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Doctoral Thesis

# Investigating the role of Social Media Technologies in the political narratives of Global Justice Activists

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# Declaration of Authorship

I, Philip James Waddell declare that this thesis titled, 'Investigating the role of Social Media Technologies in the political narratives of Global Justice Activists' and the work presented in it are my own. I confirm that:

- This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University.
- Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated.
- Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed.
- Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work.
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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

# *Abstract*

Faculty of Physical and Applied Science
Web and Internet Science

Master of Philosophy

**Investigating the role of Social Media Technologies in the political narratives of Global Justice Activists**

by Phil Waddell

This research presents the findings from a case study undertaken in the summer of 2013. It shows the role that the Web, particularly social media, played in the narrative forming experiences of activists identified as members of Global Justice Networks. Global Justice Networks are international networks of activists who content with dominant neoliberal ideologies of governance. Historically these networks have used the Internet, the Web and now social media to organise and promote their contention. In the latter half of the 2000s and into the 2010s, much comment has been made about the role of social media in allowing new waves of democratic discourse to take effect in previously authoritarian nations, but there is a growing current of unease regarding the effects that a handful of western Web technologies can have on shaping complex socio-political events. This research presents an ethnographic method which explores the use of social media in political protest in an attempt to glean, through quantitative data, the kinds of phenomenon underpinning social Web technology use, the way that the technologies assert dominance on users, encourage or restrict cohesion and ultimately shape politics.

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# Chapter 1

# Introduction

*"In controversies about technology and society, there is no idea more provocative than the notion that technical things have political qualities. At issue is the claim that the machines, structures, and systems of modern material culture can be accurately judged not only for their contributions of efficiency and productivity, not merely for their positive and negative environmental side effects, but also for the ways in which they can embody specific forms of power and authority."*

(Winner, 1980)

The role of the World Wide Web as an enabler of political discourse is often discussed in contemporary media. Often mistakenly labeled "the Internet', Web tools and technologies are brought into question during practically every major societal event, from sports and entertainment events to elections and wars. For much of the last decade, since the early 2000s, mainstream media has been reporting on the effect of social media as a transformative political tool; the 2008 election of Barack Obama is often held up as a rubicon moment for political campaigning on the Web (Cogburn and Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011, Kushin and Yamamoto, 2010). Stories surrounding the use of the Web in the "#Occupy" and "Arab Spring' protests of 2011/2012' have become almost mythical, idealising the ability for grassroots democratic protest in a networked, information society (Atlantic, 2009, Ghonim, 2012, Juris, 2012, Lotan et al., 2011b).

While these reflections are accurate on one level, recounting as they do the visible role of the Web as an enabling and communicating force in political events, what is commonly lacking in the telling of such stories is an awareness of the idiosyncrasies of the technologies themselves. The World Wide Web is not a unitary object, rather it is a

multiplicity of socio-technical networks, each with human and technological actors within them driving social and technological change(Tinati et al., 2013). Web services and technologies are themselves constructed through various historical and social processes which can instill particular ideologies into them, and they may be able to exert some of this ideological power onto their users.

## 1.1 Research Question

The research question undertaken in this research:

**How have contemporary social media tools changed activist engagement with Global Justice Network protests?**

In seeking to answer this research question, the research will explore the technology use of activists within "Global Justice Networks"(GJNs). Global Justice Activism contends with dominant neo-liberal governance and seeks to address a number of social problems at local and international levels, from aid and trade with the third world to climate change. Because Global Justice activists are, by their nature, spread across the globe, they have embraced the Web as a communications tool, but also used it to explore political ideologies through decentralised networking and grassroots organisations. The tools and technologies used for these purposes are a mixture of bespoke tools developed by activists themselves, and more mainstream tools and services used by wider publics.

This research will show how the World Wide Web has been instrumental to the growth and development of GJNs and how networks of global justice activists rely on the Web to communicate, organise and grow. It will demonstrate the importance of various Web tools and services as actors within GJNs and discuss how the decisions which drive the development of these tools, their goals and directions, are of consequence to the nature of GJNs, and ultimately the wider social environment within which these tools operate.

It is hoped that this analysis will ultimately help shed light on the increasing complexity of modern day political activism, which is not constrained by geographical borders and has a multitude of social, political and technological factors shaping its development.

In pursuing the main research question, an important secondary question can be addressed:

**Can an ethnographic methodology benefit Web Science research?**

As an ethnographic methodology will be used to answer the main research question, an evaluation of the usefulness of such a methodology can be included and commented upon in order to assess the suitability of qualitative fieldwork in the discipline of Web Science, which is predominantly dominated by quantitative methods of online data collection.

**Case Study: "Stop G8 Participant Observation"**

In order to answer the research question, an ethnographic caste study was undertaken. The case study presents findings from a week of participant observation spent with activists involved in the "Stop G8" series of protests and occupations in central London. These activists, many of whom were part of the "Occupy London Stock Exchange" protests of 2012/13, came together to organise a series of radical street demonstrations and protests, uncoordinated with police and authorities. They occupied an abandoned building near Regents Street, London and used it as a space within which to plan protests and, importantly, disseminate media for their cause. My participation within this group was largely spent with those activists involved with the media centre and I documented the conflicting attitudes towards the Web within the group, expanding on the themes noticed at a more macro-level in the survey.

Through this case study, it will be possible to see exactly how the Web is being used within GJNs, thereby providing additional research which validates the findings of scholars in this field. However this research will also seek evidence of any potentially detrimental effects to activism the Web might be bringing about. If such evidence is uncovered, it will support a small but growing academic community which is concerned with the over-reliance on a now ubiquitous technology for deep and lasting social change.

In exploring this concept the thesis builds upon the research of a growing movement of academics and thinkers from Web Science and Political Science who are concerned with the various social, psychological, cultural, political and technological changes the World Wide Web is bringing to global civil society.

