber “God Gave Physics the Easy Problems” ” European Journal of International Relations 2000; 6; 43
see embedded reference, Katharina P. Coleman *International organizations and peace enforcement: the politics of international legitimacy* Cambridge University Press, 2007

If true, this presents seemingly insurmountable obstacles for a political science grounded in classical metaphysics which presumes that social objects have essential properties that can be captured by models that can then range across a plethora of particular instances. It is the presumption of correspondence between an ideal reality composed of static conceptual entities and a material world populated by heterogeneous entities and mutant collective entities which surprise our theories at every twist and turn that comprises the heart of the problem. Levi Bryant refers to this classical ontological position as “correlationism”⁸⁰, and attributes its prevalence to the hubristic tradition of the natural sciences to presume the potential for human omniscience and the ability of science to generate potent knowledge (“independent variables”, “control situations”) that allows slivers of sterile knowledge to be insulated from the contaminating influence of chaotic social reality. Frequently, when social scientists are approached with these sorts of objections, they make claims which can be straw personed as “we’ll we’re not perfect, but who is? we may not get it right all the time, but we at least get *close* sometimes and in any case our discipline produces valuable contextual data as a matter of course during the research process.” First, the predictive failure of political science is not merely quantitative effect, or in other words, it is *not merely* that the metaphysics of classical political science fails to predict the *vast majority* of socio-political phenomena, events, outcomes (however one chooses to verbalize happenings in the social field). It has *also* failed to predict *the most important ones as well*, most notably the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Arab Spring, not as a matter of being incidentally asleep at the wheel, but by exclusively focusing on the factors deemed relevant to outcomes dictated by neorealist power politics. The question is not whether political science is able to attend to macrosocial factors (which may or may not be completely obvious to someone who say, regularly reads the newspaper) but whether or not it is able to accurately value the relevance of factors which may *seem* significant (e.g. the portion of

⁸⁰ Levi Bryant “Correlation and the Fate of Philosophy,” Larval Subjects, June 13/
<http://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2008/06/13/correlationism-and-the-fate-of-philosophy/#more-623>

Soviet military budget allocated for deterrence capability upgrades) versus those that play a comparatively greater role in the outcome of political power struggles (e.g. the gathering of Soviet and Eastern bloc dissidents in coffee houses to discuss poetry, gatherings that became insulated networks of political dissenters who were then able to quickly activate for massive demonstrations once cracks in the ruling regime became evident following Gorbachev's *glasnost*).⁸¹ As international relations scholar Nick Srnicek notes: "The claim that working with abstractions and generalities is a 'close enough' approximation of reality is belied by any number of case studies which discover the importance of minute details, and the complete failing of social science in general to approach the success of the natural sciences."⁸²

This pessimistic examination of the record leads us inexorably to the question: what exactly is it that we want political science or scholarly examinations of social movements to do for us as a community of knowers or for the general public? What is the most that we should expect from a discipline whose subject matter consists in social systems which operate at a level of complexity wherein exact prediction is generally impossible and even vague predictions are hopelessly probabilistic? The proceeding sections will hopefully elucidate a host of examples where engaged scholarship has proved socially valuable, not because it is able to perform in the same way as the natural sciences (i.e. by generating theories which can then be usefully applied to particular instances and create instructive frames of relevance that can assist knowers in interpreting raw data and constructing and modifying models of reality) but because it provides tactical advice to political actants, not in terms of dominant solidifications of power relationships, but as a way to suggest new possibilities and to create visibility for practices of resistance which will facilitate their migration into diverse local contests. In other words, we've come along way from Machiavelli's time, and political science ought not, in the words of Simon

⁸¹ see Roland Bleiker *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* Cambridge University Press, 2000

⁸² Nick Srnicek "Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze" [unpublished thesis] 2007 p. 27

Dalby, be an exercise in “giving advice to a prince”.⁸³ Instead, emergent scholarship will seek to, in the inverse formulation, write code for a mob, or as Dalby writes in the context of critical geopolitics, “...to investigate how geopolitical reasoning is used as an ideological device to maintain social relations of domination within contemporary global politics.”⁸⁴

Even at its best, structuralist analysis of political organizations that fails to take into account the fluidity and dynamical relations of evolved social assemblages will continue to grapple with these same correlationist difficulties. Consider for example the excellent analysis of modern political institutions of John Kenneth Galbraith, the eminent economics scholar and historian, who argued in *The Anatomy of Power* for what he terms a “bi-modal” understanding of organizations. “Bi-modalism” is the term that Galbraith uses to refer to the symmetry between the internal conditioning used to bring members of an organization into a membership identity and the external effectiveness of the organization in advancing its priorities. In other words, a highly disciplined organization in which membership is sought and solidarity is high will be more effective externally than an organization which is internally heterogenous and disorganized. There are a number of reasons why Galbraith’s analysis here might seem particularly appealing. First, he explicitly recognizes the artificiality of abstract economic models and the ideological axioms of “market efficiency” and presumptions given towards *laissez-faire* schemes for de-regulation which are founded upon the willful blindness of social oligopoly and pre-existing social capital among entrenched elite interests.⁸⁵ Second, he is cautious, as many correlationist are not, to not take social actors at their face value when collecting data on ends, means and formation, but instead attempts to analyze the material relations of their internal actors, and is attendant to the microphysical cultural formations within larger entities, such as trade unions. However, his structural analysis necessarily falls short in attempting to reduce

⁸³ Simon Dalby “GEOPOLITICS, GRAND STRATEGY AND CRITIQUE: TWENTY YEARS AND COUNTING”, 1990 <http://www.carleton.ca/~sdalby/papers/DalbyDurham0>

⁸⁴ Simon Dalby “GEOPOLITICS, GRAND STRATEGY AND CRITIQUE: TWENTY YEARS AND COUNTING”, 1990 <http://www.carleton.ca/~sdalby/papers/DalbyDurham0>

⁸⁵ Galbraith here cites Thomas Balogh “The Irrelevance of Conventional Economics” Liveright Publishing, 1983

observable effects to material structural causes. Furthermore, he does not attribute a specific substance or continuous substratum to “power” (such as capital or gender relations) which allows him to consider its efficacy in light of local contexts. In bimodalism, the structural relation Galbraith is searching for is between the “internal and external expressions of power within an organization”⁸⁶ and the extent to which this relation can offer an explanatory and perhaps even predictive model for an organization’s ability to achieve its’ stated goals.

Commenting on the “successful” structures of the US Central Intelligence Agency and State Department, Galbraith writes that “...strong organizations require the careful internal conditioning of their members for maximum external effect.”⁸⁷

Now, here Galbraith is primarily referring to public agencies and organizations with centralized bureaucracies, and perhaps he only means those principles to apply therein. Yet, as he attempts to map a *complete* anatomy of power, he extends the bimodalist axiom in an iteration of what would be referred to in social movement theory as a “resource mobilization” explanation. While recognizing a space for contextual variance, Galbraith adamantly adheres to an input-output relationship based on intentionality and goal orientation relative to what he outlines as the “sources of power” (personality, property and monopolization of the means of violence), writing that: “If the purposes of an organization are many and varied, both the sources and instruments of enforcement will have to be greater for a given effect than if the purposes are few and specific.”⁸⁸

Considering the example of the 2008 protests in South Korea. How can we square this explanation of organizational power, for example with reference to the KCTU? In that instance, the empowerment of the collective in part derived from the *dis*-organization of the individual groups, the ability to mobilize large groups of people, not around a single unified or coherent message but around a generalized outrage and the concomitant impulse towards solidarity and

⁸⁶ John Kenneth Galbraith *The Anatomy of Power* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983 p. 60

⁸⁷ John Kenneth Galbraith *The Anatomy of Power* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983 p. 62

⁸⁸ John Kenneth Galbraith *The Anatomy of Power* Houghton Mifflin Company, 1983 p. 68

protest as a *practice*, or in other words as an end itself. The leaders total inability to control the message of the mass demonstrators allowed for the emergence of a political opportunity structure which *facilitated* increased participation (and the attendant pressure for the government to relent against the activists' demands) where diverse groups such as professional unions and farmers' advocates took advantage of the media spectacle to advance their own interest group messages. The generative chaos of the protests became a zone of dissensual empowerment, not weakness. The protesters were more interested in having a good time and resisting the attempts of police to disperse them than they were in "indoctrination" or succumbing to some sort of politically unified group identity outside of the generalized sentimental nationalism recalled from the 2002 World Cup. Such a framing approach as Galbraith's theory recommends, if taken as advice by the movements' student organizers, may well have spelled death for the rapid but precarious acceleration of the demonstrations.

In fact, the growth structure of the protest movement had little to do with the identity or prior affiliation of the protestors, and certainly not what Galbraith might call their "conditioning". Instead, it was the heterogeneity of the movement that allowed its message to cross the boundaries of social strata and facilitated further intensification as the focus of the demonstrations enlarged and migrated to include *more* political demands. One of the earliest acts of digital dissent coalescing dissent was a petition posted on Daum Agora demanding the impeachment of President Lee. While this petition was initially targeted at an unpopular education policy, as the beef issue rose to prominence student activists appropriated it as a symbol of solidarity against the "undemocratic" political process which had consigned them to eat potentially hazardous American beef in school lunches. This newfound prominence allowed the petition to quickly attract over 1.3 million signatures.⁸⁹ We can thus see that while Galbraith's explanations for organizational power may initially seem appealing, when

⁸⁹ see Seung-Ook Lee, Sook-Jin Kim, Joel Wainwright, "Mad cow militancy: Neoliberal hegemony and social resistance in South Korea" *Political Geography* xxx (2010) 1e11
<http://geography.osu.edu/faculty/jwainwright/publications/Lee%20Kim%20&%20Wainwright%202010%20Mad%20cow%20militancy.pdf>

confronting examples of emergent collectivism, they collapse into abstractions primarily from a reliance on the metaphysical presumption of self-interested actors and goal-oriented political activity. Such a presumption takes for granted that the actants find political activity only as a means to an end that would otherwise be intrinsically valueless, rather than as an end in itself. It further presupposes that the self-interested or group-interested calculation of perceived costs and benefits determine the preference for action of involved parties. These presumptions, particularly in the case of group dynamics that we can observe in digital space, seem misplaced, and may thus not be useful as descriptors of power in the abstract and certainly not in its instantiation in loosely organized collective action.⁹⁰ They also seem to assume actants which pre-exist the application of the model⁹¹ (i.e. observing a trade union or government agency that has existed before the situation in question presents itself) rather than self-organizing collectivities whose networks coalesce around a set of local circumstances. This is a key distinction that will be vital for understanding the necessity of *process ontology* in analyzing social movements. If one never steps in the same river twice, then perhaps one is never confronted by the same social movement twice, either.

Traditional social movement theory is a step closer, but still relies on abstract principles of collective unity and purposefulness. From this theoretical perspective, exemplified in the work “contentious school” of Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam and others, the identity of a group is intimately linked to the *contexts*, motivations and social pressures under which the group was formed and what activity its members come together to do. Groups can respond to any number of mundane or exceptional social conditions, but it is when groups of people have formed and self-consciously set out to change their social reality that their particular collective

⁹⁰ For a further examination of the importance of contexts in political methodology, see Charles Tilly and Robert Goodin (eds.) *Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, Oxford University Press, 2008

⁹¹ This, of course, from Latour’s definition of an actant is not possible, since actants are defined by the locality of their concreteness – an actant which abstractly pre-exists the circumstances of a particular situation is by definition a distinct actant altogether.

dynamics and organizational logic are truly put to the test. This is what Sidney Tarrow, in his book *Power in Movement*, refers to as “contentious politics”; which

“...emerges in response to changes in political opportunities and constraints, with participants responding to a variety of incentives: material and ideological, partisan and group-based, long-standing and episodic. Building on these opportunities and using known repertoires of action, people with limited resources can act contentiously... When their actions are based on dense social networks and connective structures and draw on consensual and action-oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions in conflict with powerful opponents. In such cases – and *only* in such cases – we are in the presence of a social movement....”⁹²

Tarrow seeks to develop a theoretical frame through which to understand the evolved practices of “modern social movements” since their inception as an organizational form at the dawn of the Eurocentrically marked “modern age” (beginning around the 1780s in Europe and initially articulated by the clashes leading up to the French Revolution and the subsequent collapse of the macropolitical edifice of the *ancien regime*) and thereby understand the ways in which social movements have worked to alter the material political realities of their times with varying degrees of success. His framework represents an excellent theoretical entry point for our examination of collective action insofar that it implicitly *resists* the notion of narrating *discrete* historical “events” such as protests, strikes, revolutions, and wars as if they are the foundation of social change without their own imperceptible histories. Beginning with an understanding of historical time is absolutely crucial in practicing scholarship on social movements, because how we theorize the unfolding of political action through the fragmented lens of a particular vision of a past, aggregated from documents, testimony, artifacts and so on, will powerfully influence how we go about answering the questions of *how* and *why* a particular social movement emerged at a given time.

Historians and social theorists may endlessly debate about whether or not a particular world-shattering event (the first shot fired in the American Revolutionary War at the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand which is thought to

⁹² Sidney Tarrow *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, 1998 p.10

have ignited World War I, the perilous train ride Lenin took back from Switzerland to lead the vanguard of the Russian Revolution) was in principle *inevitable*, in other words, would it have happened regardless of the contingent social conditions, the unique combination of individuals and materials involved in the event and so on. This intuition can be expressed in the aphorism that so-and-so was “only a matter of time”, and the local conditions of its happening are therefore less interesting than the fact that it was always going to happen and now finally has. However, this attempt to establish events “as they were” represents a perverse recapitulation of the scientific method’s speculative counterfactuals (a non-falsifiable attempt at falsifiability) which strives to discern some underlying property to the “event” *itself* (e.g. inevitability). This equivocation of falsificationism in a context where the conditions for its success are not evident does a profound disservice to our understanding of the subject matter. Through the construction of “events” as autonomous entities, scholars of history often appear to approach their subject matter as dis-embodied observers of the past, whose interpretation of historical data is vacuum-sealed from the cultural pressures and influences of their own time. There does not seem to be a good reason why this sort of alienation and self-amnesia in scholarship is productive.

Surely, nothing could be more estranged from our everyday experience of space-time and memory. Can we ever truly exist outside of ourselves? The practice of historical scholarship, and within that practice, the study of evolved modern social movements, is *necessarily* a traffic of *representations* through which all understandings of history are mediated and contextualized in relation to many distorting gravitational valences of contemporary social power. Interpretations of historical data are by definition additive, imposing a contemporary academic vocabulary and frame of reference in order to make legible a period from which we are historically estranged. “Events” are not static unities, but are invariably experienced from a multiplicity of contingent perspectives and theorized as legible within the aesthetic conventions of historical documentation and “evidence” post facto. In philosophical and social science scholarship, the methodology which emphasizes this process-relation is known as constructivism, which

espouses the centrality of cultural processes to the production of “facts”. This emphasis is particularly important when those facts occur in a field where interpretation of data allows a great degree of freedom (e.g. narrating history). The central tenet of constructivism suggests that “there is no observation without observers”⁹³, or in other words, there is no observation which is not embodied in a particular individuals or set of individuals, who themselves are formed as observers through a sustained socialization process conversant with institutional norms and cultural practices. The observer-making socialization processes are what cause said observers to notice certain elements more than others, to emphasize and obscure different readings of fact-sets in order to reiterate pre-established dominant narratives of the past⁹⁴.

Consider the way in which the social landscape of May-June 2008 in Seoul, South Korea has been marked as an event, both by the American media reacting to the events at the time, by bloggers and international audiences reacting to those media reports and by Korean historians conducting second- and third- order literature analysis much later. The situated-ness of these analyses could not be clearer, as American commentators primarily expressed concerns related to the market environment of US companies and investors, as well as engaging in an active attempt to alienate Western readers from the political antagonism of the protestors.⁹⁵ The ideological motivation, whether or not explicitly intentional, of hegemonic publications in framing the protestors as “irrational” or “hysterical” was two-fold; first, to portray the protestors as an aberration in a larger media narrative of strengthening ties surrounding the negotiation of the KORUS FTA, and second, to defuse any potential American concerns about mad cow disease

⁹³ Christian Hennig “How Wrong Models Become Useful – and Correct Models Become Dangerous” in “Between data science and applied data analysis” ed. M. Schrader, W. Gaul, M. Vichi p.236

⁹⁴ A detailed survey of the social distortions of dominant historical narratives along class, race, gender and other lines is beyond the scope of this paper. For an extended discussion of these topics, see Charles Beard, “That Noble Dream,” reprinted in Stern, *Varieties of History*, 314-328. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the twentieth Century: from Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown, Ct: Wesleyan University Press, 1997, 2005). James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: the Art of Historical Detection* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

⁹⁵ see Wall Street Journal (“Testing President Lee” 6/10/08) to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer (“South Korea: a beef with beef” 6/11/08) and the Detroit Free Press (“Web hysteria a danger to Korean deal” 6/15/08)

by tapping into the public sentiment of “if our beef is good enough for *us*, why isn’t it good enough for the South Koreans?” Only a few news outlets pointed out that the trade agreement allowed for the export of American beef that wouldn’t have been permitted to be sold in the United States owing to recent FDA regulations on mad cow disease, or that a parallel negotiation over beef imports that had occurred with Japan had yielded food safety measures conspicuously absent from the deal with Korea.⁹⁶ These two elements of the fact-set were critical to the many of the protestors self-understood motivations, which allowed for the creation of the South Korean narrative that President Lee had once again cowed to American commercial interests in trade negotiations. This perceived subordination, for which it was also perceived that South Koreans and particularly students would then have to bear the risk of tainted beef, were among the central elements of the protest-narrative that sparked outrage and helped to inflame the mass demonstration. By omitting these facts from stories about the protests, American news outlets were effectively able to promulgate a media narrative that most effectively advanced the United States’ commercial and geopolitical interests.

The framing of “hysterical activists” and unruly mobs that would later be described in the rhetoric of “escalating violence” that one might expect to read in a story about an opposition group’s riot against the shock troops of an authoritarian regime. But in South Korea? “Hysteria” thus became a popular media construction which served as a substitute for journalistic investigation into the causes of the protests, or in many cases, even attempting to conduct primary source research which may have allowed these writers to come into contact with the activists’ point of view. Needless to say, the American beef industry and its South Korean allies who stood to profit from the deal were far more prepared to circulate their version of events in official channels.

⁹⁶ for an analysis of how the Korean media reacted to the protests over time, see Seung-Ook Lee, Sook-Jin Kim, Joel Wainwright, “Mad cow militancy: Neoliberal hegemony and social resistance in South Korea” *Political Geography* xxx (2010) 1e11
<http://geography.osu.edu/faculty/jwainwright/publications/Lee%20Kim%20&%20Wainwright%202010%20Mad%20cow%20militancy.pdf>

In contrast, Korean historian and sociologist commentators attempted to crystallize a historical moment around the symbol of the candlelit vigils.⁹⁷ In contrast to a reliance on prior frames of reference (such as “rational motivations” against which the South Koreans’ “hysteria” was framed), the symbol of candlelit vigils was itself employed by the movement (“the candlelight girl”⁹⁸) along with the use of the vigils themselves as symbolic protest emerging *against* the backdrop of the severe the Law on Assembly and Demonstration, which prohibited collective gathering at night with the exception of “cultural activities”.⁹⁹ Thus the “candlelight vigils” became symbolic of the positioning of the movement towards government repression of dissent; obeying the letter of the law in order to expose the absurdities of its static restrictions and exceptions. This dynamic, the appropriation of the Orwellian ironies of *permissible* or *zoned* free speech against its regulating design to manage public expression can in a sense be read as a mockery not only of the political laws against mass political demonstrations after dark, but against the flimsy predictive “laws” of political science which might expect or map the production of subversive dissent, surprising the world of theory in its scope and heterogeneity.

The relationship between the theoretical mapping and incorporation of these eruptive episodes into a grand theoretical narrative is further complicated by ambiguities about the cultural embeddedness of academic observers. In other words, the correspondence between the “official story” of history and the past movement and interaction of material in the form of bodies (whether chemical, geological, biological or cultural)¹⁰⁰ is always subject to some degree

⁹⁷ see for instance Han Do-Hyun “Contemporary Korean Society Viewed through the Lens of the Candlelight Vigils of 2008” *Korea Journal*, Autumn 2010,

⁹⁸ Seung-Ook Lee, Sook-Jin Kim, Joel Wainwright, “Mad cow militancy: Neoliberal hegemony and social resistance in South Korea” *Political Geography* xxx (2010) 1e11
<http://geography.osu.edu/faculty/jwainwright/publications/Lee%20Kim%20&%20Wainwright%202010%20Mad%20cow%20militancy.pdf>

⁹⁹ Seung-Ook Lee, Sook-Jin Kim, Joel Wainwright, “Mad cow militancy: Neoliberal hegemony and social resistance in South Korea” *Political Geography* xxx (2010) 1e11
<http://geography.osu.edu/faculty/jwainwright/publications/Lee%20Kim%20&%20Wainwright%202010%20Mad%20cow%20militancy.pdf>

¹⁰⁰ I am indebted to Manuel De Landa here for the perspective which understands multiple strata of virtual and actual bodies existing at the level of materialism, available for the radical empiricist to ground material reality in as a reference point for a dynamical relationship between the production of both human and non-human emergence. (see Manuel De Landa “A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History”

of ambiguity, since there is no free-floating atemporal observation deck on which any historian would be able to somehow “objectively” position themselves. It is thus impossible to determine outside of situated-ness the extent to which a given historical narrative properly corresponds with the polyvocal swarm of perspectives (human and otherwise) through which the movement and interaction of material bodies was originally constituted as a segment of temporal flow. History as we know it is thus *at best* a partial reflection seen by a bleary-eyed addict through a broken mirror. Even the decision to segment time in a particular way, to identify a coherent starting and end point for an event as a way to bracket historical data through a necessary frame of relevance is a culturally informed decision, situated in a feedback loop between individual interpretation, multiple overlapping discourse communities and a set of data which has already been rendered through formal models, which themselves have been influenced by previous cultural traditions and so on¹⁰¹.

Thus, we can begin to distinguish a classical model of constituting history, where in an attempt to render the past objective historians necessarily rely on subjective criteria to produce historical objects. These historical objects become legible as sequential series of linear events in time, suspended in eternity, as one might encounter artifacts on the glass shelves of a museum. “The American Revolutionary War (1775–1783)”, “World War I (1914-1919)”, “Lenin’s Train Ride (1917)” have become understood self-evident facts, operating as closed causal systems, in order to individuate them as objective units of analysis. In order to become objective, historians require this production of “events” as objects. How different this must be from the imperceptible networks of social circulation in which pressure builds, slowly and intricately, lapses and

Swerve, 1997) This agential understanding of knowledge itself as what Bruno Latour would call an “actant” further allows us to puncture the hermetic seal on the formalistic understanding of observation, as Nick Srnicek writes, “Epistemologies and knowledges, no less than physical objects, are actors in the world – ones which shape and produce differences themselves.” (Nick Srnicek, “Conflict Networks: Collapsing the Global into the Local” *Journal of Critical Globalisation Studies*, Issue 2 (2010) <http://lse.academia.edu/NickSrnicek/Papers>)

¹⁰¹ Christian Hennig “How Wrong Models Become Useful – and Correct Models Become Dangerous” in “Between data science and applied data analysis” ed. M. Schrader, W. Gaul, M. Vichi, see diagram on p. 237

subsides, only to burst forth suddenly into the gaze of the official historian, fully fledged, suddenly ubiquitous, significant, capable of marking time! This classical model must necessarily take historical objects as *givens* in order to substantiate its own objectivity. In other words, historical objects (situated stories that organize skeletal facts into sweeping mythologies) must be understood by classical historians in the same light as biologists understand cell proteins or physicists measure velocity. Only when the historical objects themselves are understood as perfectly *natural* and *immutable* facts about the past, bracketed as discrete eternal entities inscribed on the great scroll of authorial Time, can the classical model of narrating history successfully claim a firm grasp on Truth.