## 1.2 Contribution of this research

This research has the potential to provide interest to a large body of non-academic individuals and organisations. The most obvious benefit can be derived by members of Global Justice Networks, who may be able to draw on outcomes of the research as a guideline or reference for personal projects which develop their contention. They may gain a greater understanding of the concept of user experience, the role that technology plays in engaging and motivating individuals politically and the ideological motivations of developing technology for political goals.

It may also be that activists across the political spectrum will gain a deeper understanding of their own experiences with technologies, and that this may inform their decision making and user interaction with current or future Web technologies. Such an understanding is likely to provide assistance to a debate outside of academia regarding the role of Web technology in social movements, whereby actors engaging with the movements can understand better the kinds of narratives and experiences being developed by the technologies they interact with and what implications this has for the global community of activists which forms the movement.

The research is also intended to contribute to the growing debate surrounding UK policy planning and implementation which attempts to restrict or inhibit use of particular Web services. It is likely that such debates will become ever present in the near future, and will highlight clear differences between those on the political left and those on the right. This research may provide referential evidence to support the inclusion of the Web as a tool of free speech and democratic debate, and lend itself to any oppositional debate regarding state centric or corporate restriction, as I hope the research will show the importance of Web technologies in maintaining democracy on a non-hierarchical, citizen to citizen level and that such interaction is imperative to the maintenance of a healthy polis that allows for the presentation of alternative views and freedoms of speech.

# Chapter 2

# De-Constructing the Web

In this chapter the World Wide Web is presented and analysed from a historical perspective in order to show the key technical and political developments in its history which have led to the academic environment which underpins this thesis. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the most current research developed in Web Science, the understanding of social machines and the non-existence of the Web as a holistic entity. No technology is developed independently of its historical, social and technological environment and the World Wide Web was born from a developmental process that sought to marry the concept of hypertext and hypermedia with the power of computer networks and Internet infrastructure. Initially, this development was intended as a solution to a very specific set of academic problems, but the elegant minimalism with which Tim Berners-Lee proposed the Web led to it becoming a vehicle for human social interaction. Before the Web itself is discussed, it is necessary to explore the concepts and processes which led to its inception and development.

## 2.1 The World Wide Web

The World Wide Web was born of frustration. Tim Berners-Lee, while working at CERN in the 1980s, noted the difficulty that the organisation had with keeping track of the various projects and people that resided within the global physics community. Predicting that this problem of distributed information management would be faced by many organisations and groups in the future, he published a call for research at CERN into a decentralised, heterogenous information network based on the navigable, yet spatially disparate principle of information management which underlined hypertext (Berners-lee, 1988). Information would be presented in the somewhat traditional format of "pages", bounded spaces of text and later other media, and those pages given addresses, what we

know today as universal resource locators (URLs) or sometimes as Universal Resource Indicators (URIs) and Berners-Lee proposed a client-server model of information management, where information is stored on remote databases and accessed by a variety of machines running the selected software. As with previous hypertext systems, such as Xanadu or Microcosm, this hypertext system had the by now well known values of hypertext at its core but, importantly, Berners-Lee published an open call for *"any information suppliers to join the Web, contributing information or software"* (Berners-Lee et al., 1992). The idea of software being developed by communities of developers was not uncommon, but Berners-Lee placed such basic entry requirements on engaging with his hypermedia network (that contributions soon grew in the physics community, spreading into the academic community and beyond.

The architecture of the Web can be described as follows. The Web sits, as an application, on top of the Internet. Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) and Internet Protocol (IP) layers of the Internet dictate how information should be communicated between machines. Information that is going to be presented on the Web is written in HyperText Markup Language (HTML) and stored in a computational databased connected to the Internet, known as a server. A users machine, the client, runs a Web browser which uses a HyperText Transfer Protocol (HTTP) to access information stored in HTML and then presents the information on that machine. Information is transmitted via the TCP/IP layer of the Internet.

The Web, therefore, sits on top of the Internet and is a separate application designed to facilitate the presentation of information as HyperText and Hypermedia.

One of the central tenets in Berners-Lee's early proposal for the World Wide Web was that the information system be decentralised (Berners-lee, 1988). A decenteralised system would allow users to create and connect their own databases, their own client-server models and grow the information network, perfect for a community of scientists seeking to connect their varied knowledge and projects. It was this decentralisation, together with the low barriers of entry for accessing the Web (as previously mentioned, homogeneity was another tenet included in the initial proposal) that led to the rapid adoption of the World Wide Web over competitor hyptertext systems. It is worth noting at this point that the nature of a decentralised system of information and varied client server relationships had much to offer a communtiy of scientists seeking knowledge through academic rigour, but has become less useful in an era of propaganda, online tribalism and misinformation, which will be discussed in following chapters.

By initially creating dependency within a small community the Web established a user base which then grew, not least due to the fact that this community contained a high number of physicists, computer scientists and mathematicians, the future architects of the Web. With engineers becoming locked into Web use, the rest of the world soon became able to use to Web due to this winning combination of simple interface, basic governing principles and dominance within the communities best placed to develop it.

By the mid-1990s, the World Wide Web was established as an integral part of Internet communications architecture. Activity on the early Web was restricted, for the most part, to accessing information stored on Web pages, leading to its (retrospective) classification as the *read only Web* or *Web 1.0* (Aghaei, 2012). Web 1.0 could be considered a form of virtual newspaper, in which information was uploaded to servers, presented in HTML as static text and browsed by users. However, the notion of the Web as "static" is somewhat misleading, for the information being presented and browsed was leading to information networks forming between a variety of actors around the world.