Of course, all of this palaver about classical historical objects is quite clever, quite convincing nonsense. The idea that complex social assemblages responds axiomatically, rather than contingently, to deterministic signals is an assumption that has never been persuasively justified, and may in principle be *unjustifiable*. Historians such as Jared Diamond, who have attempted to render the historical method as scientific, go to great pains to ignore obvious counter-examples and profoundly neglect the role that subjective frames played in sorting evidence to reach his conclusions. As critics such as Eugene Goodheart have pointed out, Diamond's attempt to schematize a thirteen-thousand year history of civilizational development and competition largely around the key determinant of geography and pre-existing resource distribution can only be persuasive if one entirely ignores substantial counterevidence. For example, Diamond ignores the evidence that many non-Western civilizations (notably China) possessed far greater advantages and yet were foiled by "typical aberrations" in local political and cultural conditions (Diamond's phrase, which Goodheart aptly notes is an obvious oxymoron)¹⁰². This is a model of scholarship in which communities of knowers do not move from one paradigm to another according to the variable accumulations of evidence, but in which multiple dominant paradigms compete against one another from the comfort of their own

¹⁰² Eugene Goodheart "Is history a science?" *Philosophy and Literature*, Volume 29, Number 2, October 2005, pp. 477-488, p.478

epistemological echo-chambers, and intellectual methodologies and terms circulate in the same way as novel fashion accessories. While Jared Diamond may initially appear as a red herring to our discussion of theories of social movements, his work is a necessary example to empirically disqualify the use of deterministic methodology of any kind at the outset.

We should not be surprised to find these grand theories of human affairs embarrassingly lacking, prone to overlooking such “typical aberrations” that complicate the production of defined historical objects as discrete causal narratives, where such complications would prevent history from assuming its properly authorial voice in perpetuating social hierarchies by valorizing particular actants power to act. Where would classical history be without its great battles, its kings and generals, its explorers and heroes and other great white men? However, classical history’s attempt to positively correlate dominant social status with historical agency inevitably runs into swarms of empirical problems, as Graham Harman notes:

Any attempt to see actants as the reducible puppets of deeper structures is doomed to fail. The balance of force makes some actants stronger than others, but miniature trickster objects turn the tide without warning: a pebble can destroy an empire if the Emperor chokes at dinner.¹⁰³

Imagine what it would be like to live in a world where all historical time could be explained by simply referring to geography, or the movement of the planets in our solar system, or class, or gender, or race some essential structure of the human psyche. What a simple world that would be! Fortunately, time unfolds the interaction between material bodies at multiple strata simultaneously in much more complex and imperceptible ways than fallible tools of human data-collection and story-telling are capable of faithfully representing. Sadly, all of the aforementioned “root cause” explanations have had a theoretical following among contemporary scholars in the social sciences.¹⁰⁴ Establishing sufficient complexity in historical social systems

¹⁰³ Graham Harman “Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics”, re.press, 2009 p. 21-22

¹⁰⁴ for a survey of prevalent monocausal explanations in contemporary social science scholarship, see Anna Leander “Bertrand Badie: cultural diversity changing International Relations?” in *The Future of International Relations*, edited by Iver B. Neumann and Ole Wæver, (1997)

for this devastating objection against deterministic (and particularly, mono-causal or closed-system) explanations is hardly a tall order. Following Bertrand Badie's declaration of the 'crisis of universalism' in the social sciences, Anna Leander aptly notes that:

Since societies do not function in a single way, no single theory, with its gamut of concepts, methods and categories, can adequately explain events... In addition, implicit in most monocausal explanations is the unidirectional assumption if A (differentiation, economic development, strong state) then B (development of a modern state, democratization, economic development) - which disregards the evidence that similar events or developments might have not only varying but opposite effects in different contexts.¹⁰⁵

Even if some hypothetical monocausal relationship between certain material facts about the past and evolution of complex social systems were to magically prove accurate, historians would surely not be able to verify that relationship with certainty on the basis of the distorted representations of the past which constitute most historical evidence. Speculation about the historical accuracy of a formal model of observation relative to a transcendent "observer-independent reality" is thus perhaps interesting only in the same way as speculations about the interior topologies of black holes, insofar as neither can ever be verified. This lack of verifiability is no mere accident, but is in fact *guaranteed by the structural relation between observer and dynamically produced historical object* (a historical object which is synthesized from evidence by the process of observation). As E.H. Carr put it in his key text *What Is History?*, "...history is necessarily subjective, since man is observing himself..."¹⁰⁶

What does this mean for understanding emergent social movements? It means that as scholars we must be mindful of our own intellectual heritage, and the dynamical relationship that it bears to a history of dissent and intellectual freedom that may have once been explicitly tied to the explicitly *political* goals of social movements of the past. It is much easier to

For an investigation of astrological social science, see Ken McRitchie "Astrology and the Social Sciences: Looking inside the black box of astrology theory" *Correlation: Journal of Research in Astrology*, Vol 24(1), pp. 5-20, 2006

http://www.theoryofastrology.com/black_box/blackbox.htm

¹⁰⁵ Anna Leander "Bertrand Badie: cultural diversity changing International Relations?" in *The Future of International Relations*, edited by Iver B. Neumann and Ole Wæver, (1997) p. 146

¹⁰⁶ E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), p. 20, as cited in Eugene Goodheart "Is history a science?" *Philosophy and Literature*, Volume 29, Number 2, October 2005, pp. 477-488 p. 479 [gendered language not endorsed by this author]

understand the conditions of knowledge as political when viewed historically, precisely because such conditions of democratic knowledge-production were once fervently desired ideals of marginal communities who strove through mud and blood to see them realized and often died trying. The process of narrating history is already a form of performative politics, attesting in itself to the political conditions for its own possibility (e.g. democratic, authoritarian, partisan and so on). In other words, there are political conditions under which every sort of history may be produced which in some ways respond to the power structures of the present. This responsiveness to power is more obvious in the case of totalitarian regimes, where history simply becomes another vehicle for propaganda and erasure, but not necessarily less pervasive in democratic ones. The politics of history are further constituted through the specific processes of historical narration, the gathering and interpretation of evidence, the arrangement and visualization of chronology and the spatialization of historical events in public spaces, museums and history books. There is no formal process by which a historical set of circumstances can be individuated as a closed object of study which is not already subtly political. A brief stroll by the Korean War memorial in Washington, D.C. and the Hall of the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea in the Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution¹⁰⁷ reveals as much, both of which depict essentially the same series of "facts" (with some noticeable distinctions) with different starting points and end points (a war of aggression versus provocation, a settlement of victory or capitulation) and yet represent those facts in starkly contrasting ways with embedded factual disagreements. An anthropologist from a third culture might easily conclude that both monuments are little more than nationalistic propaganda.

¹⁰⁷ see Military Museum of the Chinese People's Revolution "The Hall of the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1951-1953)", 2010 website blurb: "The Hall of the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1951-1953), on the fourth floor of the East Exhibition Building, mainly presents a history of the Chinese People's Volunteers who fought shoulder to shoulder with the Korean People's Army against US-led "UN forces" from October 1950 to July 1953. The enemy was defeated by Chinese and Korean troops using far inferior equipment, and was forced to agree to the Korean War armistice." (http://eng.jb.mil.cn/halls_o6.html#mid)

This is not to say that there is no such thing as actual “facts”, but rather that facticity is usually limited to a very spare set of banal truths which are then arranged in order to form a historical narrative; an act which itself produces political meaning over and above the bare factual bones. Histories are stories, the ones we read and form a cultural understanding of our past from are not skeletal, but fully integrated mythologies, with our own pantheons of heroic and intellectual warrior-gods. This principle holds at much lower registers of cognitive framing, as we will see when discussing the potent social framing of chronopolitics in Chapter Three.

We can see this same force at work in the attempt to disambiguate the accuracy (or direct correspondence) of witness testimony about a recent movement and interaction of material bodies. Consider the multiple segments in Akira Kurosawa’s famous film *Rashomon* (1950), which relates the same story of a sexual encounter which may or may not be rape and the death of a samurai that may be murder or may be suicide through four differing perspectives, which contain mutually contradictory “facts” as witness testimony and therefore complicate the viewer’s understanding of each perspective’s “truth”. Who is responsible for producing the “truth” of an “event”? In this configuration, “experience” is never a given, but rather produced through dialogue and contestation, through the contrasts and coalescence points of different situated perspectives.

Problems of observer bias are perhaps most visible in the disagreements among recognized experts in a given field who both claim to speak with the authority of their discipline and yet reach opposite conclusions. However, the complication of what scholar Donna Haraway has referred to as “situated-ness” is surely in play at every level of production for both experience of historical reality and the “evidence” that remains as its trace or record, from documents such as individuals diaries and correspondences to newspaper articles. Thus, it becomes necessary to recognize that scholars are never really talking directly about “social movements” as such, but only the aggregated data that has been organized around representations of what the term “social movements” has meant, mediated by a vocabulary which has both migrated and evolved

over time. It is easy to forget that scholarship itself does not stand still. Attending to the importance of situated perspective will be absolutely crucial as we follow the evolution of these hegemonic representations of “social movements” from unruly mobs and unwashed masses to emergent assemblages and complex social superorganisms.

How, then, can we mark the formation of a social-political group, an association, a “social movement” in time? This is a crucial methodological question that must necessarily inform the way that we chart the emergence of particular social movements in response to what scholars refer to as “opportunity structures”; new avenues of possibility combined with the threat or failure of old strategies that cause networks of people to change the ways that they collectively act. In attempting to narrate the 2008 demonstrations in South Korea; how do we become responsible for marking causes, for articulating responsibility within collective frames? As we will see later, the many answers to this question are themselves political, each allowing for differing articulations of human agency with disciplinary implications. However, this question is itself complicated by the mediation of representation that we must rely on as historical evidence for questioning and confirming particular theories of social movement emergence and success. Consider this introductory remark from noted social movement scholar Doug McAdam, as he writes:

A fairly strong consensus has emerged among scholars of social movements around the question of how social movements arise. Increasingly, one finds scholars emphasizing the importance of the same broad sets of factors in analyzing the origins of collective action. These three factors are: (1) an expansion in the political opportunities or threats confronting a given challenger; (2) the forms of organization (informal as well as formal) available to insurgents as sites for initial mobilization, and (3) the collective processes of interpretation, attribution and social construction that mediate between opportunity/threat and action.¹⁰⁸

Each of these criteria necessarily seems to entail a reliance on historical evidence about how actants in social movements perceived the terrain of opportunities, threats, available organizational forms, and collective processes of interpretation. The extent to which digital

¹⁰⁸ Gerald Davis & Doug McAdam, 2000, “Corporations, Classes and Social Movements After Managerialism” in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, V 22, p.217

technology enables the conditions of possibility for collective social action is thus intimately linked to the extent to which technology is understood as accessible, organizational and political. In other words, the “objective” conditions of possibility for social change at a given historical moment are directly linked to the subjective perception of engaged social actants vis-a-vis their chances for success and their means of achieving it. A door without a frame, outline or handle can hardly be understood as an exit. An invisible fire extinguisher is not very useful during an emergency. This point may seem obvious but it is worth emphasizing, as a great deal of what it means to trace the evolution of social movements turns out to run parallel to a history of philosophical ideas about the individual’s capacity for action, the way that collectivities ought to organize and share power as citizens inhabiting a national space and the limitations that ought to be placed on sovereignty in order to avoid the dangers latent in concentrated power. It is no accident that Euro“modern” social movements evolved in conjunction with Enlightenment ideas about politics at in the second half of the eighteenth century. Ideas become the condition of possibility for recognizing and articulating the injustice of certain arrangements of power, to make arguments for or against a particular cause, and to take action and sustain it over time.

This relation between political philosophy and social action can best be expressed at the individual level in what Doug McAdam refers to as “cognitive liberation” in his major work *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*¹⁰⁹; rendered as the capacity to understand one’s own situation as unjust and believe that one has the ability to do something to change it. Here McAdam makes the compelling argument that a key factor the civil rights movements victories was itself this positive condition of cognitive liberation. In other words, to the extent that organizers eventually overturned many institutional edifices of white supremacy, they were successful in large part because they fervently believed that one day they could and would Overcome.¹¹⁰ As we shall see, this crucial relation between thought and action

¹⁰⁹ Doug McAdam “Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970” University of Chicago Press, 1999, p.48

¹¹⁰ Library of Congress “We Shall Overcome” Postwar Period: 1945-1968

traces *the cultural production* of our representations of social movements throughout their historical evolution.

In putting such a high premium on scholarly methodology in understanding social movements, this text can hardly be ignorant of its own disposition towards the formation of knowledge of the historical past, in particular with relation to establishing criteria for relevance and applicability of evidence. In articulating my argument about how social movements have evolved to use digital technology, I shall attempt to move towards a practice of what the philosopher William James has termed “radical empiricism”, which is a pragmatic approach to truth-conditions which attempts to make concepts reflect and adapt to multiple strata of pure sensible experience. Radical empiricism, particularly in its appropriation by Gilles Deleuze, is distinct from classical empiricism as it understands embodied affective experience not as an insensate instrument for conducting scientific measurements, but to positively articulate the points of synthetic convergence between the human inter-subjective neurotechnologies of individual and cultural perception/interpretation and the material world which provides the basis for sense-stimuli. For radical empiricism, the sensoriums and the minds which interpret data are not passive silos waiting to store neutral information. As Jones et al. put it, radical empiricism “... seeks to avoid the somewhat reductive, vulgar, ‘abstracted’ empiricism which sees the task of empirical work as uncovering a singularity which pre-exists perception, or as the imposition of a pre-formed grid of decipherment onto a passive object. ... For Deleuze, empiricism is not about reduction or ‘discovery’, but about expansion, production, creativity and difference.”¹¹¹

Where most studies of social movements seek to provide an abstract model that can explain and predict why and how social movements form, organize, evolve, succeed and dissipate, this

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/lyrical/songs/overcome.html>

¹¹¹ Campbell Jones, Chris Land and Steffen G. Böhm “It Appears that Certain Aphasiacs...” *ephemera, critical dialogues on organization* Volume 1(3), 2001 195-200
<http://www.ephemeraweb.org/journal/1-3/1-3editorial.pdf>

text shall seek to provide what Michel Foucault has described as ‘diagrams of power’¹¹² which explicate the co-production of material, social and conceptual technology with the evolution of contentious politics and the emergence of novel collectivities. From a theoretical perspective, we can once again take *Rashomon* as a point of departure for evaluating the success of such power diagrams, as we do not want to postulate the existence of some abstracted, dis-embodied historical reality as “the way things really were”, for this would rely on an artificial use of perspective that cannot be squared with the inexorable embodied, situated-ness of sensible experience that a commitment to radical empiricism entails. Disagreements among audiences of that film may hinge on whether or not the disagree-ers previously believed that “reality” is a single discrete object perceived differently by many situated actants or rather is itself ontologically half-constituted through a poly-vocality of subjective synthetic perception and interpretation at multiple simultaneous levels.

This second possibility is illustrated through what Gilles Deleuze has called “partial-objects”, which is his way of noting that there is both matter and the synthetic rendering of perception and interpretation through naming that constitute the radical empirical reality of what *any real object ontologically entails*¹¹³. Every object, insofar as we perceive it, is thus only partially external from us, only partially liberated from the affective desire entwined with our situated perception. Every partial-object is thus a multiple, appearing fully constituted as distinct ontological entities to different spatialized perspectives¹¹⁴, every event multiple¹¹⁵ events and so on. Are the contradictions in the four testimonies of *Rashomon* an accurate representation of the variance of human experience, or in the case of each contradiction, was one or both of the witnesses wrong?

¹¹² Kevin Jon Heller “Power, Subjectification and Resistance in Foucault” *SubStance* #79, 1996 p.6

¹¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *Anti-Oedipus* University of Minnesota Press: 1978 p. 49, p. 359

¹¹⁴ Rob Kitchen and Martin Dodge “Rethinking Maps” *Prog Hum Geogr* 2007 31: 331

¹¹⁵ By this I am referring to a multiply-represented ontological entity, not the separation into distinct forms or embodying distinct properties, as clarified in Beth Metcalf’s essay “Deleuze versus Hegel”, *The Univocity of Deleuze* 2005, where she writes that “...multiplicities have nothing to do with numerically distinct substantial entities, because they are all ontologically singular and said in one sense.” <http://users.rcn.com/bmetcalf.ma.ultranet/Deleuze%20Versus%20Hegel.htm>

In his essay *The Rashomon Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree*, Karl Heider argues that the most interesting aspect of disagreement among social science scholars is not per se the subject matter which is being contested but rather that such disagreements are viewed by scholars as severe problems for the credibility of the discipline to deliver on 'hard truth', when in fact "...the value of thinking about the Rashomon Effect goes far beyond the relatively few cases of ethnographic disagreement that we shall be able to turn up. The sorts of influences, biases, or predilections we can examine here are at work in all ethnography, even when it is unchallenged."¹¹⁶ In other words, given the variability and range of perspectives and interpretations available, we should be surprised that social scientists reach agreement on anything at all! The fact that they do is more likely than not a result of their own socialization process, the indoctrination phases of graduate education through which scholars becomes professionalized and disciplined, and which allows the discipline as a whole to form a certain degree of consensus and homogeneity that then translates into members of that discipline being asked to speak with authoritative credibility on germane topoi.¹¹⁷ However, for a *historical* practice of radical empiricism which relies on representations as a substantial anchor to the partial-objects of past happening, it is crucial both to historicize the *production* of such representations within the dominant ideologies of scholarly practice as well as to read the structure and composition of representations as the aesthetic traces of cultural practices which may also be relevant. The famous sociologist Melvin Pollner brilliantly captured this point in his 1974 text *Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse*, writing that

"...the production of 'objective' or scientific accounts of human behavior are themselves permeated by rich, subtle practices and assumptions which are typically ignored or unrecognized – just as they are in everyday life... [this] implies that human sciences may be naively founded on a problematic supposition and thus may comprise a *folk discipline*, that

¹¹⁶ Karl Heider "The Rashomon Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree" Source: *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 90, No. 1 (Mar., 1988), pp. 73-81

¹¹⁷ see Jeff Schmidt "Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System That Shapes Their Lives" Rowan & Littlefield, 2002

is, a form of inquiry which is not so much 'about' members' assumptions as it is ensnared by and an expression of those assumptions."¹¹⁸

There are several important implications here. The first is that social truth is both pluralistic and non-metric, and the virtues of building theories with wide-ranging exactitude and rigid and specific designation are limited if not outright counter-productive. In other words, scholars should perhaps spend less time trying to knit theories that fit all shapes and sizes of specific cases and posit difference or variance as a virtue rather than constantly searching for conceptual homogeneity. The second, and perhaps more important point, is that doing social theory involves making subtle political choices in how we describe reality. If the history of social movements demonstrate anything, it demonstrates that ideas can be politically powerful, and that philosophy matters to the evolution of marginal communities' material conditions, access to social technologies of resistance and so on. Insofar as scholars implicitly or explicitly rely or reify particular assumptions about the way the world works and the mutability of particular aspects of social reality, they may reinforce the conservative aspects of the status quo. Such a tendency among extremely institutionalized communities of knowers should hardly surprise us, however it nonetheless represents a brand of elite complicity with networks of power/knowledge that function as authoritative gatekeepers for privileged strata of discourse.¹¹⁹

This elite complicity is most pernicious precisely in academic and professional disciplines that deny their political nature, or hide from the history of their dynamic relationship with social engagement, in which they have produced ideas with political utility. In his book *Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System That Shapes Their Lives*, which follows the disciplinary pressures and selection procedures in professional training programs, and particularly graduate programs, which privilege conformity primarily on

¹¹⁸ Melvin Pollner "Mundane Reason: Reality in Everyday and Sociological Discourse" Cambridge University Press, 1974, p. 1-3

¹¹⁹ Brian Martin "Review of Jeff Schmidt's *Disciplined Minds*" Workplace 4.2, 2002
<http://louisville.edu/journal/workplace/martinreview.html>

students¹²⁰, Jeff Schmidt argues in a section aptly titled “The Politics of Not Getting Political” that it is precisely the professional insistence on neutrality and objectivity among teachers and research academics that prevents them from understanding the profound ways in which their ideas shape the cultures and systems of power/knowledge in which they are embedded.

Following neomarxist critiques of worker alienation, Schmidt argues that it is precisely the stultifyingly apolitical veneer of academic professionalism that disavows the possibility of engaged resistance against socially negative technologies of enculturation that prepare students for lives of rule-following safe-not-sorry conformity, metered and scheduled time, deferring to authority and tolerating boredom.¹²¹ Central to Schmidt’s argument is that a decision *not* to resist or question the power relations of the status quo is precisely what allows individuals to become conduits of perpetuating and reinforcing violently exclusionary social orders, particularly in relation to class, race and gender. In this schema, opportunities for politicizing moments of everyday exclusion are systematically erased by the continuous iteration of majoritarian social frames, such as the mythological “equal playing field”, the just pay-off of hard work, and the valuable lie of equal opportunity for upward mobility known locally as the “American Dream”. It is against these social frames that McAdams concept of “cognitive liberation” becomes important *par excellence*. Schmidt argues that one of the main ways that academic disciplines depoliticize their professional practitioners is through the same alienating division of assembly-line labor of classical Fordist production models, sub-dividing the intellectual tasks and specifying so abstractly that the political implications of aspects of teaching and thinking ceased to become apparent. He extends his argument across many disciplines, even arguing that:

Even philosophers, who at one time struggled to develop thought that encompasses all human endeavors, are now hired on the basis of their willingness and ability to carry out the minutely specialized work of analytical philosophy. Consequently, they increasingly identify

¹²⁰ The text focuses its analysis on the graduate programs for advanced degrees in science, and particularly physics with which the author has firsthand experience.

¹²¹ paraphrased from Jeff Schmidt “Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System That Shapes Their Lives” Rowan & Littlefield, 2002 p.32

themselves as masters of the associated specialized tools and methods, rather than as independent moral and political thinkers.¹²²

One thing that this text will seek to suggest is that, from a historical perspective, if philosophers are becoming the equivalent of intellectual technocrats unconsciously reinforcing dominant power relations, social movements may need to cultivate alternative reservoirs of conceptual possibility to draw on in achieving new strata of cognitive liberation.

The politics of framing social movements through scholarly analysis further extends to the way in which scholars choose to contextualize agency within spatio-temporal loci. This is why a proper theorization of temporal motion and sequence is so vital to scholarship about social change. Consider the historical “event” as a primary unit of hegemonic analysis, and the way that Vassilis Tsianos et al chose to problematize this concept at the beginning of their book

Escape Routes:

... the (left's) fixation on events cannot nurture the productive energy required to challenge the formation of contemporary modes of control in Global North Atlantic societies. An event is never in the present; it can only be designated as an event in retrospect or anticipated as a future possibility. To pin our hopes on events is a nominalist move which draws on the masculinist luxury of having the power both to name things and to wait about for salvation. ... if we highlight [events'] role in social change we do so at the expense of considering the potency of the present that is made of people's everyday practices: the practices employed to navigate daily life and to sustain relations, the practices which are at the heart of social transformation long before we are able to name it as such.¹²³

Thus, we can identify narrating social change through time with implicit political framing choice, what George Wallis referred to as “chronopolitics”. Chronopolitics are simply the politics of historical space constituted by a disposition to a particular construction of historical time, which grounds possibilities for collective organizing. These chronopolitical frames become deterministic of how and when people relate to time in the precise terms of social action, or when they choose to “seize the moment” plucked from the stream of history, as Wallis notes: “Perspectives on the future are articulated with current belief systems concerning the nature of

¹²² Jeff Schmidt “Disciplined Minds: A Critical Look at Salaried Professionals and the Soul-Battering System That Shapes Their Lives” Rowan & Littlefield, 2002 p. 92

¹²³ Vassilis Tsianos, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Niamh Stephenson *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* Pluto Press 2008 p. 1-3

society and of social change. Since the struggle of intrasocietal groups to change and to resist change comprises much of the history of any society, a knowledge of prevailing conceptualizations of change and of ideologies concerning it is an important part of the study of social change itself. More specifically, beliefs concerning the future and roads to it will have significant influence upon current political behavior.”¹²⁴ Wallis goes on to give the example of a political progressive who has been inculcated with the “scientific” notion of time presented by Social Darwinists, who is thus led to believe that his political views are anachronisms of an outdated understanding of history, and that indeed pressing for reforms or against perceived inequalities will only complicate the “natural” movement of social evolution towards its ultimate perfection. Examples like this can be found throughout history, and in particular among Leftist groups in the early twentieth-century. In particular, this naturalizing chronopolitics framed the debates surrounding scientific Marxism, which held similar views about the dialectical evolution of history towards given points, thus seeming to obviate the necessity or even desirability of actively initiating a political revolution (lest one pre-empt the ripening of a pre-ordained historical moment).¹²⁵ If this caricature of dialecticism has failed to make this understanding of history sound absurd, consider that it rests largely on a pseudo-scientific spiritualism which recognizes the causal primacy of *both* materialism and a Hegelian Spirit of history the driver of most events. Importantly, within this idiotic understanding of historical time, material power relations count for everything and human agency counts for almost nothing, as if humans played no role in assembling the apparatuses of power and distributing exclusive access to them. Making a further case against the dialectic, a philosophical artifice which literally insinuates a totalitarian explanation for the fabric of reality itself¹²⁶, provides an explanation for the change

¹²⁴ George Wallis “CHRONOPOLITICS: THE IMPACT OF TIME PERSPECTIVES ON THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGE” *Social Forces*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Sep., 1970), pp. 102-108

¹²⁵ Sheila Fitzpatrick *The Russian Revolution* Routledge, 2008 p. 26

¹²⁶ Mark Fisher “Reading the Imperceptible Tremors of an Unimaginable Future” *Mute*, May 11, 2010 http://www.metamute.org/en/content/reading_the_imperceptible_tremors_of_an_unimaginable_future

of human consciousness similar to the explanation that botany provides for the germination of seeds, and further operates to ready our sensibilities to the logic of authoritarian axioms, is needless to say beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in summarizing the disposition of the literature of contemporary scholars to the subject, I would direct readers to Benjamin Noys succinct piece in *The Philosophers' Magazine*, where he notes: “If there is one thing that Anglo-American analytic philosophers and their Continental cousins agree on, and there probably is only one thing, it is that the dialectic is as a dead as a dodo.”¹²⁷

Theories about the nature of time and the progression of history have thus long been of interest at least to those who perceive themselves as agents of social change, insofar as these theories have direct bearings on the conditions of possibility for their collective action. If the forces of power have stacked the odds against success, it may still be worth risking life and property in the name of justice, however those noble ideals appear less sacrifice-worthy when balanced against odds approaching the immutability of the theory of gravity. Put simply, the line between bravery and stupidity can be quite thin, and actants socialized understanding of social change through historical time may strongly influence where that line is drawn. Historically, the appearance of seemingly immutable laws of human nature have acted as liminal constraints on political space and social power, as we will see in Chapter Four.