As the Web became more affordable, the cost of access diminished to such an extent that individuals were able to access and place their own opinions online via Websites and forums. This development of blogs and forums, began an age of the Web known as "Web 2.0", an age where driving goals behind Web platforms were to engage and connect people, enabling them to cooperate and communicate in a cooperative manner, writing and publishing, owning content and voicing opinions. This "social Web" has become a dominant feature in contemporary life, and an increasingly lucrative research resource for a range of academic disciplines, from physics to anthropology. The excitement that the Web created for network research has been discussed by Easley and Kleinberg, who comment that, while information networks have forever been a part of biological existence, the technological advances of the mid to late 20th century began a process of removal and abstraction that has transported networks from the physical and geographical foundations to which they have been historically rooted to a distanced, virtual and far more dynamic space where they exist today (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010).

This transformation of the Web from a tool of information access and retrieval into a representation of complex human social networks led to the need for the study of the World Wide Web to move beyond the realm of network mapping, informational systems management and infrastructure, and into the arena of interdisciplinary research which could shed light on the various socio-technical relationships. To that end, the discipline of Web Science was created.

## 2.2 Web Science and the Interdisciplinary approach

In the mid-2000s, many of the early academics who had been instrumental in the development of the Web in the 1990s were confused. They were wondering why the Web had not become the 'Semantic Web" predicted by Tim Berners-Lee, a network of specific URIs for a range of human and non-human nodes, where machines, or even non-computational artefacts, could be identified and be represented in machine readable data formats. The Web appeared to have stalled and resided as a communications platform between people. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)[1] was operating, new standards were evolving, new tools and software, such as Java and updated HTML versions made new media presentation possible, but still there was a lag between what should occur in terms of technological advancement and what was occurring in technology and society. These academics realised that they had not considered the various social, technical and cultural processes that would be occurring alongside Web use. Not considering social processes was a fundamental flaw in predicting the growth and development of the Web, and so the new academic discipline of Web Science was created.

*"The Web is an engineered space created through formally specified languages and protocols. However, because humans are the creators of Web pages and links between them, their interactions form emergent patterns in the Web at a macroscopic scale. These human interactions are, in turn, governed by social conventions and laws. Web science, therefore, must be inherently interdisciplinary; its goal is to both understand the growth of the Web and to create approaches that allow new powerful and more beneficial patterns to occur"*

(Berners-Lee et al., 2006)

Web Science is born out of the realisation that the Web would need to be studied from a multi-disciplinary perspective. While other disciplines had been researching the role of the Web in their respective disciplines, bringing academics and researchers into a collaborative space helped bring the research of the Web out of the various disciplinary silos that kept those scholars interested in observing the impact of the Web throughout society. The key tenets of Web Science were outlined in a 2010 research paper *A Manifesto for Web Science*:

[1] Berners-Lee founded the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) in 1994, created as an international governing body which aims to *"to lead the World Wide Web to its full potential by developing protocols and guidelines that ensure the long-term growth of the Web"*(W3C). The W3C is indicative of the initial community of Web users who were pioneering, broadly academic or research based, emerging from academic institutions or government research laboratories and dedicated to developing the frameworks that allowed the Web to work.

1. *Web Science must be the genuine intersection of discipline; i.e. it cannot be allowed to be a sociology or a computer science of the web;*

2. *Web Science must look both ways to see how the web is made by humans and how humans are made by the web;*

3. *Web Science must follow all the actors (individual, groups and technologies) and trace the networks implicated in the web in the broadest sense and understand the effects of these networks;*

4. *Web Science must move beyond narrow epistemologies and methodologies to enable a science which can examine and explain both micro and macro phenomena;*

5. *Web Science must be a critical discipline - if it is to speak to the desire for the web to be pro-human – it must develop theoretical thinking and push towards critical, political social theory, to critique the direction of travel, to challenge the web and society.*

(Halford et al., 2010)

Evident in this manifesto is the demand for academic training in the study of Web Science, and that demand continues to grow with each new development of Web technology and the increasing growth of users. A simple review of mainstream media would be enough to indicate how dominant the Web is becoming in social commentary. Major political and sporting events are hardly ever reported without a simultaneous review of social media, and stories of the "dark Web"; online bullying, cybercrime and deviancy populate the public imagination. However it appears that for most of the mainstream public, and the media which supplies information, there is still a trend towards viewing Web tools, services and technologies as neutral systems, and any change in human behaviour is met with confusion or evangelism when the Web is explored.

## 2.3 The age of Social Machines

Perhaps the biggest contribution Web Science has made during its short life to date is the challenge of the way society conceptualises the Web. Web Science characterises the World Wide Web as a socio-technical system, that is to say that it is constructed and re-modelled with input from both social and technological forces. The growing input of Web Scientists from a background of disciplines has led to a deeper understanding of the social and psychological underpinnings that can shape technological systems on the Web. The concept of "social machines" is a direct product of such interdisciplinary

thinking and research:

*"Social machines can be characterised as assemblies of manually executed and machine-driven (as in automatised') services and the interaction of such services...[and the] social component becomes richer when the database is curated by members of the broader community (e.g., Wikipedia) and when the social network adds value implicitly (e.g., Amazon) or explicitly (e.g., Facebook) to the overall system through the individual or joint activities of the participants."* (Shadbolt et al., 2013).

In the concept of social machines we see a paradigm shift from the development and study of the Web as a Hypertext system that could be curated and managed with the goals of improving computational and engineering knowledge, and into a study of the Web as complex social construct which is governed by both the engineering and computational limitations that develop and control the communications infrastructure, but also the social forces of culture, economy and general human nature which shape its use. Indeed, within Web Science research between sociological and computer science academics, new theories are emerging which are helping provide frameworks for future studies of the concept of social machines (Tinati et al., 2013)

## 2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a history of the World Wide Web, the standards and protocols which underpin it and the evolving importance and use of the Web in contemporary society.

The World Wide Web may have had an advantage over its competitors in that what it lacked in open hypermedia objectives it made up for in user friendliness and simplicity. Once a user had committed to the Web and accepted the use of HTML in documents and HTTP through networks, the Web was able to run unnoticed in the background. The fact that the Web was advertised as a solution to a specific problem (the need to organise scientific data within the physics community at CERN (Berners-Lee, 2000)) allowed for its gradual proliferation and acceptance within this community, and then the connecting scientific and academic communities. Combining this with the element of open access, whereas Microcosm was presented as a pay for product, meant that the Web was able to spread quickly through niche communities and then outward using the network infrastructure of the Internet. Having presented the Web we can now look at Global Justice Networks, the subject of this research.

# Chapter 3

# Global Justice Networks

## 3.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 has presented the history of the World Wide Web and discussed it's deepening role in society. As the Web has become central to our social lives =, particularly in the emergence of the social machines which operate on it, so it begins to have power within the political processes of society. There are many different avenues of political enquiry which this research could take; the role of the Web in national elections, for example. But this research will focus on the impact of the Web, in particular the social media services which use it, on a particular branch of contentious political process, Global Justice activism.

Global Justice activists identify with a variety of concerns, from questioning economic policies by Western nations which marginalize the third world to rejecting national austerity measures that some states have implemented in the wake of the global financial crisis. These concerns can be localized or exist on a global scale, but the activists share aspects of their identity which allows them to form distributed social networks. Global Justice activists are typified by their distributed nature, residing in every country in the world, and need the Web to survive, bringing as it does new technologies and tools which provide not only ways to communicate but also contributes to an on-going, reflective process where activists develop a political identity that does not necessarily need to be rooted in a local, physical space.

This chapter begins by giving an overview of Global Justice, where and how it emerged, and then proceeds to show how the Web has facilitated a new kind of distributed, loosely connected social activism which does not readily fit into the kinds of theoretical frames

proposed by historical sources. The chapter then presents Global Justice Networks (GJNs) as being a manifestation of this new kind of activism.

## 3.2 Local Beginnings of Global Justice Activism

Prior to the conceptualisation of GJNs, scholars differed in their opinion of the global justice movement, whether it was a singular entity (GJM) or a plurality (GJMs), a sustained coalition of action or a loose network of sometimes interested actors. We know that Global Justice activism is nothing if not global in its scope and ideology, but it does seem to have clear local characteristics. Rootes and Saunders (Rootes and Saunders, 2007) investigate the presence of Global Justice activism in Great Britain, using the G8 Gleneagles summit of 2005 as an example of how, just as in Seattle, a diverse array of actors from inside and outside political society converged to direct dissent against a mutual enemy, the G8. Their work found that global justice in Britain is presented through a continual balance of a grassroots "globalisation from below" ideology supported by more radical groups and the somewhat more conservative approach of policy reform driven by Aid and Trade Development Organisations (ATDOs). Saunders and Rootes analysis appears alongside the work of other academics investigating Global Justice within their own countries, and through these lenses the specific national manifestations of global justice are apparent, for example the dominance of far left communist groups and trade unions in France (Sommier and Combes, 2007), the apparent dominance of national issues over transnational concerns in Germany (Rucht et al., 2007) and the extreme heterogeneity of activism in Italy that incorporates (amongst others) environmental, labour and religious groups in opposition to what was at the time the Berlusconi government (Reiter et al., 2007). These varied national contexts provide evidence to suggest that global justice activists are not being subsumed into an overarching, homogenous movement, but that they are using transnational relationships and the effects of globalisation to strengthen their position nationally. This relationship between the global and national in global justice is explored by Tarrow, who gives insight into how global justice issues are constructed, maintained and framed in a manner that does not eliminate the local networks from which they arose. He introduces the concept of "rooted cosmopolitans" (Tarrow, 2005) as a way of exploring how certain individuals maintain socio-cultural links with other communities and issues not immediately apparent within the borders of their country of residence. Obviously this is not a concept that is new to the 21st Century, as immigrant communities have long brought their own culture to distant shores, but the increase in information available to citizens regarding conflicts and cultures beyond their national interest mean that rooted cosmopolitans occupy an important position in modern society, becoming advocates for specific interests and serving as gatekeepers to

global justice networks that can be embraced by the general population, some of whom may take up the cause;

*"What is rooted in this conception is that, as cosmopolitans move physically and cognitively outside their origins, they continue to be linked to place, to the social networks that inhabit that space, and to the resources, experiences, and opportunities that place provides them with."* (Tarrow, 2005, p.42)

According to Tarrow, rooted cosmopolitans and transnational activist networks work to provide the basis for a process of framing collective action that may (not always) move the targets and claims of a movement from local to global. Such movement emphasises the diffusing and scale shifting elements that take place at the local level and which build an environment for global activists, whereby local issues and particular social movements are mobilized and subjected to theoretical revision and new information which facilitates their inclusion of a global discourse while still maintaining a local presence. Saunders provides another contemporary stance to the subject of local transnational activism, one that reinforces the claims of diversity within global justice activism. Her study of 208 SMOs considered part of the global justice movement was an attempt to discover if social movement dynamics were present in the networks of relationships these organisations had developed. Her work discovered a weak commitment to the specific ideals that are seen as central to the global justice movement, those of anti-neoliberalism, social justice and democracy. Instead a weakly connected network of ideological foci emerges where these issues are marginalised over more specific local goals pertaining to the particular agenda of SMOs (Saunders, 2013b). Such a finding gives an indication (though not a proof) that claims made regarding an cohesive global justice movement are exaggerated and that what is really in existence are the kinds of loosely organised networks of contention which share a generalised commitment to overcoming the challenges of neoliberalism but which enact this commitment via different targets and goals specific to their socio-cultural backgrounds.