Counter-vailing commitments may also play a role in the initiation and organization of a campaign for social change. Theoretical dispositions also inform the ways that individuals map their own identity onto particular value-commitments often tied to territory. As Gearoid O Tuathail has argued, geographical notions constitute a co-productive loop with the articulation of bounded identity, for example those tied to locality and nation.¹²⁸ These identities are

see also Victor Pelevin “Victor Pelevin” Interview, BOMB Magazine, Issue 79 Spring 2002, , LITERATURE <http://www.bombsite.com/issues/79/articles/2481>

¹²⁷ Benjamin Noys “Wal-Marx: Review: Frederick Jameson *Valences of Dialectic*” *The Philosopher's Magazine*, January 21, 2010

¹²⁸ Gearoid O Tuathail “DISPLACING GEOPOLITICS: WRITING ON THE MAPS OF GLOBAL POLITICS” revised for *Society and Space*, 1994 [unpaginated] <http://www.nvc.vt.edu/toalg/Website/Publish/papers/Displace.htm>

produced in consonance with disciplinary norms surrounding the Othering of marginal populations within dominant discourses, such as the location of colonized peoples in distant spaces and ancient times. These discourses do not occur in a power-vacuum, but rather serve the distinct cultural purpose of alienating the beneficiaries of the material theft of scarce resources from the violence of its extraction. The discourses of geographical and temporal alienation of disparate colonized communities thereby become part and parcel of a larger discursive project of erasure, of removing the structural exploitation of colonial extraction from the products and material wealth which magically seems to appear in the marketplaces of colonizer populations, at a price which seems to violate local knowledge of supply and demand. Discourses of time also serve as profound elements of this edifice, as I have argued elsewhere¹²⁹, that the situation of colonized indigenous peoples today as “less developed” is in fact a schematization operative around parallel civilizational timelines, wherein ethnically homogenous spatialized cultures are racing against one another on a chronological timeline of social and technological development events, following a teleological trajectory towards an idealized future that in fact is only an expression of elite Western values. However, these chronologies are always political insofar as they create the implicit value frames from which colonialism seems both natural and desirable; indigenous peoples who are “lagging behind” or downright “backwards” must be resituated on their timelines, brought up to speed by a benevolent colonial intervention, for which the exchange of the colonizer’s extraction of material wealth is of course an overly generous bargain on the part of colonizer nations. The argument of benevolent colonialism here recapitulates a chronopolitics of the White Man’s Burden, where colonial administrators are seen as having their hands on the levers of time itself, naturalizing the processes of domination and seemingly foreclosing the possibility of resistance. Here, we can see that theory does not exist as an abstraction but constellates the material limits of

¹²⁹ Edmund Zagorin “The Spatio-Temporal Subject and the Modern State” conference paper presented at the University of the Pacific Philosophy Conference, 2007

interpretation for the practices of everyday living and the possibilities of collective resistance, although discourses are never totalizing or complete, and chance resistance always remains possible.

This relation between theories of human agency and the perceived possibilities of social actant remains true today, as we will see in the case of the Critical Art Ensemble in Chapters Five and Six, who draw directly from the political ecology of Felix Guattari, and whose tactical interventions bear a theoretical reticence both wary of cooption and attendant to the dangers of taking the powerful at their word. However, the dominant discourses of history, time and geographical space which too often frame discussions of social movements continue to present problems of scholarly complicity with reinforcing repressive regimes of power/knowledge. These are realms that typically converge around privileged representations, the stories and artifacts of those who have fought, killed and lived to tell the tale, who had enough cash to finance their version of the truth. In other words, representations which have become dominant as winner-written histories, privileged if nothing else by their visibility, by their entry into discourse. The histories we know are always the tip of much larger icebergs we can only make educated guesses at. The politics we see and read about are simply those that have become legible to us. That is why the concept of “imperceptible” politics used later in *Escape Routes* is so vitally important, insofar as it can help us answer questions about how to theorize social movements and collectivities that are literally constituted outside of *any* system of representation and burst onto the scene explosively; a bolt from the blue. Imperceptible politics offers a way of understanding un-theorized practices of everyday resistance. These practices populate and texture the sub-surface *volumetric* space of social reality, rather than articulating at the level of visible topology, and thus bring to bear a tangled structure of under-currents to the dynamic production of large-scale social phenomena. Insofar as these practices can be read as “resistance”, it is often not merely in spite of but through direct reappropriation of dominant

discourses in playful ways, where local contexts provide effective counterinstances for presumed universalisms.¹³⁰

Thus, chronopolitical and geographical framings which privilege already-dominant representations, in particular “events”, construct an understanding of history which is already inhospitable to contemporary tactics of social change. This is particularly evident wherein events are constructed in a manner that assigns them artificially determined beginnings and ends, failing to attend to the ways in which practices of dissent become crystallized sub-rosa long before emerging as representations first into the sovereign (and frequently colonial) gaze, the public fora, the print media, the historical archive of primary source documents. In other words, the classic historical timeline that shows “The French Revolution 1789-1799”, that situates events as objects in time, smoothed like billiard balls along a linear axis of causation; the simplified Rube Goldberg-machine of historical happening, is a false heuristic which is only ever created in hindsight. What we understand as the conditions of possibility for “events” are often merely the rarefied elements of cultural signification; e.g. the official declaration of war, those shots heard ‘round the world, the heroic charges led and retreats strategically engineered and so on; the romantic revolutionary, flag held aloft, beckoning for the masses to follow him. Historians pick the starting points and termini, not the embodied actants, alive in the thick of things. One could talk ad infinitum about the absurdity of a Hegelian dialectical motor of history which social science has been death-gripping to some degree ever since Marx’s appropriation, driving events into our walls panel by panel as did the ancient cuneiformists, pretending that our representations of the past correspond identically with some abstracted view-from-nowhere Truth of what an “event” means. As if meaning itself could be bound to a stable and unyielding surface without some squirming around. Our representations become evidence; our histories

¹³⁰ see Roland Bleiker “Discourse and Human Agency” *Contemporary Political Theory*. Avenel: Mar 2003. Vol. 2, Iss. 1; pg. 25

become self-evident. But this is perhaps very different from the empirical of world affect and movement in which we live...

Power relations are not structural, and thus any structuralist analysis of power cannot but fail at every hint of chaos, at every “typical aberration”. Instead, power relations are constituted through discourses in which they are embedded and which they co-create; they are alive and can only be sustained through a concerted disciplinary effort. Power relations are iterative rather than immutable, and must be performed and enacted again and again. Stability in complex social systems in which dynamic feedback loops engender degrees of immanent chaos is the exception, rather than the norm, and perceived structures of equilibrium and pacification often conceal more antagonism than the well-balanced interests they are supposed to reveal. Institutions are the work of entrenched interests that represent centers of gravity within networks of discipline, fighting for all their worth against the dissipative tendency of complex systems towards de-centralization from centralization, towards autonomy from control, towards meshworks from hierarchies, and over the long-term perhaps vice-versa as well. Time is on no one’s side, which is all the more reasons to be wary of ideological discourses which appropriate the natural laws of the universe in order to map resistance as a form of capture and control, as a zero-sum struggle over fixed material resources. Ultimately, these discourses come to function in an insidious complicity with a status quo and only serve to shackle the imaginations of those who might fight for a different world.

chapter three: active scholarship and two sciences of the social

Returning to *Power in Movement* as our point of departure, we can see that Tarrow does not conceive of social movements as issuing forth from some ahistorical essence of collective action that defines both limits and possibilities for organizing. Instead, he focuses on the ways in which the emergence and success of social movements are both responsive to concrete historical circumstances, while at the same time acting to overcome them. Thus, a proper description of group identity formation and contentious politics can never *only* involve a narrative of self-empowered bootstrapping and “bottom-up” change, but rather must describe the dynamical relationship of measures and counter-measures, repression and cooption in responsive tandem. Social change evolves through both resistance and subversion, a historical dance of systems of control and liberation that each enable and constrain the possibilities of the other.

Understanding social movements as only one axis in a much larger frame will allow us to begin to see social movements themselves not as static organizational entities, but rather as dynamical processes co-evolving with new political opportunities and constraints. In social movement theory, this is the same “political opportunity structure” we saw earlier, a necessary empirical starting point for concretizing the historical moment in which early modernist social movements operated. Historical space and place are by no means deterministic here; just as water will sometimes follow the cracks in the sidewalk, we may not see a hidden dent until the stream has already diverged, always in hindsight, left to chance until it happens. In other words, causal determinism itself can be thought of as affective, how things line up is inexorably situated by the liner-upper’s (historian’s) own historical place. Understanding social movements as abstract entities whose relations are depicted in some sort of vacuum-sealed analysis is, in a very palpable sense, theoretical nonsense.

Social science, as with most sciences, has for quite some time seen itself as being in the business of producing truth, where truth possesses a uniquely Platonic flavor, following Manuel De Landa’s characterization: “...truth is conceived as a relation of *correspondence* between, on

one hand, a series of facts about the classes of entities populating reality and, on the other, a series of sentences expressing those facts.”¹³¹ As we shall see, this tendency has been equally true of contemporary studies of social movements, which attempt to define and deduce the basic properties of the individual, group, and social movement as totalized conceptual entities from their behavior in particular historical circumstances and then project those behaviors across periods of time bracketed by the emergence of particular social and technological forms. While it may make good sense and in fact prove instructive to map where, when and under what conditions certain combinations of social practices emerged to become part of collective resistance, there are also conceptual pitfalls of taking any axiom, any variable of change, any determinant unit of measurement. Our project of pragmatic or radical empirical taxonomy, interested in difference and minoritarian evolutions at the margins of representation, differs substantively from the project that seeks to fold the process of struggling against oppressive power relations into the same authoritative historical record which is today organized, ordered and gatekept by elite institutions and signifiers of expert power/knowledge. This is one of the core elements necessary in distinguishing and elucidating a process ontology of the social, and it is best understood through contrast against the standard taxonomic project of contemporary social sciences.

Deleuze refers to this taxonomic goal-oriented discipline as a “royal science”, or that which attempts to fix truth to a static element of the world, contrasted against nomad science, which seeks to discern evolving movement or fluid patternicity in the world. Depending on what percentage of observations about the social field one believes can be adequately characterized by stasis or can be reliably contained within the scope of nuanced universalisms, one may emphasize one science’s focus over the other, although Deleuze suggests that every valuable scientific endeavor must contain elements of both. Virtual worlds scholar Jeremy Hunsinger offers the following clarification of this distinction, writing that:

¹³¹ Manuel De Landa *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* Continuum Press, 2002, p. 6

Royal science, objectifying and measuring, is the preferred science of the state where it is viewed as definitive, meticulous, and usually true or at least truth seeking. It is the science of knowing what is there, what exists, and knowing it completely. Nomad science is the science of what is becoming, what will be, what is being created... Nomad science constructs truth from movement, whereas royal science constructs truth from placement.¹³²

Thus, for the purposes of historical scholarship, royal science is that which attempts to render facts about a particular social order indexical, for the purposes of using them to map a range of time as homogenous along a particular axis. In other words, the Age of X, the Epoch of Y, a period of time understood through events, battles and technological inventions. Royal science becomes indexical precisely as it typically uses events to mark the moments when ages, eras, and epochs switch or become characterized by certain attributes more than others. Social truth becomes flattened into a fact among facts.

The “event” becomes one of many like it, and subsequently forms a theory. The theory then can become the basis of characterizing other ages and epochs. Hence we see the homogenization of the image of historical time around alien axioms. These are usually presumed as universals when in fact their origins are quite situated and specific. As noted earlier, the very grammar of “modernity” only makes sense in the context of a Eurocentric historical narrative of industrialization and colonialism. Modernity means something quite different in Mongolia, and dependent on a local index of time and social understandings of causality and technology. When we speak of “the modern” we are already assuming a false presumption of universalism without acknowledging the situated evolution of the metric of historical time itself.

Metrics, taxonomic structures, ways of knowing history and social change, are themselves in a co-productive relation of emergence with inter-embedded social systems. I have discussed many practices, entities and even social spaces of organization as “emergent”, and here I would like to take a moment to more rigorously approach this term. Emergence, as I am using following scholars such as John Holland and Manuel De Landa, implies a processual evolutionary structure, which is both sensitive to contextual pressures and attractors, while

¹³² Jeremy Hunsinger “Toward Nomadological Cyberinfrastructures” in the *International Handbook on Internet Research*, ed. Jeremy Hunsinger, Matthew Allen, Lisbeth Klastrup p. 273

blind to outcomes and anti-teleological in terms of values. No dialectic here, no grand finale, no movement towards utopia or apocalypse. Emergence has been articulated through two parallel literature bases; one like Holland's which focuses on structured evolution, for example through studies of machine learning or bounded complex systems where outcomes can be controlled and experiments can be repeated, and another which focuses on far more complex *self-organized* systems¹³³. Emergence reflects the intuition by many that systems themselves possess a certain quixotic intelligence, or as F. A. Hayek refers to as a "spontaneous order"¹³⁴ which defies full control and explanation, arguing in the case of economics that "[w]e have never designed our economic system. We were not intelligent enough for that."¹³⁵ Unfortunately for the former camp, an analysis based on the concept of this more deterministic emergence risks re-inscribing the same metaphysical presumption of constructive rationalism (the hubristic generalization of abstract *planned* models to *unplanned* eruptive applications in social space) as John Holland aptly demonstrates when describing the scope of his approach at the outset of his key text

Emergence: From Chaos to Order, writing:

"...I will restrict study to systems for which we have useful descriptions in terms of rules or laws. Games, systems made up of well-understood components (molecules composed of atoms) and systems defined by scientific theories (Newton's theory of gravity) are prime examples. Emergent phenomena also occur in domains for which we presently have few accepted rules; ethical systems, the evolution of nations...precise application to those systems will require better conjecture about the laws (if any) that govern their development."¹³⁶

However, if we accept the earlier criticism of the attempt to apply static rules to complex social systems, as Holland seems willing to suggest that we can do, then this application of emergence doesn't seem particularly promising for our investigation. (Indeed, how would one speak of formal

¹³³ Holland also focuses his attention on self-organized system, particularly in his examination of neural nets, however as the below quotation will indicate, he considers these systems results as products of sets of rules which he seeks to apply across a range of theoretical domains, and is to be distinguished in this respect even toward self-organized subject matter.

¹³⁴ John Marks "Two Kinds of Order" 1984
<http://www.ertnet.demon.co.uk/2kinds.html>

¹³⁵ as quoted in John Marks "Two Kinds of Order" 1984
<http://www.ertnet.demon.co.uk/2kinds.html> (LLL, III, p. 164).

¹³⁶ John Holland *Emergence: Order Out of Chaos* Helix Books, 1997 p. 3

laws governing “ethical systems” in the same manner as chemistry or physics?) However, the rules-based scope approach does not disqualify the utility of the concept in identifying the movements or formulations that exist behind *conceptual blindspots*, which are not a result of insufficient examination but rather are *immanently structural to production of novel entities within social space*.¹³⁷ In other words, the study of emergent phenomena is a cultivation of the mindfulness of the imperceptible as causally active. The core property of emergent structures that interests us, is in fact, precisely that they are *not* rigidly governed by deterministic laws but that they contain the virtual potential of multiple realizable outcomes, or as Ilya Prigogine and Gregoire Nicolis write in the context of cellular biology, emergence allows us to “...arrive at a remarkable cooperation between chance and determinism... Stated more formally, *several solutions* are possible for the *same parameter value*. Chance alone will decide which of these solutions is realized.”¹³⁸

In the context of social movements, an already wide parameter of outcomes, the noise introduced by a high level of complexity into any analysis and the fact that the immanent dynamics of these evolutions seem to indicate that the outcome *may not be specified in advance* suggests the structures of social science disciplines may often be a greater reflection of entrenched power relations than a reflection of emergent social dynamics, since they offer an answer where from an empirical perspective, it seems like answers are structurally non-offerable. Whether your interest is breaking the stultifying solidification surrounding event-centered political discourse, or to re-articulate the event as such *against* hegemonic systems of prediction and spatio-temporal geopolitical mapping (the incessant creation of axes and axioms,

¹³⁷ It is precisely this phenomena on a macro-scale that Nassim Taleb has characterized as Black Swans; those unexpected phenomena which embody the unseen possibilities concealed by a belief in the certainty of a specific outcome, when in fact the outcome was *structurally uncertain* up to a point and could not have been predicted except by better recognizing this uncertainty. In his analysis of historic catastrophes called from the concealment of this uncertainty, Taleb observes how the expectation of particular futures to emerge produces “hidden risk” as those expectations become socially reinforced as more people come to believe in the likelihood of the expectation, thus superficially appearing to validate it. see N.N. Taleb, *The Black Swan*, Second Edition, Penguin, 2010

¹³⁸ Gregoire Nicolis and Ilya Prigogine *Exploring Complexity* p. 14 (emphasis in the original), quoted from a section in ISVP, De Landa

variables to depend and react to possible measurements and variables to depend on nothing much at all), this attendance to the empirical vitality of this implication of multiply realizable outcomes contained within such an understanding of “emergence” is absolutely crucial. For an excellent example of the opposite interpretive strategy, e.g. valorizing events as empirical, non-representational political becomings, see William Connolly’s recent writings, where he argues, “We seek to participate in the human sciences while dropping the hubris of explanatory sufficiency in principle. To pursue such a trail we must supplement modes of efficient and probabilistic causality with an idea of emergent causality that requires us at key moments to follow real modes of creativity as they unfold to produce new outcomes.”¹³⁹ Thus a component of engaging with scholarship on social movements must be to read dominant scholarship *itself* as evidence of subducted antagonism between the *privileged* representational schema of human agency and the ability of emergent collectivities. These emergent collectivities are uninterested in the official story and will thus fail to conform to it, continuously surprising and befuddling institutionalized observers and professionalized knowers. The image of the human agent as a Cartesian rational animal therefore can be seen as serving a political purpose, a disciplinary frame that narrows the scope of analysis through an impossible lens that is quintessentially unable to square with the chaotic dynamics of complex social reality.

These tendencies to populate the conceptual universe with such images of human agency in the academy have historically been ascendant in the humanities and social sciences since the rise of the modern State and the royal philosophies of the Enlightenment, as Brian Massumi notes:

“...philosophers have traditionally been employees of the State. The collusion between philosophy and the State was most explicitly enacted in the first decade of the nineteenth century with the foundation of the University of Berlin, which was to become the model for higher learning throughout Europe and in the United States. The goal laid out for it by Wilhelm von Humboldt (based on the proposals of Fichte and Schleiermacher) was the “spiritual and moral training of the nation,” to be achieved by “deriving everything from an original principle” (truth), by “relating everything to an ideal” (justice), and by “unifying this

¹³⁹ William Connolly “The Politics of the Event” *The Contemporary Condition*, April 3, 2011 <http://contemporarycondition.blogspot.com/2011/04/politics-of-event.html>

principle and this ideal in a single Idea” (the State). The end product would be “a fully legitimated subject of knowledge and society”¹⁴⁰ – each mind an analogously organized mini-State morally unified in the supermind of the State.”¹⁴¹

However, this vision of both what knowledge means and how pedagogy ought respond to stratified power relations have been resisted in the second half of the twentieth century from a diverse range of scholarly camps. These camps range from poststructuralist thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida to liberated pedagogues epitomized by Paolo Friere and Ivan Illich to minoritarian voices in the scientific community (particularly in the areas of biology and ecology) such as Michael Ghiselin¹⁴² who wished to take Darwin’s crude notions of population to level of their own theories *against* transcendental categories such as species, a process ontology of the empirical universe as an alternative telos to the essentialist DNA-as-Platonic-blueprint.¹⁴³ In recent years, this last category of scholarly thinking has become ascendant in particular scientific disciplines or in areas where the *progressive specification* scope entailed by a commitment to nomad science seems particularly necessary, as Manual De Landa notes in the context of embryogenesis:

“...most biologists today have given up preformism and accepted the idea that differentiated structures emerge progressively as the egg develops. The egg is not, of course, an undifferentiated mass: it possesses an obscure yet distinct structure defined by zones of biochemical concentration and by polarities established by the asymmetrical position of the yolk (or nucleus). But even though it does possess the necessary biochemical materials and genetic information, these materials and information do not contain a clear and distinct blueprint of the final organism.”¹⁴⁴

While to some extent questions such as the most accurate theoretical disposition towards the human embryo are empirical questions which can be settled to greater and lesser extents by

¹⁴⁰ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) pgs.32-33

¹⁴¹ Brian Massumi, Introduction to *ATP* p. ix

¹⁴² Manual De Landa *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* Continuum Press, 2002 p. 57

¹⁴³ I would to some degree include critics of expertise such as Hayek, Tetlock, Yudkowsky and so on mentioned earlier, even though these authors might not consider themselves consonant with a poststructuralist scholarly disposition. Indeed, many of these anti-experts consider themselves experts in their own right, presenting something of a conundrum of circularity insofar as it is unclear to what extent they fall prey to their own best criticism.