## 3.3 Defining Global Justice Networks

What we arrive at through this literature is an acceptance that network properties have grown to become more than a characteristic of a social movement. It seems clear that there is a growing call to present networks as the dominant environment by which transnational movements of rooted cosmopolitans are visualised. Routledge and Cumbers have dedicated a substantial work to this very need, constructing the concept of

Global Justice Networks, which they define as a **"series of overlapping, interacting, competing, and differently-placed and resourced networks"** that exist to connect a variety of place based actors to a shared foci of justice concerns (Routledge and Cumbers, 2009). Unlike the movements which are a part of them, GJNs do not have a collective identity, but rather a plurality of identities and differences which create temporary and longer lasting alliances between perhaps unlikely candidates (a phenomenon which accounts for the strangeness of protest coalitions at international summits).

GJNs address the scepticism of many academics to define global justice activism as a clearly observable "movement" with many voicing their opinions on the prevalence of networks of activists and individuals interacting at a variety of levels and with specific contexts. Polletta and Jasper argue that "one can join a movement because one shares its goals without identifying much with fellow member" (Polletta and Jasper, 2001), similarly Bennett and Segerberg argue that traditional collective action organisations have been "supplanted by personalized collective action formations in which digital media become integral organizational parts"(Bennett, 2012). In the contemporary arena of political activism, the concept of network seems far more suitable for understanding the kinds of manifestations of contentious politics seen today; one can participate in a network without identifying with fellow members, because the network promotes subjective inclusion, whilst the movement demands shared collective experience.

While constructing theoretical models which identify and characterise social movements is clearly a very important process in any understanding of contentious politics, the scalability of such theories to allow for the inclusion of complex and nowadays Web and Internet assisted networks of loosely linked individuals as "social movements" is questionable. GJNs appear to fit the calls for a more cautious approach to defining global justice activism and furthermore, the framing of global justice through the theory of networks appears a far better explanation for the kind of data being revealed in empirical studies of global justice, where issues of coordination, collective identity and shared ideological ends seem lacking. With global justice activism being rooted in diversity and autonomy on the part of its constituents, identity becomes contextual and closely tied to the diversities of time and space. Whilst social movements with specific, localised agenda, centralised and coordinated organisational practices or strongly identifiable adherents and antagonists can claim control over the process of identity formation in their development, global justice activism will by its nature be subjected to a variety of identity making processes within the movements and perceived in a number of ways by outside observers.

Constructing identity makes movements coherent and solidifies their practices, and indeed the term "movement" in "social movement" constructs an image of a coherent collective of activists identifiable by shared characteristics and convictions, directing their contention against an obvious oppositional force. What is important to understand here is that these definitions of movements are by no means false, but that they are unlikely, it would seem, to scale to the kinds of contentious activism being seen in global justice activism. If we turn to global justice activism with regards to these identity building situations, we can see that all three processes have a presence in the movement. International institutions and financial institutions claim legitimate identity that affords them a range of benefits from governments and wider society, while a range of groups and individuals form networks of contention through a shared perception of resistance to the legitimacy of these institutions. Within these contentious networks are groups who maintain a long term project identity that they feel will be attainable through network participation. An example might be feminist activists in the third world who interact with global justice activism networks to simultaneously contend with the exploitation of women as underpaid workers for multinational corporations and also advance goals for equality for women in their home nation. When discussing global justice activism, it can be detrimental to apply too restrictive an identity to these kinds of association, as there is a risk of losing sight of the variances in actor identity and goals and tactics which explain these sometimes surprising relational networks.

For Saunders, the re-conceptualization of movements as networks allows the researcher to avoid the conceptual confusion' that is commonly attached to the task of defining movements (Saunders, 2013a) Social movement definitions are often varied, stressing the significance of particular social groups or organisations. However, the meta-characteristics of movements remains similar enough to be followed without the researcher getting bogged down trying to adhere to specific definitions. The idea of activist networks provides intellectual breathing space and neatly encapsulates the multiplicity of groups and organisations which make up activism. Indeed, with regards to the global justice networks, this multiplicity of members and goals presents us with a challenge, as the network of global justice activism is a network of networks. The environmental movement, the labour movement, the humanitarian movement, all have their particular idiosyncrasies tied to global justice activism, and so it seems foolish to define this broad network of actors on the basis of shared identity and goals, which movements are defined by.

## 3.4 The Historical development of Global Justice Networks alongside Digital Technology

One of the defining factors in the development of contemporary social movement studies has been the shift of digital technology from the periphery to the centre of activist life. Once a tool for organisation and maintenance, digital communication technologies are at the heart of how activists position themselves within wider contentious political networks (Juris 2012, Juris 2005a). Nowhere is this more true than in GJNs, which, I will argue, depend on digital technology for their very existence. In this section I will discuss how instrumental various digital technologies, the Web, Blogs, Social Media, have become to GJNs, and how these technologies have brought about a new theoretical lense for viewing Global Justice activism. One which is rooted in the connections between individuals, rather than any collective identity which might exist.

### 3.4.1 The World Wide Web and GJNs

Around the turn of the century, scholars were beginning to identify the World Wide Web as a growing tool of democratic political participation. Early studies, such that of Bimber (Bimber, 1998), argued that Web technologies were creating an "accelerated pluralism" in political engagement, making the formation of single or multi-issue groups swifter and, importantly in his opinion, less dependent on institutional structures, either public or private. These early concerns were, in many ways, limited in their scope by the technology of the day. Writing in 1998, Bimber would not have had knowledge of the power of blogs or of "Web 2.0", and his analysis was based on a theoretical critique of the impact of telecommunications on political engagement, together with an understanding of the means of communication available on the Web at that time. We can see in his analysis that scholars at this time had some idea of the potential for the Web to reshape existing media and political power structures, but that the precise nature of change was difficult to identify. It therefore becomes important to assess the historical impact of the Web on Global Justice activism by exploring their relationship over the past two decades.