¹⁴⁴ Manual De Landa *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* Continuum Press, 2002, 2002 p. 16

open minds and rigorous experimentation, there are also social elements that characterize the scientific process, which may be de-stabilized when viewed through alternative frames. One of the best examples in the history of modern science is, in fact, the many appropriations of Darwinism for theories of political economy and racialized pseudoscience *that then dynamically fed back* into the vocabulary and methodology of biological science. Many of these overlapping theoretical formations are currently receiving much-needed scrutiny, particularly through interdisciplinary collaborations of scholars such as Kenneth Weiss and Anne Buchanan, a biologist and anthropologist who noted even today who the legacy of exchange between Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer has created a social frame for both biology and economics that emphasizes competition and selection as fundamental principles, without seeing that the frame can be arbitrarily reversed based on the level of detail:

The 19th Century British sociologist Herbert Spencer, even before reading Darwin's *Origin of Species* (Darwin, 1859), proposed that societies change competitively and the best (like Imperial England) succeed at the expense of others because it is Nature's way. After he read the *Origin*, he suggested the phrase 'survival of the fittest' to evoke the ruthless competition that he saw as being at the root of Nature. Darwin and Wallace had originally used the term 'natural selection' but later adopted Spencer's phrase.... We might even turn the common view on its head and ask whether the function of cooperation in life is to enhance competitive advantage, or the function of competition is to enable cooperation.¹⁴⁵

This last example illustrates that in many disciplinary contexts, deciding on the primary units of analysis can be determinative of how conclusions are both reached and then framed to reify or de-stabilize certain assumptions and intuitions about the way the world works. This point may seem trite but it could not be more important. If we choose the atom, cell, individual, species, nation-state or planet as the unit of analysis, we will reach radically different conclusions about whether or not concepts such as "competition" or "cooperation" can relevantly characterize aspects of our social and physical universes. If we are ontologically committed to a particular mechanistic understanding of historical happening, then a particular system of axioms will not only give us "facts" but it will come attached with implicit value-judgments about which facts are

¹⁴⁵ KENNETH M. WEISS and ANNE V. BUCHANAN "The cooperative genome: organisms as social contracts" *Int. J. Dev. Biol.* 53: 753-763 (2009)

more relevant and how they should be framed, sequenced, communicated and so on¹⁴⁶. They will also importantly inform which *scale* and *level of detail* we choose to observe as primary. Thus, how we produce units of analysis becomes a crucial question for scholarship. If we rely on the idea that there is a particular homeostatic vision of an entity that is unaffected by its progressive specification within a particular concrete time-space, then our units of analysis may similarly reflect a metric homogeneity. After all every inch is by definition exactly like every other inch, but the same may not be said of cell, organ, torso and so on. The prevalent methodology for the production of units of analysis in the social sciences is to take conceptual entities as givens and then schematize them according to underlying essential principles which are supposed to explain and predict the behavior of given particular cases, even at the level of complex social systems. Theorists such as De Landa have characterized this approach towards scholarship, which takes homogeneity or unity as a fundamental organizing principle as “naive realism”, writing that:

“If one assumes that a class of entities is defined by the essence which its members share in common, it becomes relatively simple to conclude that these classes are basically given, and that they exhaust all there is to know about the world. The ontological assumption that the world is basically closed, that entirely novel classes of entities cannot emerge spontaneously, many now be coupled with the epistemological one, and the correspondence between true sentences can be made absolute.”¹⁴⁷

Naive realism as applied to social movements not only fails to produce accurate or useful results from the perspective which is concerned only with the sterile accumulation of facts, but it is *antithetical* to the sort of knowledge production that might assist the emergence of novel practices of resistance among and between social movements. This form of scholarship proceeds by erecting new systems of signs in a desperate attempt to artificially schematize the everyday

¹⁴⁶ see also Ele Junker’s “Knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting” Integrated Thesis: Philosophy and Science Studies and International Development Studies, 2006 <http://rudar.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/1951/1/Knowledge%20is%20not%20made%20for%20understanding%3B%20it%20is%20made%20for%20cutting%20-%20ELE%20JUNKER,%20RUC,%20JULY%20%202006.pdf>

where writing after Foucault she notes that “There is no transparent form of knowledge, free from error and illusion, or an area of life that is free from power relations. We all operate within a prevalent discourse with its own value-system.” (p.7)

¹⁴⁷ Manual De Landa *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* Continuum Press, 2002p. 6

practices of actual resistors, new terminology and new axioms by which to classify and story-tell novel activisms from an apparently apolitical perspective of disinterested academia. However, the categorical attempt to fix practices to representations is incommensurate with the reality of their constant processual evolution. Social science does not need new buzzwords, the erection of ever-more conceptual monuments without regard to the mutation of their empirical foundations, rather it needs concepts that can turn with earth! Social reality is neither stagnant nor unified, it will not remain still long enough to be representationally mapped or photographed. However, the evolved practices of everyday activists, organizers and sympathetic political actants which supposedly underlie theories of social change *are real* and the latent combinatorial possibilities offer lots of room to maneuver. Importantly, these quotidian practices and spaces *have histories*, many histories most likely, and understanding the cultural repertoires and the access of engaged individuals and groups to social technologies, whether that means a moveable-type printing press or a mobile Twitter feed, will allow us to create loose diagrams of power relations which may not only help general audiences understand the contemporary manifestations of activism but also *may be useful to activist themselves*. Recognizing that abstract neutrality is tantamount to complicity with current relations of power/knowledge can offer a point of departure for scholars to re-politicize their production of knowledge, and situate their frames of relevance relative to the needs and interests of new activists and effective strategies of de-structive subversion.

Following our earlier discussion of Kuhnian paradigms, we can note that multiple paradigms always exist simultaneously, co-habiting the social space of historical time in relations of dominance and marginalization. Thus, in arguing for a paradigm-shift, I must illustrate examples of scholars whose engagement with social movement theory have directed them to activism, and activists whose engagement with organizing has directed them to social movement theory. The new paradigm is never “new”, but exists as a minor narrative within and against the context of an over-arching formation of power through discourse, a social space populated by a

community of knowers and writers who subscribe to particular assumptions. The task of identifying and executing a paradigm shift thus consists in mapping these social spaces of discourse in order to illuminate the areas where the distinction between objective knowers of activist theory and actual practitioners of untheorized tactics have become blurred. The text *Digital Activism Decoded* presents abundant examples, most notably the editor Mary Joyce whose new Meta-Activism Project was an outgrowth of her interest in digital organizing following her work with social media in Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Similar concatenations can be found with Talia Whyte's engagements with DigiActive and Global Wire Associates, or Timothy Hwang's Web Ecology Project. In each of these cases, groups and individuals are simultaneously seeking to produce scholarship and practical knowledge around digital activism while seeking to advance the social justice goals of many of these transnational movements through communication technology. The writings of the Critical Art Ensemble on digital resistance, discussed earlier¹⁴⁸, also follow this blending of disciplinary orientations, as well as other theoretical publications from Autonomedia, and a network of quasi-institutional formations such as the Institute of Applied Autonomy, the Center for MetaHuman Exploration, and Movements.org. Many transnational organizations that have sprung up around regional affiliations, such as the slew of new groups working to build international solidarity with digital activists in Syria, such as Suriye Devrimi and Days of Rage. The same sort of organizations, with many anonymous and international participants, can be found surrounding the protests in Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and many others, creating a waiting distribution channels for viral videos documenting human rights abuses of protestors and enabling potentially high audience costs for state violence against demonstrators operating in locally embodied social space.

From the mid 1990s, examples of these interdisciplinary intellectuals abounded, particularly following the popularization of cyberpunk fiction, the rise of the hacker (and hacktivist) movements, and the political successes achieved by the international ZLDN, or Zapatista

¹⁴⁸ Critical Art Ensemble *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* Autonomedia, 2001 p. 15 <http://www.critical-art.net/books/digital/tact1.pdf>

Solidarity Network. The leader of this last group, Subcommandante Marcos, developed a repertoire for digital activism which centered around collective correspondence, stylized manifesto-type electronic publications, and the cultivation of a charismatic anonymity (in rare photographs his face is covered by a black facemask, out of which can often be seen protruding a pipe). These themes, particularly anonymity, have evolved as hallmarks of digital activism, particularly when activists are dissenting against repressive regimes that may have the power to threaten their embodied social identities.¹⁴⁹

The writings of Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos and others in the ELZN such as Don Dorito express an early theorization of on-the-ground tactics “from the frontlines”, and offer the beginnings of an articulation of what Simon Tormey refers to as post-representational politics, a political discourse at once outside of theorization, not a static system of meaning but one which is continuously deferred.¹⁵⁰ The Zapatistas exemplify a concretization of this *active scholarship*, an anti-theoretical approach to political economy which frames their demands for autonomy *against* the very logic of representation. Such a disposition does not seek to make their activism legible to the sedentary apparatuses of political capture through a set of coherent demands which would typically entail reconciling local antagonism within the nominalist consensus-building space of a majoritarian public sphere. Instead, their resistance seeks to push against the very terms of this majoritarian inclusion within what Vassilis Tsianos et al. refer to as the double-R axiom of political and social representation (the twin impulses to defer political autonomy to “representatives” embedded within a political bureaucracy and to schematize the lived micropolitics of autonomist resistance within the terms of defined political demands)¹⁵¹.

These political becomings do not draw their resonances from the cultural economy of the

¹⁴⁹ The theme of anonymity is often mentioned in the context of China’s “netizen democracy”, where anonymous posters and viral social media postings often contain messages which may not square with the official story of state-owned media.

¹⁵⁰ Simon Tormey “Not in my Name’: Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation” *Parliamentary Affairs* 2006 59(1):138-154 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/33396675/Simon-Tormey-Not-in-my-Name-Deleuze-Zapatismo-and-the-Critique-of-Representation>

¹⁵¹ see Vassilis Tsianos, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Niamh Stephenson “Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century” Pluto Press 2008

philosophical idols of academia, but rather finds a more lyrical form of *anti*-theorization from the poetry of Pablo Neruda. Taken from the beginning of the Zapatista anthology “our word is our weapon”, the Zapatistas articulate post-representational *against* the taxonomic tradition, as Marcos writes:

SECOND BEAT

It was
words
that
created
us.

They
shaped us,
and spread
their lines
to control us.

A SUBVERSIVE ENDING

But
I
know
that
a few men
gather
inside caverns
in SILENCE

Never again will the Zapatistas be alone...¹⁵²

Much of the Zapatista literature of Marcos and others begins in this figurative vein, drawing both on theoretical themes of representation and poetic surrealism. In contrast to Marxist and neo-Marxist manifestos addressed to the “workers of the world”, the Zapatista writing is addressed to an anonymous and diverse audience in digital space. The spirit of their writing is tactical, and seeks to activate a cultural sensibility of the everyday within the intertextual experience of international readers, readers who could then be drawn upon through the Zapatista solidarity network to support and participate in acts of electronic civil disobedience.

The emphasis on quotidian narrative forms, often in the form of first person descriptions

¹⁵² Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos “Poem in Two Beats and a Subversive Ending” in *our word is our weapon: selected writings* ed. Juana Ponce de Leon, Seven Stories Press, 2001 [no page given]

making use of affective perception and psychosomatic imagery, or allegorical parables (such as “The Story of the Tiny Mouse and the Tiny Cat”¹⁵³) following the thematic repertoires of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* to describe the affective incoherence and grim intoxication attached to the situated perspective of those on the receiving end of structural exploitation and inequality.

Social theory is here, riding the undercurrents of an affective political expression, an anonymous swarm of voices eluding capture and legibility, creating a purely emotive currency with a virtual network. This network is constituted through an initially anonymous audience, narratively politicized and attached to the distant struggles of the Zapatista’s confrontation with the Mexican military, struggles for indigenous rights and local autonomy in Chiapas. This is not the elitist responses of neo-Derrideans, writing in “against legibility” or in opposition to the so-called “tyranny of clarity” through concatenated postmodern jargon, but rather harkens back to the story-telling traditions of peasant revolts throughout the Middle Ages, and exemplifies Michel de Certeau’s everyday politics through a communicative style and distribution mode designed for mass accessibility while at the same time resisting the commodification of *literal* revolutionary discourse. This latter pitfall is a real danger, as one sees with the marketization and cooptation surrounding supposedly “counter-cultural” symbols such as the iconography of Ché Guevara, who is more recognizable from his massified T-shirt image logo among Western audiences than from his political writings or the role that he played as a leader of the Cuban Revolution. This resistance to theorization emblematic of the Zapatista writings provides an ideal point of departure for future research on novel articulations of active scholarship, a style of theory that precedes naming and co-evolves in relation to the local contexts of material political struggles. In this dynamic, theoretical indoctrination only occurs after the fact.

The Zapatistas are important to consider not only for their theoretical approach but for their the real material victories achieved on the ground in Chiapas. These victories were often achieved by organizing their vast transnational solidarity network to conduct a form of what has

¹⁵³ Don Dorito “The Story of the Tiny Mouse and the Tiny Cat” in *our word is our weapon: selected writings* ed. Juana Ponce de Leon, Seven Stories Press, 2001p. 308

been termed “electronic civil disobedience”. In the mid-90s they succeeded in gaining interest from a transnational audience by posting information about their struggle online, and making a concerted effort to engage a network of transnational digital media. These tactics focused on communicating the importance of their struggle against the federalization of the Mexican province of Chiapas in favor of local autonomy. Their approach has been described as inaugurating the practice of theories of “tactical media” in digital space, a term which has come to be associated with the use or appropriation of media technologies to undermine established power relations or draw observers into an organizational network for the purposes of collective action.¹⁵⁴ The transnationalization of the Chiapas struggle was a singular phenomenon of media technologies in that it framed what amounted to an extremely local struggle for self-determination against the backdrop of encroaching interests of globalization, particularly in the run up to and passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), on local interests *everywhere*. The paradoxical notion of a global struggle for local autonomy is hard to conceive of outside of a sort of *social locality*, or diminished social distance within a network (remember the earlier analogy to the game of Telephone), enabled by digital communication networks. The Zapatista’s efforts thus created a point of frame convergence around numerous local interests situated in disparate national spaces, who could nevertheless see themselves by extension as stakeholders in a localist conflict. Here we see the emergence of a conceptually convoluted political assemblage in which transnational activists form global networks in the service of particularized local struggles.

The ELZN was interested in the possibilities of digital communication from the beginning, but it was only as the movement grew that they realized the possibility of *direct action* in digital space. While achieving early victories through the establishment of territorial autonomous zones, the Zapatistas were militarily in the precarious situation of many rebels and other militant groups with respect to security *from* federal government forces. The Zapatistas

¹⁵⁴ Critical Art Ensemble “Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media” *Autonomedia*, 2001 p. 4 <http://www.critical-art.net/books/digital/tact1.pdf>

continued to skirmish with federal troops both in limited combat engagement and through battles over framing the struggle, the latter which the Zapatistas seemed to more decisively win. However, throughout the mid-late 90s they were constantly at risk from encroaching federalization, which for reasons of scale they were only able to mount proportionally limited military resistance. Annoyed by continued difficulties in exerting territorial control over Chiapas, and smarting from international media spin which seemed to favor these upstart rebels, Mexican federal troops began escalating the harassment.

In early 1998, following an episode which became known as the “Acteal massacre”, where paramilitary soldiers in connection with the Mexican government shot and killed at least fifteen unarmed civilians in a Catholic church, the Zapatistas decided to win more than just the traditional battle for media sympathy. Their retaliation took the form of direct action in digital space, using a program called FloodNet developed by a US-based group called the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a group of performance artists who saw the program as a convergence of interests in art and social justice. Following the attack, Zapatista supporters were asked to download the program and input the names of those who had died in the Acteal massacre into a log, which would then send repeated requests to the websites of both the Mexican and US governments using those names, a prime example of a “distributed denial of service” or DDoS attack. In communications with their supporters, both the ELZN and the EDT framed this collective action in the language of a “sit-in”, drawing on frames from the American Civil Rights Movement in order to justify the action as a just response to an atrocity in which both governments were at least complicit, and whose web disturbance would further the visibility of the Chiapas autonomy issue among policy elites. In this frame we can see a noticeable juxtaposition between the ELZN, premised on anonymity, mobility and constant self-reinvention and the EDT whose founders were well-known artists and considered their identities to offer symbolic examples to those who wished to pursue social justice issues in digital space.

This action successfully brought visibility to bear on the recent events in Chiapas, allowing the Zapatistas to claim a major victory with the temporary withdrawal of federal Mexican troops. While to many authorities the attacks appeared to happen “suddenly”, as if from nowhere, they in fact represented a coordinated practice that had been developed over years of experimentation. This experimentation had first achieved visibility earlier in 1998 with virtual sit-ins on the websites of Mexican financial companies. These evolved practices of resistance in digital space are not isolated from embodied social space more generally, but serve to complement, segment and supplement offline actions by increasing their visibility, and creating opportunities for coordination between geographically disparate actants. Throughout the Zapatista articulation of their localist anti-ideology within a globalized political communication space, we see the persistent theme of anonymity, name-lessness, against the representational system of accommodation and inclusion. The Zapatistas are not “fighting for rights”, they are fighting against the system of rights as intrinsically paternalist towards indigenous peoples and violently exclusionary in practice. This framing serves both ideological and tactical purpose, and lends itself to direct action which focuses on disrupting flows of political information-traffic even without a direct link between those interruptions and the Zapatista struggle itself. Here we can read anonymity as an emergent tactic to avoid cooption and institutionalization. It is precisely these dangers of domestication that successful social movements often face as they enlarge, slowly coming to resemble the institutions that they once fought so hard against. The sentiments embodied in this experience have been echoed by other groups producing active scholarship, such as the Critical Art Ensemble, writing:

Once named and defined, any movement is open to co-optation. Should tactical media become popularized, its recuperation by capital is almost inevitable. Definitions also create boundaries. What was once so liquid would become increasingly structured and separated as the movement was theorized and historicized. On the other hand, joy can emerge out of separation that expresses itself as generative difference...Many felt liberated from having to present themselves to the public as a specialist in order to be experts (and therefore valued). It was a vindication of the proto-anarchist Fourier’s idea that pleasure and learning come from what he termed the “Butterfly” – the human desire to access as many active processes

and learning resources as possible, or to put it negatively, an aversion to boredom caused by the redundancy of specialized activity.¹⁵⁵

Thus, we can see the twin developments of both a form of activist collectivity that both exists outside of formalized representational practices and the emergence of a way of articulating knowledge and value claims outside of the sedimented power relations of expert knowledge and traditional scholarship. CAE is an interesting case as well because in addition to producing theoretical writings and participating in activist projects ranging from counter-surveillance collaborations to anti-copyright promulgations, they also integrate the sensibilities of communal art into the core of their framing practices. These communitarian sensibilities are often oriented against the institutional pressures of alienating individuality and competition that they see as structuring the commercial art world. The above passage also illuminates that a prime concern of active scholarship for a new social movements is a fear of cooption, of smooth integration into the dominant regime of signs and value that will de-claw the subversive potential of the movement by including in within the conventional schema of representation. This fear strongly influences the goals of poststructuralist-inspired collective. Whereas more traditional social movements often attempted to rest levers of institutional power from deeply entrenched and exclusionary interests, many of these digital movements prefer to remain outside institutions. However, such movements may still seek to influence policy outcomes by effecting shifts in culture and by making institutions more responsive to outside popular pressures. Rather than resisting a particular hegemonic edifice by attempting to replace it with a different totalizing program for governing, the goal of such movements is to de-structure systems of control through localizing networks of autonomy. The Zapatistas uses of tactical media, and particularly the DDoS direct action, are prime examples of such counter-hegemonic resistance.

These concerns about institutionalization expressed above are not merely abstract, but directly impact the ability of a collective social action to address the concerns of its members

¹⁵⁵ Critical Art Ensemble “Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media” *Autonomedia*, 2001 p. 5-6 <http://www.critical-art.net/books/digital/tact1.pdf>

and sympathizers. Direct and explicit focus on integrating a movement with a political bureaucracy, which is often a presumed relationship of civil society actors to legislative bodies in a representative democracy, can often be extremely demobilizing for advocates of social change.

Writing about the GLBTQ movement in the United States, veteran activist Urvashi Vaid notes:

For one, the process of passing legislation differs markedly from the process of building a social change movement. Indeed, the two are antithetical. The former requires a fairly obsessive and insular focus on 535 members of Congress... Lobbyists and lawmakers are intently focused on the passage of a piece of legislation, seen as the ultimate win. This limited goal leads them to enter the legislative process ready to bargain and compromise. ... Finally, legislative strategies are more vulnerable than any other kind of activism to becoming insular, self-referential, and separated from the interests of the broader community.¹⁵⁶

Thus, the original magic of the movement's initial idealism, the outrage against injustice, the recognition of the necessity of collective action to alter the material conditions of oppression, are incorporated within a broader rhetorical economy of competing interests, winning and losing, compromising within a majoritarian public sphere. These implicit system-driven goals come to replace struggles towards an everyday politics of local autonomy, or attempting meeting the needs of minoritarian communities and minor cultures. Bureaucratic politics does not typically lend itself to inspiration. Historically, the most successful movements, particularly those that sought to articulate their rhetorical frames in the context of transnational publics, were those which understood that changing the autonomous culture surrounding policy decisions was first and foremost vital to social change. In contrast, decision to defer political agency that entailed institutionalizing struggles for radical change have proved disastrous for the durability of a fluid collective social assemblage, exemplified by the virtual collapse of the nuclear freeze movement, one of the largest and most successful transnational social movements of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁷¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Urvashi Vaid *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of the Gay and Lesbian Movement* Random House, 1996 p.146-7

¹⁵⁷ David S. Meyer "Institutionalizing Dissent: The United States Structure of Political Opportunity and the End of the Nuclear Freeze Movement" *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1993

In this respect, the Zapatistas offer a suggestion of a novel form of anti-ideological politics, one which neither strives for governing power nor seeks to “speak on behalf of the people” in the matter of representative democracy, or incorporative discourses, yet attempts to signify resistance *on behalf of difference in itself*. As Marcos writes: “In the world we want everyone fits. We want a world in which many worlds fit.”¹⁵⁹ In the case of the Zapatistas, this valorization of difference is articulated through the struggle for indigenous rights against the strictures of federalization by a rigid caste system and political economy centralized in the bureaucracies of Mexico City. For the Zapatistas, it could never be a question of compromising with the dominant schema of federalized representational democracy insofar as within such an apparatus of power local concerns are *always* subordinated to majoritarian interests. The majority by definition is distinct and opposed to the minority, and in a political economy where indigenous peoples are often treated like racially second-class citizens, it is understandable why the Zapatistas would not want to simply have their position represented.¹⁶⁰ In a democracy, it doesn’t pay to have your voice heard if you are always destined to be outvoted.

Unlike many previous self-determination struggles, the Zapatistas do not promulgate a grand narrative of liberation or the vision of a political utopia-to-come for which revolutionary bloodshed must be made necessary. The revolution is never an “event” for the Zapatistas but rather constellated throughout their everyday practices of resistance, including those organized through digital space. Furthermore, other than the practices of sustaining zones of local autonomy, they do not have final political goals with respect to the centralization of power. The Zapatistas have therefore exhibited a tenacity not seen in other revolutionary movements which have operated along the principles of the necessity of seizing control of dominant modes of

¹⁵⁸ see also Lawrence Wittner “Toward Nuclear Abolition: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1971 to the Present” pgs. 485-490

¹⁵⁹ as quoted in Simon Tormey “Not in my Name’: Deleuze, Zapatismo and the Critique of Representation” *Parliamentary Affairs* 2006 59(1):138-154 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/33396675/Simon-Tormey-Not-in-my-Name-Deleuze-Zapatismo-and-the-Critique-of-Representation>

¹⁶⁰ see Vassilis Tsianos, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Niamh Stephenson *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* Pluto Press 2008

production from the elites that they have sought to topple¹⁶¹. The Zapatistas are a remarkable movement in this and many other respects, but perhaps most importantly for this text are the ways in which they epitomize a bridging of the theory/praxis divide, not as mere “subject matter” for theorists to map concepts onto, but as the producers of their own concepts that then become a metaphoric conditions for understanding new abstract machines of emergent social movements.

¹⁶¹ see also the treatment of the Zapatistas in Richard F. Day *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* Pluto Press, 2005 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19280772/Gramsci-is-Dead>

chapter four: modern movements, modern theories

“Everyday living is a rich affair, whereas theory is a narrowing enterprise.”

--Bruno Latour¹⁶²

The oft-repeated claim that contemporary social movements are a “modern” organizational form is worth interrogating. If this is true, can we then usefully distinguish between historically modern movements and emergent forms of collective organizing in digital space? The goal here is not to discretely mark beginnings and endings of social epochs, for empirical analysis may reveal the same dynamics of anonymous digital organizing in the public fora of medieval Europe, while the “modern” dynamics of trade union organizing may be also be found to have parallels in the opportunity structures of digital space. The medium never axiomatically determines the message. However, by examining the evolution of the “modern” organizational form, we can identify the continuing and integrated dynamics at play between the history of ideas surrounding human agency and the development of novel tactics of activism. Tarrow emphasizes this modernist distinction early in *Power and Movement*. Whereas contentious politics may be a sort of action, social movements are formal organizational vessels in which their leadership structure mediates their political goals and enables and constrains their possibilities for success. For Tarrow, this organizational form is quintessentially a strategic response to the coalescence of the control-structures of the modern state:

Contentious politics...Such confrontations go back to the dawn of history. But mounting, coordinating, and sustaining them against powerful opponents are the unique contribution of the social movement – an invention of the modern age and an accompaniment to the rise of the modern state.¹⁶³

Certainly peasant revolts, low-level sabotage, mass desertion, outright mutiny and many other forms of collective action have existed as long as the hierarchies of control against which they

¹⁶²Andrew Basden “Dooyeweerd and Latour's Actor-Network Theory” 2008
<http://www.dooy.salford.ac.uk/ext/ant.html>

¹⁶³ Sidney Tarrow *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, 1998 p. 2

were opposed. However, are there particular repertoires of contention and evolved tactics of dissent linked to social movements that arose in concert with the institutional form of the nation-state that makes them somehow distinct, that makes them legible as “modern”? While modes of dissent have certainly changed over time, making use of new technologies and ideologies, these changes *alone* do not make a social movement modern, at least not for our purposes. Rather, it is the ability to frame dissent in terms *other* than a generalized social ill which must be corrected expediently, and usually by force. In other words, modern social movements are those which became understood as socially *positive*, in contrast to their previous classical depiction as an “unruly mob”. “Modernity” here represents the ability to organize people around a moral conviction that the struggle against established power can be just. While today this notion may be easily taken for granted, in the days of the divine right of kings, where the phenomenological universe of most (peasant) people was entirely controlled by an all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good God who, despite all His perfection, had nevertheless condemned them to a daily life of material deprivation and abject servitude to elites whose rule was often cruel and arbitrary, such an idea was the stuff of utopias. Such an idea was the stuff, eventually, of revolutions.

For Tarrow, what makes social movements modern is precisely their self-awareness *as social movements*, an awareness that then enables sustained unity of purpose and organizational stability over time. For many theorists, the modern era began in 1789, when for the first time inside a major European power, the *ancien regime* foundered, and for a glorious and terrifying historical moment, the mob won. However, it is precisely such narratives that attempt to inaugurate “the modern” via events and chronological hash marks which we ought to resist. In order to do justice to the ways in which contentious politics grew organically, we must *first* attend to the quotidian practices and commonplaces available to popular understandings of political agency. These are the usually imperceptible practices of everyday existence that may be seized upon to frame elite repression negatively against popular demands for justice. In order to

understand this aspect of contention, we must examine the concepts and cultural narratives surrounding the evolution of popular dissent. Following the pathbreaking work of Roland Bleiker, we can begin to trace a fundamental notion of human agency in the early modern writings of a young French thinker named Étienne La Boétie, a thinker of a far earlier time. A later friend of Montaigne, La Boétie's *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* or *Anti-One* written in 1522, exemplifies the reactive movement of individual dissent against the contemporaneous social strata, which was governed by a divinely ordained monarchy that was becoming increasingly absolutist. While certainly not the only thinker of his time to express views against the arrangement of established power structures, La Boétie framed his objections not merely against a particular individual, but against the *process* that naturalized exploitive social arrangements. What Bleiker finds revolutionary in La Boétie is the belief that power is fundamentally contestable. In other words, the simple notion that the world is in fact *not* governed by an immutable and deterministic apparatus of rewards and punishments that underlie social reality. From this initial skepticism, from this simple challenge, we find springing the fundamental outlook that *power relations are contingent*, that they exist because they are made to exist, not by God but by humans, and thus by humans could be made otherwise. As Bleiker writes:

By linking any form of government to popular consent and ruminating about the possibilities that could arise when this consent is withdrawn, la Boetie advances a fundamental proposition about the nature of power. Contrary to the prevalent view of the time, he does not perceive power as something stable and restraining, a privilege that some have and others do not. Power emerges from popular consent and it is relational, a constantly changing force field located in the interactive dynamics between ruler and ruled. Perhaps most importantly, power is enabling, it provides common people with the chance to create opportunities for social change.¹⁶⁴

An understanding of power is a template, a diagram, a script in which an individual narrates their own political agency through a host of particular situations and arrangements. This diagram of implied social relations, inculcated through a belonging within a particular cultural

¹⁶⁴ Roland Bleiker *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* Cambridge University Press, 2000 p. 58

space, informs a willingness to follow orders, submit to unfavorable changes in the distribution of scarce resources, and confront authority through collective action. If power is monolithic, if power is omnipotent, if power is concentrated in elites and if the desires of those elites are made known, where then is there space for the politics of a farmer dissatisfied with the *gabelle*? What about ten farmers, a hundred farmers or even a thousand farmers, all grumbling against the theft of their profits and children for foreign wars? The sum total of a million zeros is still nothing. While an exclusive focus on ideology misses key material groundings of actual possibility, ideology nevertheless informs political agents of their own limits of possibility. Where is the voice of someone who has been told that they will never speak? Drawing on classical Greek and Roman traditions that saturated his early modernist university education at Orleans, La Boétie launched a blistering attack on tyranny, not as a system of oppressive governance, but the prevalent system of thought which enabled it.

“Tyranny” here is not merely understood as a condition of coercive bondage, but rather *par excellence* as a *consensual blunder* in violation of the innate tendency towards making one’s own decisions. It is this innate tendency for *self-governance* and autonomy that La Boétie saw as a *natural* condition of humanity. Where are the shouts of a multitude that have been told that *they* will never be heard? The key word in the title of La Boétie’s text is “voluntary”, the notion that power is intrinsically consensual, that one consents through non-action to the rule of a tyrant, but that this consent is fundamentally *revocable*. Silence is the condition of one’s own political marginalization. Passivity and obedience are the conditions for one’s own exploitation and servitude. In a political philosophy these ideas might crudely equate to the far-later ruminations on civil disobedience by Thoreau and Ghandi. Writing well over two hundred years before the storming of the Bastille, La Boétie emphasized that it was precisely this very contingency of power that contained within it the possibility of resistance, arguing

If one concedes nothing to them [the tyrants], if one refuses to obey them, then without fighting, without striking, they become naked & defeated & are no more, just as when the root is deprived of water and nourishment, the branch withers and dies.¹⁶⁵

La Boétie's fate would lead him to later disavow this expression of his rebellious youth. As cynicism about Henry II's brutal repression of the Bordeaux peasant revolt set in, he tempered his humanist tendencies and would later affect a grim acceptance of monarchical rule. This early sketch of dissent against prevailing metaphysical models of the social universe may seem crude and narrowly drawn (following its political use in the Reformation by the Huguenots, Bleiker even goes so far as to call *Anti-One* "a mere political pamphlet that did little more than inflate and dogmatise the concept of human agency."¹⁶⁶) However, one must appreciate such a text as a valorization of what would later become foundational democratic principles over two hundred years before the revolutions in the United States and France shook the world. Here I am not using "democratic" to refer a particular arrangement of government, but the foundational co-relative principles of the "consent of the governed" and the "right of revolution" which are fundamental to "modern" social organizing. These early modern concepts of La Boétie and others would create the notional political space for indoctrination of diagrams of power that at least superficially valued dissent. Thus, we can see the beginnings of a cultural space co-evolving with early Humanist subjectivity throughout the Reformation period and until the beginning of the so-called "modern" era of popular dissent in the Westphalian nation-state.

In any history of contention, concepts of agency must always be understood as necessary but not sufficient. After all, concepts do not stand at the barricades, concepts do not rally together in public places where soldiers may fire on them, concepts do not take risks; it is the people who do that. Cognitive liberation is crucial, but is not by itself enough. Concepts of human agency may serve a limiting function insofar as those who are unable to conceive of a world different than the status quo may have difficulty organizing to alter dominant power relations. How does one

¹⁶⁵ La Boétie, *Discours de la Servitude Volontaire*, p.10-11, quoted as translated in Bleiker (see Roland Bleiker *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* Cambridge University Press, 2000p. 60.)

¹⁶⁶ Roland Bleiker *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* Cambridge University Press, 2000p. 73

paint the face of someone that one has never met? Recall the fantastic duration of the so-called “Dark Ages”. How else can one explain such a monotony of political form; a profound and pervasive axiomatic in the everyday concrete anatomy of European power relations? Humanism tapped a vein of inspiration stoppered since the Classical period and created conceptual space in which the courageous and curious could rediscover novel processes of experimentation and trouble-making that continue even today. The slow evolution and dissemination of these concepts of agency enabled early modern repertoires of contention such as killing tax collectors or seizing shipments of grain to become socially valued. However, these tactics of contention were valued through a new teleology; not only as a pointless expression of frustration, as a venting, but rather as a means to altering a particular aspect of the social order. Understanding themselves as political agents of necessity, groups of peasants and workers in this early modern period responded to increasing government demands for taxation and monarchal religious mandates with a multitude of direct action strategies aimed at stymieing increases in their immiseration, albeit often with low degrees of success.

Following De Toqueville in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, Tarrow argues that it was these nascent consolidations of power by monarchs leading up to the creation of territorial nation-states that created the opportunity structure from which modern social movements would emerge. However, opportunity structures by themselves are irrelevant without the conceptual cartography with which to navigate them. It isn't an opportunity if no actant is capable of recognizing it. Ideology matters, and does not arrive ready-made but is assembled out of the cultural material through which struggles are framed. We can never know what the opportunity structures of the Dark Ages might have looked like to a Europe comprised of self-interested liberated atheists living in identical material conditions. The value of this thought experiment is limited to the value of demonstrating its own absurdity. If history is an inexact science of cause and effects, if outcomes are contingent and under-determined, then we

may say that the winners of history are merely the lucky, with the caveat of the cliché that luck is simply the moment where opportunity meets the prepared mind.¹⁶⁷

Thus we can observe two related evolutions during the early modern period; one in the evolution of a notion of individual human agency based on contingent power relations which implicitly includes the possibility of collective action, and a second in the evolution of a consolidated opportunity structure around centralized systems of taxation and conscription that would become the modern nation-state¹⁶⁸. As elites found themselves requiring more capital to maintain and expand control over territories which were under the constant perceived threat of invasion and insurrection, they found the concurrent need to expand control to over their subjects in order to extract larger quantities of wealth and labor from them. Rigid absolutism failed through its own inefficiencies; a productive class of merchants and bureaucrats was needed to create industry from which the ruler could finance military glory. However, the conditions for the competitive expansion of sovereignty and production were simultaneously the enabling conditions of its own demise. The rise of a growing well-educated merchant class with transnational social ties served to increasingly disseminate privileged networks power/knowledge and promulgate dense extra-statist social networks that contained subversive potential. Modernity can thus be understood through this feedback dynamic of the expensive fantasy of absolute regulation, a fantasy which can only be financed through empowering and subjectifying a population in the name of greater production, a productive population who will one day come to see their rulers as an atavistic inefficiency whose hassles and regulations ought be done away with altogether in the name of production for its own sake, or what is today called “the greater good”.

However, we must avoid the temptation to think modernity as some sort of property which can be mapped onto an internally homogeneous social unit. Tarrow goes badly wrong when he

¹⁶⁷ Saying attributed to Louis Pasteur.

¹⁶⁸ Tarrow has explored this second condition much further than I will in this paper, see Sidney Tarrow *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, 1998

attempts to speak of “The Basic Properties of Social Movements”¹⁶⁹. This search for “basic properties” represents a useless theoretical exercise in essentialist metaphysics, for which exceptions will always be found and where the limits of key definitions will inevitably rely on unstable semantic distinctions¹⁷⁰. For instance, when he suggests that one such basic property of a social movement is possessing a “common purpose”, one might raise the basic and even childlike questions of; “do all members of the movement believe in the “common purpose” in identical ways, and are they all invested in that purpose to the same extent? does everyone in the movement understand the meaning of what the movement’s purpose represents in the same way? what about movements in which there is substantial internal disagreement over purpose, such as the Sons of Liberty in the American Revolution, or the Bolsheviks in the Russian Revolution? did Trotsky cease being a Soviet in formal category prior to his exile by Stalin, or was the exile itself performative of a parallel conceptual exile from political Sovietism?” and so on. An approach of apparent simplicity to a subject matter characterized by complexity is not difficult to complicate with empirical counterinstances. In the case of ‘basic properties’, one might recall Whitehead’s famous maxim: “Seek simplicity and distrust it.”

In fact, as radical empiricists we can observe there is truly no such thing as a purpose, but merely the representation of one, socially constructed inter-subjectively, refracted through a multiplicity of perspectives which we only have accessed to through fragmented representational evidence. The message here is that there is, in principle, *no reason to believe* that social movements are the sort of thing capable of possessing essential properties mapped onto metrically identical social units. There is, in fact, *no such thing* as an internally homogenous social unit of analysis. Units are simply representations, which *cannot* describe empirically heterogenous social space through identical references. Instead, units must represent *processes*, continuously in the act of evolution even while seemingly remaining stable,

¹⁶⁹ Sidney Tarrow *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, 1998 p.4

¹⁷⁰ See Steven Bernstein, Richard Ned Lebow, Janice Gross Stein and Steven Weber “God Gave Physics the Easy Problems” ” *European Journal of International Relations* 2000; 6; 43

in the same way in which the eternal mountains are in fact constantly locked in drifts and tectonic movement and cycles of geologic destruction and renewal. To believe otherwise is a form of naive realism as we saw earlier, which imprisons the collective energy of social organizing within sterile concepts and static signifiers. Naive realism takes social movements at their intentions and stated goals (rather than their active becomings or formations of power/knowledge) and is unable to articulate a politics outside of its own tautological system of signification, or representation, a system wherein new movements simply become evidence of old theories.

In considering the evolution of social movements along early modernist trajectories, and the interplay with the emergence of novel non-intentional and anonymous forms of participation and expression in digital space, it is useful to consider the approach offered Actor Network Theory (ANT) of the sociologist Bruno Latour. This is not a theory in any traditional sense, as indeed Latour himself once explained, lamenting the label: “The third nail in the coffin is the word theory. As Mike Lynch said some time ago, ANT should really be called 'actant-rhizome ontology'... If it is a theory, of what is it a theory?”¹⁷¹ In the context of writing on social movements, perhaps Latour’s most useful concepts are that of the actant, a non-specific unit of distributed agency across a wide range of distinct material assemblages. The notion of actant is almost entirely empty, since it simply implies that the referent described possesses the potential to affect the process and/or outcome of a movement of material within its local context, wherein power/knowledge is always already networked. Unlike an actor or organization or institution, an actant does not possess abstract properties which are concretized in local cases, but exists as a singularity in the passage of spacetime. The fundamental property of an actant is, paradoxically, its irreducibility beyond the concrete contexts of its local space and place. For Latour, the metaphysical simplicity of describing social systems in terms of actants is that one avoids the oft-committed fallacy of reducing effects to causes, tracing monocausal narratives of teleological

¹⁷¹ John Law and John Hassard “Actor Network Theory and After” Blackwell, 1999 p. 19

success or failure of a movement, or even situating the movement in relation to abstract historical principles such as “modernism”. As Graham Harman explains:

... the world is made up of actors or actants ... Atoms and molecules are actants, as are children, raindrops, bullet trains, politicians, and numerals. All entities are on exactly the same ontological footing. An atom is no more real than Deutsche Bank or the 1976 Winter Olympics... an actant is not a privileged inner kernel encrusted with peripheral accidents and relations. After all, this would make a thing's surface derivative of its depth, thereby spoiling the principle of irreduction. ... a thing is so utterly concrete that none of its features can be scraped away like cobwebs or moss. All features belong to the actor itself: a force utterly deployed in the world at any given moment, entirely characterized by its full set of features.¹⁷²

Let us discuss what this means in a concrete case of analysis. Insofar as the ontological entities we are examining are such irreducible actants, we are not interested in listing representations, such as “rational choice” or “political opportunity” alone as “causes”. In the local concreteness of the earlier case study, we are thus not interested in whether or not it can be said that the interpenetration of digital networks within South Korean social space “caused” the eruptive demonstrations in the summer of 2008. In any case, such a notion of causality can only be established in reference to the heuristic of the appearance of conjunctive representations, deriving from the classical political ontologies of the study of social movements as a “royal science”, always attempting to axiomatize the becomings of chaotic collectivities around sterile concepts¹⁷³. As Srnicek describes the failure of contemporary royal scientists, “...their analyses remain too static. They are capable of relating elements to each other when they remain stable for a significant period of time, but are unable to account for the dynamic genesis of contentious episodes or any of the aspects which constitute them.”¹⁷⁴ Digital space and social networks do not constitute distinct applications of transcendent properties which can be Venn-diagrammed onto particular applications. Instead, digital movements constitute *immanent* elements of the embedded social contexts in which actants combine to open new possibilities previously

¹⁷² Graham Harman ““Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics”, re.press, 2009 p. 14

¹⁷³ Nick Srnicek “Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze” [unpublished thesis] 2007 p. 16

¹⁷⁴ Nick Srnicek “Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze” [unpublished thesis] 2007 p. 95-96

foreclosed to activist organizing, based on the speed and multi-valence of social communication technologies and web literacy. Relational concepts here are thus not alienated nor distinct, as one might find in Tarrow or McAdam's scholarship. This metaphysical open-ness is against the closure of *fixed* delineation of reference that demands concepts possess a scope ranging across different particular cases. Instead, concepts are understood as abstract machines in virtual space, existing in (multiple) concert to produce the actual conditions of possibility. These abstract machines are not essential for any form, but are accidental, immanent to the production of conceptual/historical entities in their constitutivity.

Through ANT, we are approaching a "nomad science" of social movements, where what Mary Joyce would call "optimistic" narrators of digital activism can perceive it rife with emergent subversive opportunity structures. One such commentator, Nick Dyer-Witheford, has declaimed as much, following the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri on "new combinations", writing: "The history of the Internet is in fact that of a hyperaccelerated "cycle of struggles," Today, cyberspace is the scene within which the vectors of e-capital tangle and entwine with those of a molecular proliferation of activists, researchers, gamers, artists, hobbyists, and hackers."¹⁷⁵ It is precisely this acceleration which makes nomad science so important for understanding forms of valuation in digital space. The speed of both technological development and network growth has been so astounding that emergent forms that once would have been the product of decades, if not centuries, of blindly evolved social practice now achieve genesis exponentially faster. Think of digital space as the fruit fly avatars of human social behavior, being born and dying with enough speed that biologists can observe the causal genetic relations on manageable timescales.¹⁷⁶ This acceleration of social interaction coincides with the development and socialization of new repertoires of communication and contention cycling through a 24-hour global noosphere of a fantastically heterogeneous composition.

¹⁷⁵ Nick Dyer-Witheford "The New Combinations: Revolt of the Global Value-Subjects" *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 1, Number 3, Winter 2001, pp. 155-200

¹⁷⁶ Eric C. R. Reeve, ed (2001-06-23). "Drosophila melanogaster: The Fruit Fly". *Encyclopedia of genetics*. USA: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, I. pp. 157.

A viral meme, an image of an animal or a celebrity quotation or animation style, can quickly become part of a shared cultural discourse for digital natives to draw on in contention. This is precisely what we saw in the 2008 protests in South Korea, where symbols such as the “candlelight girl” made use of digital animation as a symbol against the restrictive protesting laws. The identification with and dissemination of the “candlelight girl” thus came to socialize a sense of immanent resistance, an active element of identifying with protests as a form of civil disobedience. The use of the “candlelight girl” was also important in the crucial overcoming of gender stratification in South Korean society, which may otherwise have presented an initial barrier for female students and women more generally to participating in the mass demonstrations.¹⁷⁷ Here we are truly in the realm of nomad science, which articulates becoming out of a closed system of representations by integrating the plane of consistency on which multiple outcomes are always possible, and classical political axioms are never deterministic. As Brian Massumi argues in his introduction to Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*:

Nomad thought replaces the closed equation of representation, $x=x \neq y$ (I=I≠you) with an open equation: $\dots+y+z+a+\dots(\dots+arm+brick>window+\dots)$. Rather than analyzing the world into discrete components, reducing their manyness to the One of identity and ordering them by rank, it sums up a set of disparate circumstances in a shattering blow. It synthesizes a multiplicity of elements without effacing their heterogeneity or hindering their potential for future rearranging (to the contrary).¹⁷⁸

However, this dynamical “evolution” itself is a barren term that requires an additional level of detail in order to be meaningful, particularly when discussing social processes which only become concretized historically. Forms and organizations are already immanently embedded within the cycles of contention and repression which they collectively constitute, and cannot be reduced to forms outside of the movements from which they arise. Terms like “collective action” and “social movements” ought not become empty analytical categories lest we risk painting the

¹⁷⁷ Seung-Ook Lee, Sook-Jin Kim, Joel Wainwright, “Mad cow militancy: Neoliberal hegemony and social resistance in South Korea” *Political Geography* xxx (2010) 1e11
<http://geography.osu.edu/faculty/jwainwright/publications/Lee%20Kim%20&%20Wainwright%202010%20Mad%20cow%20militancy.pdf>

¹⁷⁸ Brian Massumi “Translators Preface” Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987 p. xiii

history of popular dissent with an overbroad brush; saying everything correctly by in fact saying very little at all. This is where Tarrow gets it exactly right, when he writes:

People do not simply “act collectively.” They petition, assemble, strike, march, occupy premises, obstruct traffic, set fires, and attack others with intent to do bodily harm. No less than in the case of religious rituals or civil celebrations, contentious politics is not born in organizers’ heads but is culturally inscribed and socially communicated. The learned conventions of contention are part of a society’s public culture.¹⁷⁹

In fact, Tarrow is perhaps re-stating the notion of ‘diagram of power’ offered by Michel Foucault, and here contextualized in terms of the history of collective action: what it means to dissent is co-productively informed by what it means to be repressed. Obedience has never been total; as Foucault phrases it apropos of the common belief about the repressive attitudes defining nineteenth century British sexuality; “we have never been Victorians”.¹⁸⁰ The complex opportunity structures of modern social systems offer a wide diversity of possible spaces, asymmetrically aligned against (while simultaneously being produced by) the repressive forces of power to maintain control and stability. Following Foucault, what we understand as repression is in fact vitally *productive* of subjectivity, and that is no less true for oppositional politics as it is for those mobilized through the taxonomy of populations or in the name of a sovereign’s glory.

The sovereigns of early modern society became increasingly reliant on the collection of taxes to finance their consolidation of political power. Suddenly, the harassment or even murdering of tax collectors becomes a common style of direct action. In the pursuit of extracting greater wealth from the merchant class, the rulers of territory directed their subordinates to facilitate the production of roads paved with cobblestones that became key routes for commerce; suddenly the barricade becomes an effective mode of opposition. With the advent of mass newspaper distribution and a substantial increase in literacy, media symbols gained pre-eminent value with the explosion of political propaganda and the advertising industry. Thus the

¹⁷⁹ Sidney Tarrow *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* Cambridge University Press, 1998 p. 20

¹⁸⁰ Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality Vol.1* Pantheon Books, trans. by Robert Hurley 1976 p.26

protest sign becomes a powerful megaphone where it once would have been a curiously useless cryptograph. And so on. What does it mean to dissent today? Ten years ago? A century ago? Answering these questions historically means specifying the conditions of control and repression against which dissenting collectivities are strategizing, and evolves through counter-measures; call and response. Hausmann had in mind more than views from tall windows when he gave Paris thoroughfares wide enough to prevent barricading.

These strategies of dissent have been called *repertoires of contention* by the scholar Charles Tilly in his major study *Popular Contention in Great Britain 1758-1834*. These repertoires are both material and semiotic; they draw on easily available pools of resources (why is it that rioters throw bricks?) and well-recognized cultural memes to frame their struggles (why is it that marchers sloganize?). These repertoires are repeated in a variety of contexts and they gain and lose social meaning through their repetition. They evolve slowly over time through the blind selection of mutations that occur among an experimental minority, while the majority predominantly relies on the tried and the true. As we have seen in South Korea, repertoires of contention evolve in response to local contexts and opportunity structures, but also may be simultaneously constituted on multiple different planes of consistency (e.g. embodied and digital social spaces, gendered and nationalistic resonances). The candlelight vigils for example, became both a symbol for the participation of women in political life through the symbol of the “candlelight girl”, as well as an engagement with the opportunity structure which prohibited demonstration gatherings after dark except for “cultural activities”. In the case of the former symbolism, it gained currency as a meme posted on chat sites of Agoras as a way of both spreading the word of the protests and showing solidarity with demonstrators, virally spreading to lower the social barriers of entry for new friend-groups and creating positive network externalities for new actants to take up its mantle.