#### 3.4.1.1 The Zapatistas

Anyone discussing the relationship between global justice action and the Internet and World Wide Web cannot fail to begin with a reference to the Zapatistas, seen as the first activists to make use of modern information communication technologies (Castells,

2004). The Zapatistas gained notoriety on January 1st 1994, when armed guerrillas opposing the enactment that day of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) attacked police barracks and municipal centres in towns across the Mexican state of Chiapas, gaining control of several (Castells, 2004, Routledge and Cumbers, 2009, Tarrow, 2005). NAFTA eliminated trade barriers between the United States, Mexico and Canada, undercutting local producers and labourers with foreign imports and providing large T/MNCs with the ability to reduce labour costs by threatening to move factories to cheaper labour sources. NAFTA directly threatened the livelihoods of the peasant farmers the Zapatistas represented;

*"In committing Mexico to open its borders to trade with its more-powerful northern neighbours, NAFTA promised a boon for commercial agriculture but threatened the survival of poor dirt farmers in the South."*

(Tarrow, 2005, p.115)

Following several skirmishes with police forces and the Mexican army that left several guerrillas, civilians and soldiers dead, the Zapatistas entered into negotiations with the Mexican government, signing a ceasefire agreement on January 27th 1994 that demanded the government engage in a series of social and political reforms to acknowledge the rights of indigenous Mexicans in the face of the neoliberal economic agenda of NAFTA (Castells, 2004). According to Martinez-Torres (2001) it was the Zapatistas transformation into an "informational guerrilla movement" that forced the vastly superior Mexican government to accept the ceasefire. In the build up to their action in Chiapas, the Zapatistas cultivated an alliance of Mexican and South American NGOs, Human Rights NGOs, and other supporters throughout the world using the Internet and telecommunications to advertise their grievances with NAFTA. Once the guerrilla campaign began, these networks allowed for the Zapatistas to diffuse information regarding their motivations and goals to the outside world in their own words. Manuel Castells takes great pains to emphasise the importance of this transnational information network in securing the survival of the guerrillas:

*"They were protected by their relentless media connection, and by their worldwide, Internet-based alliances, from outright repression, forcing negotiation and raising the issue of social exclusion and political corruption to the eyes and ears to public opinion worldwide."*

(Castells, 2004, p.84)

The Zapatista uprising was arguably the first real instance of a GJN protest. The social movement of armed guerrillas in a southern Mexican state formed an association with NGOs across the world who opposed the sanctions of a neoliberal economic plan,

presenting alternative information that fuelled global debate and placed publicity on the Mexican government to accommodate the activists with negotiations. In years to come, the tactic of Internet enabled communication in order to establish networks of activists through which alternative information could proliferate would become commonplace in global justice activism.

#### 3.4.1.2 Indymedia

Just as it was the definitive moment for the establishment of global justice activism, so Seattle 1999 was definitive for the relationship between the Web and GJNs (Milberry, 2009). Where the Zapatistas had demonstrated the effectiveness of Internet communication for producing propoganda, Seattle developed the use of the Web as a tool of personal expression, cultivation and community formation for global justice activists. The Independent Media Centre (IMC), or Indymedia, was born in Seattle as an alternative news source for the protests, one which did not rely on embedded national or international news networks (Pickard, 2006, Van Laer and Van Aelst, 2010). The activists working on the Indymedia Seattle project created an open source publishing format that allowed for citizen journalism in the form of protesters and activists uploading their own news stories and media regarding the protests, subverting what the established media chose to report. Indymedia was developed using Active, Open Source (OS) software developed by a collective of radical technologists in Australia, Community Activist Technology (CAT). The goal of Active was to provide an online space for messages, event information and citizen journalism that was unhindered by editorial processes. The OS nature of Active meant that it was soon being modified for use outside of its original local context;

*"Active represented and materialized the interests of a core group of social justice activists organizing in a particular geographical area. However, the software would soon become an international FOSS [Free and Open Source] project, incorporating the collective needs of an emergent global movement against neoliberal capitalism."* (Milberry, 2009, p.178)

The Active software enabled Indymedia to become instantly popular within activist networks engaged or interested in Seattle, getting 1.5 million hits in its first week online (Ibid). This was due to the emancipatory act of providing activists with the ability to voice their dissent in their own words, with no editorial process or preconceived ideological goals and rules (within the broad topic of opposing neoliberalism) obstructing or distorting their voice. As Milberry points out, it is important to remember that in 1999, before the rise of blogs, wiki?s and social media, the concept of online citizen journalism was practically unheard of and websites and online communications channels

were certainly not as user friendly or as smoothly operated as they are today. Through its Open Source project and egalitarian publication principles Indymedia was able to cultivate a substantial activist network by mimicking standards that popularised the Web, those of free distribution and aiming towards a niche community (Saunders, 2007). The grassroots, OS ethos of Indymedia led to the establishment of local Independent Media Centres (IMCs) around the world, where activists in particular locations could present news and opinion relevant to their particular struggles. Location specific IMCs became a virtual meeting place for the varieties of activists populating GJNs. While it would be presumptuous to say that networks of global justice activists were not in place before Indymedia, it has been evidenced that the IMCs quickly became a focal point the world over for a variety of activists groups wishing to promote radical democracy and report their own local struggles against neoliberalism (Bennet, 2003, Kahn and Kellner, 2004, Milberry, 2009, Pickard, 2006). As of 2010, Indymedia had become a

*"world-wide network of collectives that run over 160 open-source Internet sites which collect and make public alternative (i.e. counter hegemonic) news stories and analysis"* (Sullivan et al., 2010, p.13)

If Seattle became known as the birthplace of modern global justice activism then Indymedia can be given the honour of being the online steward of GJNs in these early, tentative years, providing as it did communication, coordination and publicly accessible alternative information to fuel network membership.