Tilly’s theoretical framework of repertoires of contention has been extended to digital space by Sasha Costanza-Chock who has examined the ways in which quotidian protocols and

commonplaces within digital culture have informed instances of electronic civil disobedience, direct action that occurs through digital space such as distributed denial of service or DDoS¹⁸¹ attacks, which may be used to temporarily disable the web presence of institutional entities.¹⁸² As I have suggested, the potential for social action is immanent to digital space itself which is necessarily *already collective*, e.g. it is constituted as a network series of flows of information, imagery, nonsense and so on. If the dynamics of these viral groundswells can be found in the same reappropriative hypercycles (to use Dyer-Witheford's description) by which a YouTube video of two kittens fighting over a remote control becomes a quiet national media sensation, then the repertoires for communicating and emphasizing certain themes and messages become the conditions of cultural possibility for more explicitly political forms of organizing. These repertoires are not alienated from offline conventions of organizing and collective dissent, but instead seek to re-capitulate the abstract machine of these older collectivities in the new cultural economy. This is a cultural economy in which digital space only represents one valence, one surface topology of visibility for the imperceptible *volumetric space* where everyday practices of communication coalesce. As Constanza-Chock has shown, the DDoS repertoire has appropriated the cultural frame of the "sit-in" to articulate the value of participation for online actants who may be sympathetic to the goals of collective action but may initially be unfamiliar with effective digital methods, as shown in her case study of the Virtual Sit-In for a Living Wage @ Harvard

¹⁸¹ see Mary Joyce and Talia Whyte "Glossary" in *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*, IDEBATE Press, 2010 p. 218 where a DDoS attack is defined as "An explicit attempt by Internet attackers to prevent legitimate users from accessing a website or other online service. Attackers make repeated requests to the website, sometimes by simply reloading a Web page in their browsers or, more often, by using a botnet or other software to create automatic requests. The high number of requests overloads the capacity of the servers on which the site is housed, thus the servers are no longer capable of responding to requests—either legitimate or illegitimate—from people trying to access the site, often resulting in the display of an error message to the site's visitors.

see also Andrew Chadwick *Internet Politics* Oxford University Press, 2009

¹⁸² Sasha Constanza-Chock "Mapping the Repertoire of Electronic Contention," in Andrew Opel and Donnalyne Pompper (eds.), *Representing Resistance: Media, Civil Disobedience and the Global Justice Movement*. NJ: Greenwood, 2003

University.¹⁸³ The goals of digital collective action thus parallel two long-held goals of traditional social movements; first, creating a disturbance in the “business as usual” operations of institutions supportive of or complicit with practices and power relations perceived as unjust, and second, raising barriers to retaliation and response (especially through offline political repression and real violence in embodied social space) by creating audience costs for strategic counter-measures by elites, limiting the range of response options through the threat of a public relations fiasco.

Returning to the construction of edifices of power/knowledge, these tactics are immanently subversive in that even if unsuccessful in accomplishing either goal, they often further the limits of a third, less apparent goal; that of denaturalizing the authorial frame of elites to dictate the terms of engagement for activists to mount public challenges. Whether or not the collective actions succeed in their explicit goals, they challenge the assumptions of the immutability of social conditions, and thereby ground the potential for future action with greater success. In other words, even if collective action does not translate into direct policy changes or institutional reforms, they still alter the inter-subjective activity of what the German historian Thomas Lindberger has described as “street politics”, in a social space with valences both on and offline.¹⁸⁴ “Street politics”, Lindberger argues in the context of early twentieth-century Germany, need not take an explicitly political form as its starting point but may emerge out of collective cultural forms such as public funerals.¹⁸⁵ Collective social gatherings, such moments of communicative encounter that also occur in digital space, present the opportunity for social movements or acts of dissent to gain increased visibility. These cultures of digital collaboration and the immersion of social space in virtual worlds has co-evolved with a strong in-group gamer

¹⁸³ see Thomas Lindenberger *Strassenpolitik: Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914* Dietz, 1995 from references in Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood *Social Movements 1768-2008* Paradigm Publishers, 2009

¹⁸⁴ see Thomas Lindenberger *Strassenpolitik: Zur Sozialgeschichte der öffentlichen Ordnung in Berlin 1900 bis 1914* Dietz, 1995 from references in Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood *Social Movements 1768-2008* Paradigm Publishers, 2009

¹⁸⁵ see Charles Tilly and Lesley J. Wood *Social Movements 1768-2008* Paradigm Publishers, 2009 p.82-83

culture, that often both participates in and co-creates the social rules for insular gameworlds at the same time grounding the potential for collective action by rapidly increasing the density and strength of virtual network ties and real human connections through and around gameplay (e.g. forum discussions).

While a sustained ethnography of gameworlds is beyond the scope of this text, the case of the Cloudmakers¹⁸⁶ provides an exemplar for how the “street politics” of on-line gameworlds can become fertile ground for collaborative organizing. In 2001, the long-awaited release of the film *A.I. (for artificial intelligence)* had many science fiction fans poised with bated breath, as well as a degree of anxiety over its final incarnation. A narrative concept proposed as early as the ‘70s by notorious director Stanley Kubrik, the film had encountered preproduction development problems nearly every step of the way, even in spite of Kubrik’s clout and ascendancy as his impressive library of international successes grew over the years. The film has been described as Kubrik’s final labor, a project he was truly committed to but was nevertheless endlessly deferred due to technical failures and production logjams. These snags finally cleared only in time for his death in March 1999, at which point Steven Spielberg was asked to take over as director. As both a marketing ploy and an effort to pay homage to Kubrik’s secretive and labyrinthine production techniques, the film was co-released with a nameless puzzle-style game, only accessible to those who pursued a series of strange clues buried in blog and media commentary surrounding the film’s release. The initial clue was embedded in the film credits, where a credit for “Sentient Machine Therapist: Jeanine Salla” provoked Kubrik acolytes and other curious fans to plug the credit in as search terms, eventually leading them to the Salla family site, documenting a series of fictitious identities purportedly from the year 2142. Combing the website for clues lead these amateur sleuths to a series of puzzles whose solutions lead to other puzzles comprising a vast yet simple gameworld. This gameworld was integrated with a narrative of the Salla family and the

¹⁸⁶ I am indebted to Tael Harper for pointing me towards this case study. See his work on the Cloudmakers in the context of spaces of play in Tael Harper “The Smooth Spaces of Play: Deleuze and the Emancipative Potential of Games” symplote - Volume 17, Numbers 1-2, 2009, pp. 129-142

puzzles were linked to a mystery surrounding the murder of a character named Evan Chan. By posting clues on chat forums, the puzzle-solvers communicated information to one another quickly and within days had created an insular community in digital social space where people from all over the world collaborated to solve different elements of the game. By the fourth day of gameplay, the chatforum has surpassed a thousand posts and an informal system of moderators had been established, along with a remarkably talented problem-solving assemblage. The group then began to assume the identity of The Cloudmakers, who achieved collaborative problem-solving results that few would have thought possible given the complexity of the puzzles created for them to solve¹⁸⁷. The game designers associated with A.I. observed the growth of this community and began to respond tactically through the modification and dynamic re-design of new puzzles and narrative progression, correcting or devising new explanation to account for noticed inconsistency and dramatically increasing the game's complexity.

As Cloudmaker Jay Bushman writes in his firsthand account of this virtual community's evolution, "[l]ike religion or art, it couldn't be explained to anybody who didn't already get it. Or at least, in the rush of spring 2001, that's how it felt to the initial converts."¹⁸⁸ For Bushman it was the namelessness of the game and the experience of a new type of social play that opened up a parallel social reality, soon populated with over 7000 members, which quickly came to function as an insular culture marked by distinct terminology, norms of interaction and shared goals/values surrounding the game itself. He uses the term "rabbit hole" to describe the disappearance of himself and others into this alternate reality, a new type of game that co-evolved with its players and allowed for a space of shared monomania among the game's

¹⁸⁷ This episode would later prompt network-think to become a prime research interests of scientists at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to launch the Red Balloon Challenge, in which large red balloons would be stationed at geographical coordinates near major highways and network teams could compete to aggregate the information that would allow them to submit the correct locations. see John C. Tang, Manuel Cebrian, Nicklaus A. Giacobe, Hyun-Woo Kim, Taemie Kim, Douglas "Beaker" Wickert "Reflecting on the DARPA Red Balloon Challenge" *Communications of the ACM* Vol. 54 No. 4, Pages 78-85 10.1145/1924421.1924441

¹⁸⁸ Jay Bushman "Cloudmaker Days: A Memoir of the A. I. Game" 12/14/10
<http://www.etc.cmu.edu/etcpres/content/cloudmaker-days-memoir-i-game>

transnational participants, who withdrew from their offline lives in order to devote themselves to a new community, and quickly developed strong social bonds.

It is precisely these sorts of evolved networks which have become vital for understanding digital social action. Elements such as network density, the speed of growth, the diversity of the members embodied identities and the pre-existing social ties of prominent members are an important initial enabling factor for successful future organizing. After the socialization of community-members had taken place to the extent that individuals felt comfortable engaging in desirable offline encounters, the Cloudmakers as an assemblage was brought to bear as an invisible machine for generative social organizing, initially around issues that were directly relevant to their starting subject matter (e.g. artificial intelligence advocacy). As Bushman describes,

On the evening of May 6th, 2001, I dawdled on the corner of 4th Street and Avenue A in New York City, trying to decide if I really would attend a rally for the Anti-Robot Militia.... I wouldn't know anybody there. Sure, I had corresponded with some of them through an online message board. ... this would be more than just kibitzing about an online curiosity. This was the real world. I thought about going home. ... I could skip a strange evening with a bunch of weird geeks, turn in early and get ready to face Monday morning. I could read about what happened behind the safety of my monitor. Standing on that corner, I hesitated. At last, I chose the road with the robots and the weirdoes. And that has made all the difference.¹⁸⁹

This testimony illuminates several different elements of the Cloudmakers social assemblage relevant to social movement theory. First, it demonstrates the potential of digital networks to become social sites for the *development* of new collective spaces in which repertoires of contention can emerge in tandem with specialized social practices, as one might see in a socially insular community such as a monastic order. However, unlike a monastic order, these communities are constituted by a self-reflexive representational identity which is *only a small part* of the multiply constituted ontology of their social space more generally. In simpler terms, it's not as if these people don't have lives outside of the gameworld. Virtual networks don't per se compete with or substitute for embodied social space, but rather supplement and interpenetrate

¹⁸⁹ Jay Bushman "Cloudmaker Days: A Memoir of the A. I. Game" 12/14/10
<http://www.etc.cmu.edu/etcpres/content/cloudmaker-days-memoir-i-game>

increasingly throughout it at different strata simultaneously, and this is particularly true in the case of mobile technology. These strong social bonds allow a collective space that lowers the barriers for individual members to politicize specific issues and organize collective action. Organizing, as for some protestors in the Korean or Cloudmakers case, may be seen primarily a means to advancing the social cohesion of the group as a whole by providing an excuse for facilitating offline encounters.

This dynamical relation has the potential to invert previous assumption about the linear relation between social practices and contentious politics, where the goal of fighting injustice may be less significant than the material value in collective organizing itself. In other words, the goal of “meeting up” offline may be more important to the private social goals of the individual organizers than the political goal of achieving substantive reform. Nevertheless, these individuals may feel passionately about the cause to demonstrate their commitment to a newfound social group. In doing so, they may increase the solidarity of the group through reciprocity, which then becomes a self-reinforcing collective good, a social resource that can be mobilized to great effect. If accurate, such an abstract machine would transmute the conventional opportunity structure analysis which examines costs and benefits of collective action from a purely individualistic or ontologically singular perspective (in which collective action is seen as a cost and the goal to be achieved in terms of institutional reform is seen as a benefit) into a simple win-win, where the process is more important to the organizers than the outcome. In the South Korean context, we have seen some explicit articulation of this valuation, as activists often seek to emphasize the democratic form of mass demonstrations over the actual outcomes of mere victories, where the injustice is related to the policy *process* which appears secretive and corrupt, rather than a particular policy outcome. This sentiment also echoes the notion of collective action as a space for metaphoric social articulation of perceived universals which are always necessarily deferred, signifiers such as “equality”, “justice”, “liberty” and so on which are never concretized and thus always remain works in progress. In these cases, the

protest itself is a re-signification of their authority, legitimacy and resonance, and thus become part of the fermentation of new cultural frames on which future activists and policy-makers can draw.

This is part of why the achievement of short-term concessions from entrenched institutional interests, while superficially allowing the movement to achieve “success”, is in fact de-mobilizing and antithetical to the *social* interests of digital movements precisely because it seeks to deny the processual value of collective anarchical action. Such processual valuation places collective action itself as a goal, achieving in its mere act a victory against the stultifying subduction of everyday life into a knowable, controllable bureaucratic order. As Slavoj Zizek puts it, connecting to the earlier discussion of protests as metaphors for social condensation, “the protest is no longer actually just about the demand, but about the universal dimension that resonates in that particular demand (for this reason, protesters often feel somehow deceived when those in power against whom their protest was addressed simply accept their demand – as if, in this way, they have somehow frustrated them, depriving them of the true aim of their protest in the very guise of accepting their demand).”¹⁹⁰ The main achievement of digital movements is not new tactics against authoritarian regimes or novel constructions of socially relevant messages, but rather *a new social space* in which repertoires of contention can be produced with a wide and subversive audience in ways which are largely unrecognizable to those in power and thus will prove far more difficult to intercept and coopt.

¹⁹⁰ Slavoj Zizek *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, 1999 p. 204

chapter five: anomalies and emergent collectivism

“If resistant culture has learned anything over the past 150 years, it’s that “the people united” is a falsehood; this concept only constructs new exclusionist platforms by creating bureaucratic monoliths and semiotic regimes that cannot represent or act on behalf of the diverse desires and needs of individuals within complex and hybridizing social segments.”

-- Critical Art Ensemble (CAE)¹⁹¹

We are now beginning to sketch the evolutionary process of collective contentious politics in greater detail, but are we any nearer to establishing the first-order ontological questions of what entity exactly is doing the contending, the protesting, the active dissenting? Surely collectivity is not merely a random assemblage of individuals, yet it also seems a mistake to speak *a priori* of “a group”. We are back to the old conundrum; are we seeing a forest or simply many trees? However, classification should never be the primary concern, a stop-gap to articulating empirical indistinction. Through these fluidly limited entities, we must understand the ways in which actants align and coalesce in order to sketch patterns in the dynamic relationships of social movements.

While our current theoretical framework may pass muster from a historical perspective, there are good reasons to mistrust its claim to universality when it comes to the definition of both contentious politics and social movements. As we move on to focus on the repertoires of contention made possible by digital space, keep the following questions in mind: first, Is it possible to imagine an evolution of such repertoires (in virtual space) that renders our previous theoretical understanding of collective political action obsolete? and second, How well does contemporary movement theory fare when confronted with social networks in digital space?

Unfortunately, the answer to this crucial second question superficially appears to be: badly. In the Editors Introduction to the second edition of *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts*, a collection of core theoretical essays and case studies on social movements, editors

¹⁹¹ Critical Art Ensemble “Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media” Autonomedia, 2001 p. 15 <http://www.critical-art.net/books/digital/tact1.pdf>

Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper define social movements as: "...conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means."¹⁹² This model for contention, which relies on self-conscious participation in a collective action framed around a unity of purpose, has problems dealing with what we saw in the case of South Korea. In fact, recent protests driven by mobile technology, from Mexico to Moldova to Myanmar, offer numerous examples in which this definition could be multiply inverted; a movement where many members are not conscious of any explicit "membership", where their efforts are ad hoc and uncoordinated, where they flare up for extremely brief but potent moments, where they may only be advanced by a small number of *extraordinary* people to change some aspect of *someone else's* society using extra-institutional means.

Consider as a particularly thorny counterinstance to this definition the recent activity of Julian Assange, WikiLeaks, and Anonymous, in which a small group of extraordinarily talented hackers provoked the outrage of many national governments simultaneously by releasing classified military and diplomatic documents. The only common thread that seems to typologically unite Assange with more traditional social movements in Goodwin and Jasper's definition seems to be extra-institutionality. Yet, if we consider a movement such as the antinuclear Ploughshares Foundation or the American labor movement as embodied in the AFL-CIO, we find them to be *perfectly institutional* in practice, office buildings and suits and ties and regular meetings and so on. Of course, these examples perhaps blur the lines between 'social movements' and lobbying groups or think-tanks, but then, where would the *standard* definition draw that line? In other words, most traditional social movements that have been successful over the long haul now find themselves culturally similar to any other *institutional* bureaucracy, and thus excluded from the standard definition of a social movement, despite the fact that they are often cited as exemplars of the definitional model! Surely, this is not what these authors had in mind. Or was it? The problem with analytical precision is that it gives rise to zones of

¹⁹² Jeff Goodwin and James Jasper "The social movements reader: cases and concepts" Second Edition, Wiley Blackwell, 2009 p.3

empirical indistinction when approached with concrete examples of multiply overlapping criteria. Do we re-classify the anomalies or revise the theoretical approach? If the tired question of “what is a social movement?” sounds like a useless theoretical precondition to active scholarship, then why not dispense with it and see where the emergent voices of the new paradigm take us? In any event, it seems like a question that can never be usefully answered according to rigid rules of reference, and one ends up forever playing semantic games within the text, while outside the actants of a new political economy are busy making our theories obsolete.

Against the theoretical frames which seek to identify distinct causal relationships between social movements and the historical “events” that they give rise to, I propose to follow Actor Network Theory’s principle of irreducibility to reverse the abstract constitution of historical events. Instead of understanding events as ready-made objects waiting to be discovered by neutral scholars situated in distant historical time, I want to suggest an understanding of social movements *as* sustained events that breaks the frame of event-centered historical/political analysis. Re-thinking events as continuous, always partially imperceptible, and co-created through the politicized representations of scholarly power/knowledge allows us to withdraw from the pretension of neutral historical time and begin investigating the ways in which our situated perspectives inform our analysis. Thus, “events” as recapitulated through historical scholarship become a form of Deleuzian *refrain*¹⁹³ through which the semiotic frames of the movement are made re-available to contemporary activists articulating new conditions of possibility. The purpose of memory here is always political, and the scholarship-as memory of social movements are then made available to become fodder for the re-combinant repertoires of contention that draw non-linearly from diverse pools of cultural material. We are once again speaking of historical objects of our own making, which function as concrete actants in their own rights, immanently situated in time and space and renewing the real economy of cultural signification from which social movements fashion new frames for mobilization. In such an

¹⁹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987 p.333

understanding, social movements as assemblages *and* actants take the place of events in an arrangement of historical causality. This is the terrain out of which “emergent” social forms arise, from which they slowly coalesce in consonance with their articulation through an embodied collectivity, only *finally* bursting into the realm of visibility where naming becomes possible.

If we can understand the evolution of classical social movements as a rough mirror of the growth of the modern nation-state’s repertoire of repressive tactics, the network possibilities of digital communication shatters the mirror with an opportunity structure that doesn’t easily lend itself to standard methods of control. Insofar as we have chosen to understand the relationship between social movements as reciprocally fitted with those of its managerial opponents, we are already far through the looking glass, wandering amongst a conceptually fertile terrain of *dynamic* possibility, past the staid analysis of intentions, goals, resources and stated preferences. Classical images of political opportunity structures give way to a much richer, heavily textured opportunity structure at the micro-level of everyday politics, where connections are mobile and easier to forge than in times past. The transcendent edifice of the “opportunity structure” paradigm itself gives rise to a much more complex theoretical landscape. Multiple disjunctive opportunity structures appear nested within and between one another at different levels of detail, presenting radically disjoint pathways for organizing social change depending on where one chooses to ontologically constitute actants. Here we can see ANT giving rise to what some scholars have termed *process ontology*¹⁹⁴, where the relevant questions are not located at the level of static definitions, but rather within the dynamic interactions that threaten to destabilize the very limits of reference that static definitions suggest or imply.

This theoretical commitment entails emptying the transcendent notions of definitions themselves, which inexorably serve to *limit the possibilities of social actants*, in favor of a radical empirical materialist understanding of emergent social systems existing simultaneously

¹⁹⁴ Nick Srnicek “Assemblage Theory, Complexity and Contentious Politics The Political Ontology of Gilles Deleuze” [unpublished thesis] 2007 p. 24

at multiple registers and articulations, in order to give rise to a descriptive vocabulary capable of accommodating phenomena underneath and outside of representation. In other words, the limits of theoretical definitions are not merely accidents, but rather exemplify the limitations inherent within the practice of defining, always doomed to be surprised by those who have never fully learned what is and is not supposed to be possible.

We will see that digitally organized collective activism looks very difficult for contemporary social movement theory, as currently articulated in its essentialist paradigm, to accommodate. Of course, one could always respond that it is not necessary to include these examples under the standard definition of “social movements”, however this is precisely the sort of circular semantic metaphysics criticized in the introduction. One is left constantly drawing ever-more epicycles in order to defend the purity of a conceptual system inexorably riddled with counterinstances, drawing scholars into circular semantic debates about how to join concepts together which are too alienated from their subject matter to be truly useful. This thesis has not and will not seek to present a definition of “social movements”, nor will it attempt to examine the essential properties of any social unit; rather I will seek to elucidate the ways in which digital space may cause us to problematize and revise some of our assumptions about how political-social collectivities function and evolve. I have sought to do this in the service of providing multiple juxtaposed levels of detail *against* a metaphysics which seeks to taxonomize conceptual parts within homogenous wholes.

However, we are still wrestling with the problem of situating analysis at a particular level of detail; what should the descriptive unit of analysis be, at least grammatically? The group? The individual? The movement? The difficulty of this question lies in the motivation of two opposed modes of theoretical parsing: atomism and holism. On the one hand, the whole seems overwhelmingly complex and incoherent without a firm grasp of the parts, inclining us to atomize conceptual and physical entities and thereby create manageable units of analysis. This inclination may be motivated by both rigor and pragmatism; otherwise the inevitable question

of where to begin seems difficult to answer empirically. However, the world of phenomena synthesized by our sensoriums may then again induce us to holize, seeing mere figurative atoms as only parts of much larger social units joined in nested cosms (think for example of the intuitive appeal of the medieval European macrocosmos), where anything is always already part of the Greater Everything. This is a sensibility tied to the identification with a sense of impending doom, the ephemerality of infinity, of the Everything around which the unity of presumed ontological entities may once have formed.¹⁹⁵ As W. P. Ker described in his history of medieval literature:

The tragedy of the Doom of the Powers, the end of the world, seems to have been the ruling idea of the later Northern mythology... Originally perhaps a nature-myth, of the death of summer, or of the day, its ideas of mortality were retained after the natural origin of the story was forgotten; it became the symbolic tragedy of all death, the triumph of Time. The idea also that the whole system of the world – Heaven and Earth and the Gods – was fated to disappear, was probably a very old one.¹⁹⁶

Narrative structures surrounding these holistic presumptions have not disappeared with the illuminating influence of Enlightenment thought, rather they have crystallized around seemingly more noble ideals as the goal of human aspirations, while still retaining the image of the world as an object to be fixed by power. Here the impulse to holize is a function of apocalyptic wrestling with the collective anxiety about institutional mortality, the giving way of the staid walls of the office or cloistered hallways of church, university or government to the tactile space of encounter, inaugurating the premonition of abject terror. Tactile encounter, the absence of an institutional framework through which one threads a daily life gives rise to a more elemental set of fears, which Elias Canetti begins his major work *Crowds and Power*, describing that:

¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the notion of unity of form is a corollary of finality in the narrative sense, for all forms must be tied or part of a larger whole in some profoundly basic way in order for “the entire story” to come climactically to an end, as in apocalyptic narrative form. See also Stephen O’Leary “Apocalyptic Argument and the Anticipation of Catastrophe: The Prediction of Risk and the Risks of Prediction” *Argumentation* 11: 293–313, 1997, where for example he presents the argument in terms which may also be germane to our socialized understanding of political science, suggesting “Predictions of the future are never offered in a vacuum; they influence action in the present by offering both positive and negative scenarios as consequences of choices made by the audience.”