### 3.4.2 Blogging

Indymedia may be known as "the organisation that symbolises Global Justice" (McCurdy, 2010, p.48) but it was bolstered by the adoption of blogging by Web users which not only strengthened the growing GJNs on the Web, but also provided a blueprint for the kind of autonomous, self-created political narratives that I argue define GJNs. Where IMCs gave activists a unique virtual space within which to decry neoliberalism, blogs gave the everyday citizen a place to decry or discuss anything from the divisive political issues of the day to celebrity gossip. With their endless subject matter, growing readership communities and (in some cases) talented authors, blogs challenged the mainstream media in the early 21st century, presenting a decentralised alternative for news and information (Drezner and Farrell, 2007). For GJNs, they provided a new avenue for information dissemination across the Web that existed outside of IMC network.

In "Blogs, Politics and Power", Drezner and Farrell outline how early political bloggers became instrumental in providing additional commentary and information to their subscribers and the mainstream media, often promoting and fuelling debate and discussion

around political issues long after the regular media had moved on to fresher topics. Blogs are defined by Drezner and Farrell as:

*"a web page with minimal to no external editing, providing on-line commentary, periodically updated and presented in reverse chronological order, with hyperlinks to other online sources."* (Drezner and Farrell, 2007, p.2)

Blogging grew rapidly in the early 2000s, with the blogosphere (the name given to describe the connected networks of blogs on the Web) growing from less than 50 blogs in 1999 to over 70 million in 2007 and as with the Web and Indymedia, the growth of blogs was catalysed by free software designed to make creating and running a blog easy (*Ibid*). Early adopters of blogs were able to present their own opinions and what they deemed to be important information to the wider world through the Web. One early example of this emerging power in decentralised citizen media towards politics was the resignation of Senator Trent Lott in 2002. The Senator made inflammatory comments that were deemed to attack the civil rights movement and, although these comments were largely ignored by the mainstream media, the continued pressure placed on the senator through blogs forced his resignation (Azman et al., 2010, Drezner and Farrell, 2007, Kahn and Kellner, 2004). According to Kahn and Kellner, the power of the blogs lies in this ability to operate outside of the informational cycle of mainstream media.

*"If the World Wide Web was about forming a global network of interlocking, informative websites, blogs make the idea of a dynamic network of ongoing debate, dialogue and commentary central and so emphasize the interpretation and dissemination of alternative information to a heightened degree."*

(Kahn and Kellner, 2004, p.91)

Blogging ones opinions and newsworthy information in a format that eschewed the previously private communications channels of instant messaging or email meant that information previously kept personal or restricted was publicly accessible and, through the hypermedia format of the Web, associable in links. As the blogosphere grew, the link structure of the Web developed, with bloggers interested in particular topics citing websites relevant to their personal communication on the blog. Such websites may have been other blogs, mainstream news sources, shopping or entertainment websites and all this linking meant that the complexity of the World Wide Web was growing. (Adar and Adamic, 2003) conducted a study into information epidemics on the blogosphere and discovered a highly connected network of blogs through which information could disseminate in a viral manner. The more connected blogs are to one another, the more likely information will spread through shared sources. Easley and Kleinberg explain this process as the homophile of a network, where networks of similarity form but remain

connected to the broader network through nodes whose characteristics create bridges to other networks (Easley and Kleinberg, 2010). GJNs can exploit the network effect of the Web and the blogosphere to widen their network of supporters and members in the face of attempts to reduce or contain the impact of the information by their antagonists. Importantly, the personalisation of the Web through blogs and the specific communities of interested Web users that interact with certain blogs mean that certain GJNs are likely to reach certain communities through information dissemination in the blogosphere. It is unlikely that labour activists would read the same blogs as environmental activists, but both can become adherents of global justice activism through their interaction with context specific GJNs and their networks of information dissemination. What emerges from the study of the Zapatistas, Indymedia and the early blogosphere is a sense of the Web as a tool for information dissemination and network development. Just as the Paris coffee shops were the breeding ground of Marxists on the 19th Century, so the Web at the turn of the 21st Century was the virtual coffee shop for existing and potential global justice activists. This personalisation of the Web is a continuing trend, and by 2011 the complexity and popularity of online social networks had created ever more pervasive environments for GJNs to develop.

### 3.4.3 Social Networking Services

In the early 2000s, the idea of Social Networking Service/s (SNS) was only just emerging into the mainstream, but recent highly publicised protest events have brought these technologies to the forefront of research regarding social movements and global justice activism around the world. At the head of the social media phenomenon has been Facebook and Twitter, SNS which offer their users unprecedented opportunities for online social interaction. Facebook is an SNS currently enjoying immense popularity on the Web, offering its users a format for creating a personal profile that displays a user name, interests, personal photographs and other media and the ability to interact other users on Facebook through the creation of a social network of ?friends? who can observe published personal information (Ellison et al., 2007). A Facebook user can fill their personal profile with content from elsewhere on the Web and users can engage in processes of selective self-presentation so as to present particular identities to the wider social network (Gonzales and Hancock, 2011).

One of the incentives for using Facebook appears to be the ability for users to find and observe information through other users social networks (Hart et al., 2008). The Facebook newsfeed creates a space of information distribution that details that content of a social network that is wider than the personal networks of individual users. Facebook pages provide spaces where social networks of shared interests can congregate and discuss

particular topics (Hart et al., 2008). This, coupled with the ability for users to tailor their identities through cultivation of content on their Facebook profile, means that Facebook can become an effective space for ideologically or socially similar social networks to deliberate and share particular information.