¹⁹⁶ W. P. Kerr “The Dark Ages” New American Library, 1958 p. 43

“[t]here is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown.”¹⁹⁷ We must worship the hierarchies which make us retched, lest we be cast into the abyss. But if we must, perish, let us make it *mean!* The world as we know it must come to an end, the story must not simply dissipate into the entropic void of meaningless vacuum-space, the death of the social, the complete individuation and disaggregation of all indivisible singularities and the slow weakening and unraveling of all relations. It is against these poles of inertia and dissipation on one hand and monomania and symbolic totalization on the other that the impulse to occupy the same body arises; the group as a mind of many crowds¹⁹⁸, the crowd within and between the embodied “individual”. From the anxieties of this affective unraveling comes the schizophrenic composition of a new symbolic universe of frames and attractors into which the desire of a situated perspective is poured to co-mingle with others and form a new sort of reflexive social body, a formation that is always in the process of being constituted. This is the group. We are together, we are all here to validate on another’s actions and meanings. The group is a building of a new world.

Atomization/Holization: the binaristic dualisms that collapse in the intersection of individual and group, node and network, the combinations which are immanently concrete, already configured as an ontological multiple, part and whole. These opposed tendencies often function at different levels of detail, of scale although not always. The organic molecule can be both the whole of the atom and the part of the cellular organelle, thus existing as the overlapping disciplinary foci of chemists and biologists. However, both impulses represent a metaphysical

¹⁹⁷ Elian Cannetti *Crowds and Power* Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1960 p. 15

¹⁹⁸ see the opening for Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*, “The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away. We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognizable in turn. To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think.” In the same way, the name of the group is a formation of the crowd of the individual, the singularization of the swarm, valorization of certain marks of perceptible politics against which the mundane interactions and collective becomings of the group disappear, subvert, a group that is only named to make the eventual ideal of its becoming “unrecognizable in turn.” Collective politics is at its best (and worst) when it becomes unrecognizable through an intensification of the dynamics at the limits of its conditions of possibility, defying expectations and norms in order to ground re-articulated limits of social space.

urge to describe at some level a totality, a smooth conceptual space even at the level of the infinitesimally minute. The salient feature of this smooth conceptual space is that it has already been described by the category that it belongs to in advance, and therefore simplifies the theoretical work of explaining relations.

In opposition to this metaphysics of totalities great and small, I would like to contrast a Foucaultian/Deleuzian microphysics¹⁹⁹ of relations, which replaces smooth units of analysis with dynamics of progressive specification. The necessity of nuance offered by *some* sort of alternative methodological approach to thought is difficult to dispute when it comes to culture, where objects are always partially constellated in the flux of social feedback loops which include the flows of matter, energy, and social meaning. As Michel de Certeau writes: “Analysis shows that a relation (always social) determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact.”²⁰⁰ While classical metaphysics in the social sciences is interested in determining the essential properties of defined units: “the individual”, “the group”, “the social movement” which grounds their meaning in ahistorical linguistic terms, this adaptive microphysics is interested in precisely the ways in which multiply co-evolving historical contexts may alter the conceptual tools, metaphors and descriptors that we may use to understand the dynamics of contentious politics. Another way to put this is that while metaphysics is interested in how things stay the same, conceptual microphysics is interested in how things change from when we started talking about them, to recognize the frailty of truth-preservation in our language. Here I am not merely suggesting that this is somehow a superior way to do social science, but rather that from a rigorous philosophical perspective, it represents the only *possible way of achieving meaningful rigor in analysis*. As Manuel De Landa explains, after one has adopted this ontological constraint:

¹⁹⁹ Michel de Certeau uses Foucault’s term here from *Discipline and Punish*, quoted as “microphysics of power”, from which I am borrowing, see “General Introduction” *The Practices of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984

²⁰⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practices of Everyday Life*, University of California Press, 1984 p. xi

“...*the world itself* emerges transformed: the very idea that there can be a set of true sentences which gives us the facts once and for all, an idea presupposing a closed and finished world, gives way to an open world full of divergent processes yielding novel and unexpected entities, the kind of world that would not sit still long enough for us to take a snapshot of it and present it as the final truth.”²⁰¹

Imagine the classical taxonomic practice as puzzle-making; the goal of the social scientist is to create linguistic representations of the world through the formulation of sentences and diagrams (and occasionally, even specimens) that are the epistemic equivalents of the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle; each sized proportionally and fitted onto a smooth surface, a manageable enumeration of data that when joined together with its proper cousins in the right formations can form an image of the world. Consider such an image of the world present in a concept such as the genus; a Linnaean reduction of species to a few essential properties shared by many other species. This process of nesting categories (“X is a type of Y is a type of Z is a type of...” and so on) represents the conceptual legwork of Kuhn’s “normal science” for the taxonomic project in social science. Such a process can only serve to continuously re-validate the selfsame practices of typologization in every new case, inserting caveats and accommodations and footnotes for anomalies while attempting to preserve the overall project of fitting the world into grid categories embodying immutable types.

In order to understand the importance of an antireductive (and therefore antitaxonomic) approach to the intersection of social movements and digital space, it may be useful to examine an instance where the standard taxonomy seems to go badly wrong. Tarrow’s more recent text on emergent social movements, *The New Transnational Activism*, offers a case in point. Here, Tarrow examines the way in which organizers have begun working across borders to advance common economic and political goals effecting transnational populations. As Tarrow aptly points out, these transnational movements are hardly new, however with the pre-eminence of discourse on globalization they have achieved a greater visibility, particularly following the rise of the Global Movement for Justice (GMJ) and the coalescence of a huge number of

²⁰¹ Manual De Landa *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* Continuum, 2002, p.7

transnational activists during the 1999 meeting of the World Trade Organization in Seattle²⁰². As a global political economy emerges composed of vertical aggregates (e.g. hierarchical corporate entities) which span borders, models of organizing which appear to limit their scope within national spaces seem archaic at best, and a grave misdirection of scarce resources at worst. This is not to say that national governments are no longer central sites of struggle, or that they do not have a role to play in contesting notions of rights and protections. For the time being, national governments will remain a standard form of social machinery used to mark and safeguard cherished constructs of space and place. However, the way in which these struggles are constellated often must be complemented with a transnational political lens. Consider the South Korean case; even though the target of the movement was the administration of President Lee Myung-Bak and his legislative coalition in the Blue House, the issue of the struggle was formed around a transnational trade relation with the United States. Even more importantly, the issue gained substantial traction in large part because the United States had negotiated similar trade deals with surrounding nations such as Japan, which *did* include protections designed to limit the risks of mad cow disease, whereas the deal to South Korea did not. Thus, examining the protest by looking *only* at its domestic context would have missed crucial framing questions which were important in mobilizing otherwise satisfied South Koreans to dissent.

However, Tarrow's difficulty in analyzing transnational movements comes in constituting a transnational cultural space. Since the individuals who participate in these movements are often separated by great geographical distances and have local political opportunity structures which may deter transnational coalescence around a grievance, how is it that these movements manage to get going? In arguing why globalization and economic integration is not sufficient to explain the rise in transnational organizing, Tarrow writes:

Acting collectively requires activists to marshal resources, become aware of and seize opportunities, frame their demands in ways that enable them to join with others, and

²⁰² Mary Joyce "Introduction" in *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*, IDEBATE Press, 2010 p.8

identify common targets. If these thresholds constitute barriers in domestic politics, they are even higher when people mobilize across borders.²⁰³

This conceptual difficulty of attempting to nest national contexts within transnational contexts represents a profound error in many modern scholars who attempt to negotiate transnational cultural space in reference to national space or identity, as if transnational cultures are inexorably reactive against national social units. The assumption is that transnational cultural space is constituted in the same way as national political space once was, and therefore the barriers to organizing in national space, including distance and resource mobilization, will be far more constrained when those barriers are raised. In other words, the standard observation that one might take from a survey of modernist movements in national space is that the greater the distance in actors and the lack of access to common resources and cultural frames, the higher the cost of organizing and the harder it will be for a movement to form and gain momentum.

However, this equivocation of national with transnational cultural space is badly mistaken. Conventional metrics of social movement success, derived from modernist social science research, reveal to be badly equipped to deal with many contemporary transnational movements because they fail to understand that supra-national cultures have formed through profoundly distinct abstract machines than those that constitute the space of national cultural identity. Transnational culture here, signifying through a multiplicity of communications technologies, does not come to replace national cultural space but rather serves to augment cultural reality of embodied actants by providing the opportunity for geographically disparate social linkages to form as powerfully as those that form within a locality such as a neighborhood, city or national space. Consider, for example, that two people living on different continents who both play World of Warcraft may be socially closer than two geographical neighbors within a national cultural space. Transnational networks of digital and mobile communication have become the basis for enlarging and transforming this transnational cultural space, and are embedded within and

²⁰³ Sidney Tarrow “The New Transnational Activism” Cambridge University Press, 2006 p. 7

throughout a networked cultural structure which is virtually overlapping with national cultural space constituted through territorial boundaries. This new dis-embodied cultural space is increasingly absorbing more of the everyday cultural activities of the denizens of developed countries. Understanding digital space as the conditions of possibility of the contemporary formations of many distinct transnational cultures is absolutely vital for interpreting the startling emergence of transnational organizing on a massive scale, and recognizing that “closeness” in a network has many more metrics than geographical space or immediate proximal access to material resources. Communicative or social closeness plays a far greater role in organizing than the geographical proximity of the participating actants, although the latter criteria is by no means insignificant.

However, this is not to imply that there is one single space of “transnational culture”. As Tarrow aptly recognizes, there are a multiplicity of cultures that become political through their transnationalization, writing “...even prosaic activities, like immigrants bringing remittances home to their families, take on broader meanings when ordinary people cross transnational space. Most studies of transnational politics focus on self-conscious internationalists; we will broaden that framework...”²⁰⁴ Remittances is a particularly good example, given theorists recognition that the size of the remittance economy at this point overwhelms and exceeds any *conscious effort at engineering development policy* by elites in developed countries, and represents in some ways a bottom-up form of redistributive wealth (albeit, while also fostering economic dependencies and depriving sending countries of robust members of their labor market).²⁰⁵ This move to recognize non-intentional political formations, which are political before they are named and come to represent a reservoir of social practices that inform and contour social space regardless of any individual’s particular orientation to it is vital to understanding what exactly allows revolutionary political action to crystallize and grow through

²⁰⁴ Sidney Tarrow “The New Transnational Activism” Cambridge University Press, 2006 p. 2

²⁰⁵ see Ilene Grabel “Remittances, Political Economy, and Economic Development” International Institute of Social Studies, 2/21/2009 <http://www.iss.nl/DevISSues/Articles/Remittances-Political-Economy-and-Economic-Development>

digital space²⁰⁶. The question for understanding emergent forms of social organization becomes three-fold: First, what overlapping cultural spaces constitute the limits of organizing in actor-networks? Second, how do the cultural spaces inform both the conditions of possibility and the political opportunity structure for a collectivity to become articulated as an identity? and third, what catalysts exist to combine and give rise to socially apparent cycles of contention? These questions do not imply that the imperceptible or underlying features of a contentious social form ought be devalued in relation to the social bodies that may exist before they are named. Rather, it is to suggest that what may catalyze social theorists to become attendant to the quotidian practices of contentious formation is precisely that moment where contention becomes recognized by non-participants as a distinctly political phenomenon. These questions demand a high threshold of analysis while at the same time recognizing the necessity of initially identifying an iceberg by its visible tip (rather than the submerged majority), in the manner of approaching subterranean social formations which may exist outside of the theoretical continuum of representation (the second half of the double-R axiom in Tsianos et. al.)²⁰⁷

Framing our approach to transnational activism is equally important. Many theorists from Rousseau to De Tocqueville to the mid-twentieth century commentators on civic culture such as Robert Dahl and Walter Lippman have framed social movement as participatory in the larger structure of democratic civil society. Social movements become mere evidence within a political economy of representative democracy, or come to function as repetitive demonstrations that “the system works!” Insofar as they manage to mobilize change, they are incorporated into a depoliticized homeostasis that supports and uncritical attitude towards the underlying edifice of

²⁰⁶ Remittance economies themselves may be understood as a non-intentional assemblage of imperceptible politics, redistributing wealth from globalization-driven concentrations deriving from trade imbalances back to the Global South.

see Hein de Haas “Remittances, Migration and Social Development A Conceptual Review of the Literature” Social Policy and Development Programme Paper Number 34 October 2007
[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpAuxPages%29/8B7D005E37FFC77EC12573A600439846/\\$file/deHaaspaper.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/%28httpAuxPages%29/8B7D005E37FFC77EC12573A600439846/$file/deHaaspaper.pdf)

²⁰⁷ see Vassilis Tsianos, Dimitris Papadopoulos and Niamh Stephenson *Escape Routes: Control and Subversion in the 21st Century* Pluto Press 2008

elitism and the consolidation of power in formally democratic societies. In other words, social movements become folded into the narrative that the democratic order, constituted at the ‘ideal circles’ (Deleuze’s term) of state, economy and civil society²⁰⁸ is the apotheosis of political community, where every new deviation is simply reconceived as evidence of the system’s infinite ability at incorporation of difference, of homogenization within the dominant narrative “that of representative participatory politics”.²⁰⁹ However, contemporary *transnational* social movements often lack a defined place in these discussions outside of the abstract promises for *global* civil society, promises constantly undermined by national claims of sovereignty. The claim that transnational social movements will eventually become evidence for a functional transnational democratic order is precisely the same sort of flawed equivocation we saw earlier with Tarrow’s description of transnational movements using metrics and descriptors developed in observing modernist movements in national space.

The hope to create an international democratic order in which social movements fulfill the role of mere evidence of representation appears today as hopelessly naive. From a theoretical standpoint, it epitomizes the attempt to incorporate an entirely different abstract machine of social becoming as “anomalies” into a pre-determined taxonomic structure, whose definitions are unable to account for the relation of transnational movements to national loci of repression and containment. The point here is not to try and come up with some way to accommodate transnational movements within the dominant paradigm, but to recognize the ways in which they undermine the classical project of definition itself. The Zapatistas provide a perfect example of how a post-representational social movement can thrive in digital space. How would it be possible to do justice to these activists by using a theoretical frame based in an analysis of political economy that is *directly at odds* with how these activists have organized themselves?

²⁰⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press, 1987p. 367

²⁰⁹ Frederick Jameson *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Routledge, 1981 p. 22

To do so would be to reduce their own theoretical labors as *active scholars* to mere curiosity objects in the social scientists' specimen room.

However, this concern should not give way to pessimism or theoretical paralysis. As Marcelo Svirsky has argued, it is the attempt to understand activism enframed within a larger continuum of democratic grand narratives and hierarchical political orders which precisely constitutes the royal science earlier discussed in the context of narrating history through discrete events. Svirsky points to examples such as WikiLeaks, which constitutes a form of collective digital activism aimed at the mantle of secrecy that often accompanies the tactical registers of sovereign power²¹⁰. In the case of WikiLeaks, this resistance is constellated with reference to military actions and the “collateral murders” of civilians and repressive tactics against forms of dissent that are unable to be smoothly incorporated into grand narratives of militarized liberation and the Westernized democratic community. The very tension between the neoconservative narrative of “democracy promotion” and the antidemocratic forms of secrecy undermines the incorporation of WikiLeaks democratic dissent into the larger narrative of the triumphal homeostasis of the liberal democratic order. In other words, WikiLeaks is antitheoretical precisely because its main target is not the sovereign itself but the presumed sovereign authority to determine the legitimacy or illegitimacy of acts of violence.

This incorporative form of scholarship, Svirsky argues, is not merely an active reification of the idealized forms of dominant structures of representative democracy. It *actively subverts* the possibilities of a nomad science of activism, denying the capacity or desirability of recognizing the conditions of possibility in novel spaces of resistance. We begin to understand activism in the narrow terms of *only* that which acts intentionally to directly change the state, denying forms of direct action which may be more effective in altering the cultural space necessary to achieve widespread social change. Examples of these other spaces include; critical teaching in schools, eruptive public discourses in the form of graffiti and anonymous activism such as the

²¹⁰ see Marcelo Svirsky (2010). Introduction: Beyond the Royal Science of Politics. *Deleuze Studies* 4 (supplement):1-6.

anti-Scientology Guy Fawkes crowds which emerged following the popularization of the film *V for Vendetta* (2006).²¹¹ The schema we use for articulating activism can thus be understood as greatly responsible for the way that those articulations signify politically; as complicit or subversive, as conforming to expectations of political participation or undermining previously understood conditions of possibility. This level of analysis will be important when examining the recent social upheavals in Northern Africa and the Middle East, in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and so on, which caught the world “by surprise” before being inexorably cast as “struggles for democratic freedom” by media outlets and social theorists alike. The royal science paradigm thus provided the conceptual frames necessary validating long-held neoconservative worldviews about the essentially Westernizable conditions of all humans and paving the way for justifiable military intervention by the United States and European powers against Qaddafi’s forces in Libya. Regardless of whether or not these events as unfolded are understood as normatively desirable by readers, it is important to investigate how the knowledge and narratives surrounding these upheavals have been produced. Dominant scholarly frames play an important role in rendering what initially appears as images of raw dissent, disorganized masses and generalized discontent into the image of democratic participation and a popular uprising with the goal of regime change and representative democracy. The royal science of activism is alive and well in the production of these dominant representations and we would do well to attend to the theoretical texture of the ideas it produces, learning to read the violences of conceptual production that ideology so easily naturalizes and erases.

²¹¹ see Marcelo Svirsky (2010). Introduction: Beyond the Royal Science of Politics. *Deleuze Studies* 4 (supplement):1-6.

chapter six: politicizing digital space

“The destructiveness of the crowd is often mentioned as its most conspicuous quality... [t]he destruction of representational images is the destruction of a hierarchy which is no longer recognized.”

-- Elias Cannetti²¹²

Proponents of virtually every major ideology have rushed to claim the social field of digital technology as their own. On the Left, many thinkers have viewed the possibilities of digital space with guarded optimism concerning the possibility of grounding a new form of “commons” or collectivism that would be impossible to appropriate for a self-interested profit-motive. Unlike the historical “commons” of Northern England, upon whose fabled tragedy of over-grazing were founded the advances of the enclosure movement, and where value was based on excludability²¹³, the digital commons did not wither from use but rather grew with it. This growth-from-use dynamic was true both in terms of economic and social value, which quickly became co-productive with the rise and dominance of Internet media and advertising over print. Insofar as digital space can be enclosed, it only becomes valuable at the point where it is passed through, used, contributed to, and therefore seems to be an ideal enabling condition for organizing cooperative social action. What is crucial in this understanding of enclosure (as juxtaposed against the possible “commons” that theorists may seek in digital space), is that it provides the conditions for interaction of a particular sort, the conditions for valuing space in a particular way, and the conditions for producing identity as bounded towards a socialized construction of territory. As Ronen Shamir writes:

Practices of enclosure, even in extreme cases of sealed total institutions, must always rely on some selection procedures that distinguish that which may come across from that which cannot. During the feudal era, most people could not leave their communities without written consent, and those who did risked imprisonment and death. Feudal estates closely

²¹² Elias Cannetti *Crowds and Power* Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1960 p.19

²¹³ e.g. “This patch of grass is *mine*, therefore it is my responsibility to make sure that it is not over-grazed, whereas if the grass is everyone’s there is no point in my caring since someone will simply come and graze more after my sheep have taken what they need, and therefore I ought graze as much as I can in the short term, lest it fall in to the bellies of my neighbor’s sheep”, for contextual analysis see Garrett Hardin “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science*, 162(1968):1243-1248.

watched their boundaries, deriving revenue from fees of passage and multitude types of tariffs and excise duties.²¹⁴

In other words, the precise aspect of cultural space that motivated profitable excludability in the physical historical “commons” of Northern England (zero-sum consumption) is reversed in digital space, where value is produced through inclusive use. This inversion creates a reverse in the incentive for membership in community. Classically, the social value of community membership is enhanced through excludability and rigidly defined boundaries and entry costs. On the Internet, audience value provides a collective enhancement for community membership, and includability determines the value of cultural space.²¹⁵

Some contemporary Marxists and other critics have expressed suspicions about the emancipatory promises of a technology, which after all has surely been harnessed for market forces, was originally developed for military communication, is highly susceptible to both efficient surveillance technologies, and is frequently used to mask violent power relationships through cuddly interfaces.²¹⁶ However, many left-libertarians, autonomists and anarchist

²¹⁴ Ronen Shamir “Without Borders? Notes on Globalization as a Mobility Regime” *Sociological Theory* 23 (2) p. 208) THE OSMOTIC PROPERTIES OF THE MOBILITY REGIME (2005)

²¹⁵ There is a direct objection to this view espoused in Gian Maria Greco and Luciano Floridi “The tragedy of the digital commons” *Ethics and Information Technology* 6: 73–81, 2004, which is a direct application of Hardin’s thought experiment about enclosure practices to digital space. However, this argument is deeply flawed. First, Greco and Floridi argue that the expanded use of the Internet, principally in overcoming the “digital divide” and expanding access to less affluent users in developing nations, is contributing to an increase in “junk use” such as spam email and frivolous communication which is slowing down the Internet and costing companies billions of dollars a year in filter software. However, since their study does not measure the positive effects of the creation of a cottage industry of antivirus software and spam filters, and further does not attempt to estimate the economic gains from increased access to customers in emerging markets, these apparent economic costs cannot be taken at face value. Their conclusion seems to be directly contradicted by the fact that overall communication technology speed has increased globally and is expected to continue to do so, largely due to the introduction of broadband technology and 3G/4G networks. In sum, Greco and Floridi’s argument amounts to the objection that one occasionally hears from uniformed US politicians who do not understand/ appear intimidated by digital technology and worry that the Internet as “a system of tubes” is becoming overloaded and slowing (this view was in fact expressed by former US Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK)), and as such does not merit more than a cursory disqualification.

²¹⁶ See perhaps most notably the ambivalent Slavoj Žižek, see “Is this digital democracy, or a new tyranny of cyberspace?” in *The Guardian*, December 30, 2006 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/dec/30/comment.media>
Also see Menzies, H. (2000). “Postscript: On digital public space and the real tragedy of the commons”. In M. Moll and L.R. Shade (Eds.), *E-commerce vs. e-commons: communications in the public interest*, Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, who argues that the fetishization of digital activism and

activists took the vision of digital space as a free area of positive association beyond its purely “market” harness. During the early evolution of the internet, activists such as John Barlow heralded the inauguration of “dot-communism”; a post-property barter economy where agents were unconstrained by compulsory employment but were instead rewarded collectively for creative inspiration that benefited the greater good.²¹⁷ From this and other writings developed an understanding of the internet as an intellectual space where the *practical* constraints of private property to enclose ideas (via intellectual property) dramatically failed, as in the piracy of music, videos and so on. This trope has hardly withered; witness the publication of Eben Moglen’s “The dotCommunist Manifesto”²¹⁸ in 2003 and Kevin Kelly’s proclamation of the new “digital socialism” in a 2009 article for *Wired Magazine*²¹⁹. For many of these commentators, the unbelievable growth of cooperative network sites such as Wikipedia (the world’s largest aggregation of information) by people working for free, combined with the advent of virtual worlds and communities constituted outside of geography and based on networked affiliation of

virtual social space is part of an ideological trap designed to pacify global publics in the face of the erosion of physical public commons (e.g. libraries and universities). However, these objections tend to imply a zero-sum relationship between digital social participation and offline activism which does not appear to be born out in any of the case studies we have examined. While Menzies argument is supported by empirical correlation, there is no counterfactual suggestion that *in the absence* of the development of digital technology that the same effects of erosion might not have been produced as a by-product of the corporate “race-to-the-bottom” occurring within globalization, in which nation-states compete to lower their tax bases and eliminate workers’ rights in order to make up for the costs of corporate relocation. This “race-to-the-bottom” effect seems to be a more plausible explanation for the erosion of public commons globally, as has been documented in Andre Gorz “Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society” trans. Chris Turner, Polity Press p.14-16, Nick Dyer-Witheford *The New Combinations: Revolt of the Global Value-Subjects* *The New Centennial Review*, Volume 1, Number 3, Winter 2001, pp. 155-200, Dermot Leahy and Stephen Pavelin “Divide and Rule: Geographical Diversification and the Multinational Firm” *Open economies review* 15: 363–374, 2004

Michael Perelman “Manufacturing Discontent: The Trap of Individualism in Corporate Society” Pluto Press, p. 50-54

James Crotty, Gerald Epstein and Patricia Kelly “Multinational Corps in Neo-Liberal Regime,” in *Globalization and Progressive Economic Policy*, by Baker, Epstein and Pollin, Cambridge University Press, 1998 http://bss.sfsu.edu/jmoss/resources/635_pdf/No_23_CrottyEsteinKelly.pdf

²¹⁷ see Kevin Kelly “The New Socialism: Global Collectivist Society Is Coming Online” *Wired Magazine* 5/22/2009 http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/magazine/17-06/nep_newsocialism?currentPage=1

²¹⁸ Eben Moglen “The dotCommunist Manifesto” January, 2003 <http://emoglen.law.columbia.edu/publications/dcm.html>

²¹⁹ Kevin Kelly “The New Socialism: Global Collectivist Society Is Coming Online” *Wired Magazine* 5/22/2009 http://www.wired.com/culture/culturereviews/magazine/17-06/nep_newsocialism?currentPage=1

shared interests or purposes are persuasive demonstrations that cyberspace belongs to their future.

This discourse of inevitable change that re-writes the rules of social engagement and represents a clear break with the past is hardly novel and cannot be understood as neutral, but rather participates in the historical legacy of what anthropologist Gabrielle Hecht refers to as “rupture-talk”²²⁰. Rupture-talk is a classic element of postcolonial discourse which Hecht identifies in particular with the development of nuclear weapons, but represents a strategy of amnesia for the violent legacy of colonial resource-theft, racist dehumanization, and mass-murdering. The belief that “everything is suddenly different” is a way of avoiding a confrontation with the realities of colonialism that are still very much present in the structural inequalities and artificial boundaries of the late capitalist nation-state system. How simple would it be if technology by itself could just change the channel on the evident hypocrisy of the West’s bloody hands, the start afresh with all forgotten and forgiven? However, while Hecht discusses this with particular relevance to the almost mystic reverence surrounding the technoscientific discourse of nuclear weapons development, testing and deterrence, this “rupture-talk” is nowhere more clear today than in discussion of social technologies of dissent. In particular, the fetish for social media technology enframes many discussion in the Western media of the recent revolutions in Iran, Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Qatar and others. Of course, wouldn’t it be perfect if Twitter and Facebook actually changed everything, enlightened the masses to the need to democratize, to Westernize, to properly integrate themselves into the global market economy? To overcome all those pesky authoritarian dictatorships, many of which were supported for years by substantial military support and arms sales from Western powers?

The Western media loves nothing if not to display and reify its latent fetishism for every sort of digital technology every ten minutes of the nightly news cycle on Middle Eastern revolutions . The message is clear: *we did our part*, we stood with the heroes, we gave them the information

²²⁰ Hecht, Gabrielle “Rupture-Talk in the Nuclear Age: Conjugating Colonial Power in Africa” *Social Studies of Science* 32/5–6(October–December 2002) 691–727

weapons to fight their techno-clueless oppressors! Commentators passively observe that the media is no longer a passive observer of social change, but is now on the front lines of the struggle (virtually, of course) to democratize the world without needing a costly military intervention. The focus is never on the *emergence* of the movement, dis-organized and illegible to Western audiences, but rather on the pre-formed narrative used to articulate the struggle of oppressed (brown) people in the language of Western technoscience; rupture-talk on repeat. Every new social media platform becomes the inauguration of a new era, and the social theory surrounding innovation has become a pathetic reflection of this media techno-fetishism that always subordinates the role of imperceptible material formations under the grand narrative of technical advancements, posing a deterministic relationship between technology and social change.

On the political right and center-right, thinkers following the insights of economist Friedrich Hayek have begun to view digital networks as an abstract space for aggregating market information, a theoretical dream which technology has finally perfected. Rather than relying on misleading price signals, susceptible in practice to manipulation and distortion, digital space could enable a market space of *direct* information, from the horses mouths of buyers and sellers. For many, this optimism was tied to a previous understanding that so-called “market failures” (where the market caused instability by mis-valuing relative supply and demand of a good or service) were caused by “market imperfections” which were largely due to the presence of assymetric networks of information bracketing large populations of individuals. This privately held information, such as what products consumers wanted to buy or the expectation of a future event’s likelihood was not intentionally kept secret, however there was no reliable forum where access to this information could be presented to market participants equally.

Thus, for proponents of free markets, digital space represents the ultimate informational evening of the playing field, a smooth space of market interactions that will chaotically optimize actionable conditions for everyone. This perfected market space finally makes the positive

externality of markets much more widely accessible, thereby making private information into a public good. In an information economy, the notion of “enclosure” represents a market inefficiency in a similar way that tariffs represent an inefficiency when analyzing the markets of global trade. The free movement of information can either be read as “transversal” in the sense of dissent against solidified territorial norms of identity, or an efficient means of creating aggregates of information for market analysis, consumer profiling, the development of a surveillance economy based on digitally revealed preference and a data economy based on the buying and selling of personal information. Commentators such as Cass Sunstein refers to this evolution as an “infotopia”²²¹, where the information that is most relevant to the choices of a centralized decision-maker have finally become within that decision-makers grasp through methods of collectively aggregating information. Want to know what everyone’s talking about? Just check the trending topics on Twitter! However, the desirability and salience of many of these externalities to advocates of social change has proved dubious at best, particularly given the far-Left leanings of many transnational activists.

The contest over what digital space itself means has become politicized. There is no “correct” answer here, although there are ways for each interpretation to accommodate the other. One could easily see digital space as a market which includes social as well as purely economic value, and that the value of joining a collaborative community such as Wikipedia creates an incentive for individuals to participate. This evolved incentive structure of social capital then operates as a complex social system of intangible costs and benefits, authorizing a theory of digital space as a vast informal market. One could perhaps just as easily see the infotopian distribution of information as the emergence of a collective release from the self-restraint normally associated with egalitarian commons. Such a view would permit the ideals of socialism to co-exist compatibly with the values of individualism through a participatory network that grows and evolves in response to aggregated participation levels but *does not* answer to the beck and call of

²²¹ Cass Sunstein *Infotopia, How Many Minds Produce Knowledge* Oxford University Press, 2006 p. 12

a single individual, thereby avoiding any risks intrinsic to the “dictatorship of the proletariat”. However, just as we risk a danger of committing historical amnesia through rupture-talk, the opposite danger also looms. We must further resist simply re-articulating the evolution of digital activism through the myopic lens and language of a historical ideological schema, which would simply reintroduce the problems of essentialism at the level of interpretation. Each such effort is doomed to the same tautological difficulties of self-reference, insofar as it grafts a historical narrative onto the material emergence of both the digital space and the activity that comes to constitute it, which operate in co-production with one another. No ideologist ever tells us anything new, except perhaps how clever they have become in explaining the world with their own particular language. The challenge is to attend to the ways that social movement actants within digital space articulate their own conditions of possibility, while simultaneously recognizing the ways in which those conditions are historically situated within and beyond previous repertoires of contention and narrative frames of social change.

However, the politicization of digital social organizing has also achieved importance for policy-makers in reference to sovereign definitions of security. Wide-ranging challenges to the conventional order will not simply be ignored but must somehow be classified. The historical amnesia of rupture-talk surrounding nuclear weapons, in which abstract frames of security and mythic apocalypse were introduced as a way of concealing the violence of their production through colonial relations (e.g. uranium extraction from and nuclear testing on the territories of indigenous peoples) has a parallel in digital space. In this novel arena, the political antagonism of digital activists’ confrontations with state authorities is subsumed within a post-political security discourse of technical managerialism of “cyber-threats” which are presumed objective. Here we see the development of the parallel discourses of “cyberactivism” and “cyberterrorism”, where actants espousing divergent concerns have invested substantial social resources in framing and re-framing the debate in different ways. While this discussion reached a fever pitch with WikiLeaks posting of classified documents from the US military actions in Iraq and

Afghanistan, as well as classified diplomatic cables, the issue was dealt with forthrightly much earlier, particularly following the ZLDN action in the mid-90s by the Critical Art Ensemble's text "Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media".

The key framing question here is a presumptive understanding of "terrorism" which is then brought to bear on digital space. Is terrorism a simple violation of order, a willingness to wreak havoc and wantonly shut down business as usual in the name of some political cause (or in the case of nihilistic hacktivist, as an end in itself), or more strictly, must it include the willful or negligent murder of civilians? While this previous issue has been treated with a great deal of theoretical analysis from differing perspectives of culture and power (often expressed in the phrase "one person's terrorist may be another's freedom fighter")²²², the question of whether or not the frame has any meaning at all outside of the self-referential universe of security apparatuses becomes far more tenuous in the context of digital space. The facile extensions of current frames surrounding terrorism *into* digital space are not difficult to find. Consider a fairly common definition of cyberterrorism offered by Sergei Krasavin as "use of information technology and means by terrorist groups and agents."²²³ Here the definition of the users within a static ontological entity is presupposed. One might easily complicate such an approach to political ontology by asking if "ecriterrorism" might mean "the use of writing technology and means by terrorist groups and agents", or if "entymologiterrorism" might mean "the collection and categorization of insects using scientific methods by terrorist groups and agents"? Here we see the political ontology of terrorism *preceding* the process of organization and collective activity through an essentialist frame which forecloses the possibility of ever reading such activities positively. It is the fact that certain groups and individuals *are* terrorists, in some basic and inexorable way, that makes anything they do *by definition* "terrorist activity". And as we've seen time and time again in authoritarian regimes, that definition of "terrorism" is often

²²² see for example Joseba Zulaika "Terrorism: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy" 2009, p. 17-20, MT

²²³ see epigram at the beginning of DHANASHREE NAGRE and PRIYANKA WARADE "CYBER TERRORISM: Vulnerabilities and Policy Issues "Facts Behind The Myth" 2008
http://www.contrib.andrew.cmu.edu/~dnagre/Final_Report_dnagre_pwarade.pdf

irresponsibly and violently appropriated for use against troublesome dissenters and political opposition groups.²²⁴

Reasonable people may disagree about the utility, value and abuse of the terms and frames surrounding terrorism when it comes to political violence in embodied social space. That's at least a good indication that the very term itself is already political. However, when it comes to the use of the frame in taxonomizing digital dissent within a royal science, it seems difficult to see the term as anything other than self-serving, as it comes to establish new consolidations of technocratic power. As the CAE have argued:

How can terror happen in virtual space, that is, in a space with no people – only information? Have we reached a point in civilization where we are capable of terrorizing digital abstractions?...Terrorism is a strategic form of contestation, in which the resistant faction attacks the designated oppressor by using tactics of near-random violence against its citizenry...terrorism requires organic bodies to house the terror... The inherent civility of electronic disobedience is being deliberately and officially misconstrued under the sign of that which it is clearly not – terrorism...²²⁵

Thus we see at play a contest, not merely over particular struggles, but the authority of sovereign institutions to constellate digital dissent and online direct action within the post-political specter²²⁶ of the Terrorist, the absolute Evil who is, of course, the enemy of the Good of all society, and who must be opposed by any means necessary (including terrorization itself, the rescinding of civil liberties, the creation of legal states of exception in which paramilitary violence, torture and so on become permissible).²²⁷ This is not to say that direct action in digital space such as the Zapatistas DDoS attacks on the Mexican government, or the attacks of Anonymous on financial and security institutions do not cause real damage in the form of monetary loss and so on, but rather that they exist in a different register from, for example, an

²²⁴ Pablo Ouziel “Can Privacy be the antidote to Mass Surveillance?” 2009
<http://www.pabloouziel.com/Academic%20Essay/Can%20Privacy%20be%20the%20antidote%20to%20Mass%20Surveillance.pdf>

²²⁵ Critical Art Ensemble *Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media* Autonomedia, 2001 p. 15
<http://www.critical-art.net/books/digital/tact1.pdf> p. 33-36

²²⁶ Slavoj Žižek *The Ticklish Subject*, Verso, 1999 p. 204-206

²²⁷ see for example Andrew J. Mitchell “Heidegger and Terrorism” *Research in Phenomenology* 35, Research Library pg. 181; 2005

improvised explosive device set off in a busload of civilians. The framing contest between groups who are advantaged by the new opportunities in digital space and those entrenched interests who seek to mobilize public support against these emergent possibilities can thus be exemplified in the use of activist/terrorist framing devices. These frames are a crucial site of contestation because, in the mind of many publics, they already presume a series of agreed-upon political remedies, restrictions and so on. However, effective contestation of this framing question may allow for the possibility of online free spaces, communal fora for collective dissent, as well as securing sovereign protections for the airing of grievances and mobilization of demonstrations on and offline.

The stakes couldn't be higher, but it thankfully it is likely impossible for either side to truly "win". The era of true "hegemony" in the sense of an imagined smooth space of absolute control has ended, if it ever existed.²²⁸ Rather the dynamic interplay between these frames operates to produce local opportunity structures in which different assemblages can play to contextual advantages. In order to examine the political opportunity structure of digital activism, it is important to see the interplay between nation-states and other sovereign *institutional* entities and counterinstitutional oppositional groups, for example the ZLDN in Mexico, the GJM in Seattle and the candlelight vigils in South Korea. A key distinction in the formation and participatory structures of actants nested within both groups can be described as the contrast between *representation* and *direct action*, and correlates directly with the time horizon and complexity of the expectations for tasks that the groups will have to work on²²⁹. Consider, in contrast to these extra-institutional formations, the police. A police bureaucracy in a democratic society is expected by its political superiors and the electorate to serve as an ongoing response to protect the public by locating and removing criminals from the general population, as well as to

²²⁸ see Richard Day *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, Pluto Press, 2005 <http://www.scribd.com/doc/19280772/Gramsci-is-Dead>

²²⁹ Anastasia Kavada "Activism Transforms Digital: The Social Movement Perspective" in in *Digital Activism Decoded: The New Mechanics of Change*, IDEBATE Press, 2010 p. 102

enforce the general laws passed by the legislature and/or signed by the executive. The cops who walk a beat and the detectives who solve cases do not have a great deal of say in the content of the laws they enforce (indeed, they have about as much say as you or I) but they are expected to enforce the mandates of the law without asking too many questions. Like the rest of us, they have political representatives who inform the content of the laws, and more directly, they have superiors who may provide them more detailed instructions about exactly how particular mandates are to be enforced. Here we see the representational structure of most institutions and bureaucracies in which the participants appear alienated from their political agency by a system of consensual deferral, a political “division of labor” in which non-institutional power is so dilute that single individuals must go to great lengths to see changes which they may believe favor them or the public in general. This inertia goes a long way towards promoting a general atmosphere of inactive apathy. In contrast, the social movements that we have been describing are systems based on participants direct action, where many of the same people who decide on core concepts such as issue-framing and the dissemination of key media items are the ones waving signs in the streets and helping to mobilize in other physical locations.

This structure affects (and is affected by) the speed at which institutions and counterinstitutions evolve and adapt to one another’s opportunity structures, and create grand strategies of population managements and microphysics of subversion and molecular liberation. Bureaucracies are notoriously unresponsive to changing circumstances and have difficulty adapting to cultural shifts. At the same time, such institutions constitute their own microphysics of power which have great proficiency at successfully sedimenting particular cultural practices of administration and replicating those practices throughout their ranks, built to endlessly reproduce the grand totality over time. Social movements, particularly of the fluid variety that we’ve been discussing, are almost entirely characterized by their responsiveness and adaptability, their mutant disorganization and their potentiality, yet have difficulty maintaining the will of their participants and the emergent structure over time. This is not necessarily true

for all digital movements, particularly for those such as the ZLDN or Anonymous where “direct action” frequently takes place in digital space.²³⁰ The strength of the opponents are asymmetric, but if one believes that the social field is accelerating most prominently within digital space, then the possibility of continuously emergent tactics and repertoires of contention for digital social movements seems promising. The conflict over how global publics come to understand and interpret these contests relative to previous and well-entrenched frames such as “security”, however, may be a more difficult struggle for social movements to prevail in.

²³⁰ Sandor Vegh “The Case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank” in *Cyberactivism in Theory and Practice*, 2003 pirate version accessed via Amazon Noir, p. 74
http://www.paolocirio.net/work/amazon-noir/amazon-noir-books/AMAZON-NOIR--Cyberactivism_Online_Activism_in_Theory_and_Practice--By--Martha_McCaughey_Michael_D_Ayers_--0415943205.pdf

conclusion

To radically shift regime behavior we must think clearly and boldly for if we have learned anything, it is that regimes do not want to be changed. We must think beyond those who have gone before us, and discover technological changes that embolden us with ways to act in which our forebears could not. Firstly we must understand what aspect of government or neocorporatist behavior we wish to change or remove. Secondly we must develop a way of thinking about this behavior that is strong enough carry us through the mire of politically distorted language, and into a position of clarity.

-- Julian Assange²³¹

Social movements have always evolved through the cultural spaces of their actants. As segments of that culture are increasingly enacted within digital space, the propensity for social movements to make use of this space and the repertoires of digital culture for contentious politics are sure to increase as well, as indicated by some of the cases investigated in this thesis. This cultural activity in digital space will never entirely replace offline encounters, organizing and direct confrontations with authorities in physical social space. Digital activism has not empirically shown to exist in a zero-sum relationship with offline organizing, but augments and supplements conventional organizing strategies in radically new ways. Information technology, and particularly mobile technology, allows for the evolution of a de-centralized and fully integrated information network which groups of motivated individuals may appropriate to communicate with their members. Furthermore, it can allow an established or nascent movement to grow a transnational audience for specific causes which can be made more broadly identifiable, allowing geographically disparate populations to become stakeholders in local causes which they have not material interest in, as we saw with the Zapatistas. There can be no theory of digital activism, of organizing in digital space, which is divorced from local contexts and particular manifestations of digital culture. There are no final answers, no essences for stable ontological unities that may be firmly grasped by the disciplinary knowledges of political science. There is no matrix by which to define social movements in digital space through

²³¹ Julian Assange "State and Terrorist Conspiracies" November 10, 2006
<http://cryptome.org/0002/ja-conspiracies.pdf>

essential properties that can then be generalized across many instantiations of vacuum-sealed models. Social change happens antitheoretically.

However, that does not mean that digital social movements are impossible to understand, or that political ontologies are outside the purview of scholarly analysis. The realities of complex social systems and the impossibility of determining outcomes through specific images of certain futures hardly entails quietism, or disengagement from this subject matter. Rather, the arguments I have presented suggest a re-positioning of scholarship in ways that attend to and recognize the situated-ness of all analytic perspectives. This situated-ness recommends investigating the ways in which knowledge co-evolves in relation to edifices of privilege and marginalization, constructions of professionalization and identity within and outside academic cultures. Such a commitment entails recognizing the political dimensions of scholarship, and activating political understandings of social movements which *begin* with the perspective of activists and organizers. In this schema, the goal becomes to produce socially useful knowledge by which one may imagine new possibilities and tactics for real social movements. I have argued that such an approach is preferable to remaining complicit with the entrenched interests of the status quo by passively describing exploitive power relations as if they were natural or inevitable. Today we cannot afford to be naive about our own frail approximation of omnividence, and should not make our extrapolations conditional on ideal relations between variables which may never exist at the level of local contexts. Human perspectives are incomplete and fragmentary, only ever capturing a pinch of the actual, ground up in a host of heuristics and inseparable²³² from the paradigms used to interpret data about social systems.

These commitments are part and parcel of the emergent paradigm of *active scholarship*, where activists and organizers describe their approaches and commitments, outline concepts as they co-evolve with tactics and uses of social technology. In these groups and individuals we see a performative overcoming of the classical distinction between theory and practice, thought and

²³² Inseparable, but not identical.

action, in which the active processes of emergent social forms constitute a sort of lived theory of the social. Theory does not take a back seat to these discussions, but rather plays a key role in framing social issues and broadening constituencies for local concerns, as we saw in the ability of the Zapatistas to mobilize a transnational coalition concerned with the inequalities of globalization around the particular conditions of a localist struggle. A crucial element of social movement development and success occurs that the level of framing, both of the issues themselves and the possible strategies for resistance. Therefore, theory can play a vital role in the ability of groups to achieve Doug McAdam's notion of cognitive liberation, a condition which, as we have seen, is necessary but not sufficient for social movement formation and success.

The complexity of spontaneously ordered social networks in digital space has allowed for the evolution of social movements through non-intentional or spontaneous structures, as with the dissemination of viral media through segments of alienated populations and diverse social assemblages. Understanding the dynamics of contagion and the network properties of social systems will thus provide a powerful tool for activists to make the most effective use of these digital media ecologies to amplify their frames. Examining the immanent components of network space will further allow digital social movements to effectively contest the attempts of dominant actors to engineer spin and socially construct dispositive passivity among global publics as "political spectators".²³³ The illusion of withdrawal and non-participation can thus be overcome through cultural encounters for micropolitical engagement, and evolved practices of social collaboration "indigenous" to digital space. This is precisely what we saw with the evolved collective repertoires of The Cloudmakers, which was then appropriated for contentious political action. The illusion of spectatorship is in part sustained by a dispositive approach to intellectualism that suggests that passively describing reality constitutes a form of apolitical

expertise, when in fact inaction often serves to foster complicity with structurally violent power relations, as we saw in Jeff Schmidt's examination of academic professionalism. Examining the augmented contexts of information technologies will also prove crucial. The dynamics of digital space further create an incentive for offline collective socialization, driven by social anxieties to remain in communication with real friend-groups, and thus social movements can become an excuse for more basic quotidian goals of building group identity and having a good time with friends.

There is nothing deterministic about organizing large groups of people and information through digital space, and the dynamics are constantly evolving through new repertoires of digital culture. However, understanding and attending to the emergent properties of these social networks will assist activists in approaching these possibilities, ready to take every advantage. It will also allow activists to recognize novel opportunities within communication technology and the mass dissemination of information as a form of social organizing in and of itself. Thus, it will become important to examine approaches to activism which subvert and undermine dominant enframings of social space through integrated media technologies. The social space from which broad-based activism emerges may seem a terrain of constant flows, moments of capture, as Dyer-Witheford has argued, cycles of appropriation and reappropriation. Signification is more difficult to fix here, more susceptible to performative recontextualization. Locality can become a stand-in for universality. The Zapatista struggle provided a focal point for activists who saw heightened inequality and increasingly exploitive social stratification to identify a Zizekian point of metaphoric condensation in the struggle taking place in Chiapas, since the Zapatistas autonomy struggle had risen to prominence in light of the contentious passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).²³⁴ Sandor Vegh and others have argued that it was

²³⁴ Sandor Vegh "The Case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank" in *Cyberactivism in Theory and Practice*, 2003 pirate version accessed via Amazon Noir, p. 74
http://www.paolocirio.net/work/amazon-noir/amazon-noir-books/AMAZON-NOIR--Cyberactivism_Online_Activism_in_Theory_and_Practice--By--Martha_McCaughey_Michael_D_Ayers_--0415943205.pdf

the growing condensation around the Zapatista struggles that eventually made possible the 1999 “Battle for Seattle” and the establishment and growth of a new community of transnational organizers. In this effort, Vegh argues that the communication methods offered by digital space and the ability for a transnational audiences to focus their attention on local struggles was vital, writing “...it probably would not have been possible to familiarize the world with the case of Chiapas in Mexico had the Zapatista movement not relied on the Internet for communication and mobilization.”²³⁵ The role of digital space in these and other tactical contestations function precisely to lower social barriers, to create new possibilities for solidarity that have not previously existed.

These dynamics are complex, and outcomes are uncertain. The solution is not to craft an overarching theoretical framework in order to delude ourselves with illusions of precision and certainty, but rather to recognize the empirical vitality of undetermined social space. We are not in need of a new paradigm, a new ‘theory of everything’; the new paradigm is already upon us in a swarm, providing a torrent of opportunities to make our theory political, to become students of active scholars who create new possibilities for collective identity through their actions. The process of understanding these emergent possibilities is one of learning to recognize the situated-ness of our perspectives and from there to learn to listen to the situated perspectives of activists, to comb the new manifestos of those who will achieve victories for autonomy and localized struggles in transnational digital space in the coming years. These struggles are already here, nameless, waiting to erupt into the plane of theoretical visibility, the catch the world by surprise.

²³⁵ Sandor Vegh “The Case of Cyberprotests against the World Bank” in *Cyberactivism in Theory and Practice*, 2003 pirate version accessed via Amazon Noir, p. 74
http://www.paolocirio.net/work/amazon-noir/amazon-noir-books/AMAZON-NOIR--Cyberactivism_Online_Activism_in_Theory_and_Practice--By--Martha_McCaughey_Michael_D_Ayers_--0415943205.pdf