The prominent SNS, Twitter, has been widely embraced by political actors due to its, ...lightweight easy form of communication that enables users to broadcast, share information about their activities, opinions and status? (Java et al., 2007). Twitter is a micro-blogging service which distinguishes itself from peers by restricting the posts (tweets) of users to a maximum of 140 characters. In this way, Twitter combines an SMS style message format with the public nature of blogging. Users are encouraged to subscribe to each other's blogs through following, which allows each user to see the tweets of the persons they follow on their public Twitter timeline. Twitter users regularly follow other users who they do not physically know, making their decisions to follow due to an attraction to the content the user is blogging or to the user themselves. Twitter has several methods for encouraging direct user interaction above the basic link formation associated with following. As Huberman and Romero point out, it is important to remember that; "a link between any two people does not necessarily imply an interaction between them" (Huberman et al., 2009) and so we should look deeper into the functionality of Twitter to see how interaction can occur. Kwak et al provide a useful overview of the unique functions of Twitter (Kwak et al., 2010). There are two main functions which have popularised Twitter; mentions, ReTweets and hashTags:

@ Mentions: A tweet to be directed at a user through including their username in the tweet, where  prefixes the username of the targeted user. In this way, conversations and targeted communication can be created in the public space that characterises the information stream (Java et al., 2007).

ReTweets: When users want to share information to their network, they can choose to directly ReTweet tweets of interest. ReTweets replicate the content provided by the previous user and are a method of citation (Weller and Puschmann, 2011), although they may not reflect the original source.

#Tags (HashTags): #tags aggregate tweets around particular topics. A user is able to include their particular tweet in a wider discourse by using specific #tags associated with the topic of discussion or a particular community and is therefore presented with a wider network of participation and greater opportunities for engagement (Letierce et al., 2010). #tags are self-organising, they do not tend to have any particular government aside from the mutual understanding by users that dominant tags will have the widest audience (Sankaranarayanan et al., 2009).

These three functions are extremely important, as they give users the ability to spread and share information in ways which are more directed than simply publishing content for followers to view and promote interactivity with the service. It is well known within computer science, and exampled by studies by Java et al (Java et al., 2007) and Lento et al (Lento et al., 2006), that the deeper the levels of engagement with a technology, the more likely users are to remain active on the service. The three features of Twitter mentioned above maximise this inclusion by promoting homophile, which is central to Twitter's ability to encourage streams of user participation focused on particular users or themes.

While not specifically designed for political activism, Facebook and Twitter are, like the websites and blogs before them, appropriated for the maintenance and development of GJNs. Below are examples of recent protests and mobilisations that were aided by both SNS:

#### 3.4.3.1 Iran Election protests 2009

The popular uprisings in Iran following the national elections of 2009 cemented the public perception of social media as a tool of political contention. When opposition leader Mir Hossein Mousavi claimed the election results were rigged in favour of incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, state media refused to report his grievances. In the subsequent aftermath of the election blogging and social media, particularly Twitter, became prominent sources of information for Iranians and citizens across the world who were sympathetic to Mr Mousavi (Gaffney, 2010) and who wished to follow coverage of the violent clashes between supporters of Mousavi and state security forces. While Western media and governments lauded the use of social media as a method of spreading information about protests and purported state crimes against citizens, some scholars, notably Morozov (2009) expressed concern regarding the emphasis being placed on social media as a tool of Iranians for activism (Morozov, 2009). Indeed, in Gaffney's detailed analysis of the use of Twitter during the Iranian protests in 2009, there emerges a picture of transnational networks of users who wished to express solidarity with the Iranian protesters and their goals, and took it upon themselves to assist in the spread of information from outside of Iran (Gaffney, 2010).

The Iranian election protests were widely lauded as the first real visualisation of widespread popular protest in the age of social. Despite the strong retaliation meted out by the state that ultimate quashed any hopes for a dramatic revolution (Morozov, 2009) the Iranian protests gave the world a display of the kinds of widespread social unrest that

can occur through mass mobilisation of citizens with access to information that is outside the control of the state and organisational methods situated in a virtual space.

#### 3.4.3.2 The Arab Spring

The Iranian election protest were an example of a national movement gaining worldwide attention through social media, but ultimately protests were contained by the state. The Arab Spring of 2010/2011, on the other hand captivated public imaginations globally through the consistent use of social media and the Web in a variety of countries for popular uprisings aimed at social change. Beginning in Tunisia in late December of 2010 with the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi and spreading to Arab states throughout the Middle East, the Arab Spring became a symbol of the ability for citizens to contest the tightly controlled and repressive policies of their states. As in Iran, bypassing national media, which was often state owned, in favour of social media on the Web created virtual networks of mobilized citizens who visualised in street protests (Howard and Hussain, 2011). The protests were effective in enabling regime change in Tunisia, Egypt and, after a bloody civil war, Libya. A civil war is still on-going in Syria, and other Arab states (such as Bahrain and Jordan) were successful in containing activists.

The most documented of the protests was the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo by Egyptian citizens. Despite the fact that protesters in the square did not have internet access (Juris, 2012), the continued documentation of the activity in the square, coupled with the analysis and calls for more protesters from on-line activists and bloggers led to a mass occupation and made the square the unofficial headquarters of the uprising. In analysis of the uprising much credit was ascribed to the Facebook group "We are all Khaled Said", a Facebook page set up in memory of an activist beaten to death by Egyptian police, as a catalyst for mobilising citizens in protest (**?**). Wael Ghonim, the creator of the page and a Google employee, discussed his strategy for using a Facebook page to generate a campaign against the state:

*"The strategy of the Facebook page ultimately was to mobilise public support for the cause. This wasn't going to be too different from using the sales tunnel approach that they had learned at school. The first phase was to convince people to join the page and read its posts. The second was to convince them to start interaction with the content by liking and commenting on it. The third was to get them to participate in the page's online campaigns and to contribute to its content themselves. The fourth and final phase would occur when people decided to take the activism onto the street. This was my ultimate aspiration"*

(Ghonim, 2012, p.67-68)

Ghonim's strategy gives an insight into the processes of mobilisation around the Middle East during the protests. Activists sought to use already popular SNS as a medium for generating more adherents to protests. Users were encouraged to participate with each other on shared, issue specific spaces on the SNS (through the Facebook page or the Twitter hashtag) and then to move their action from the virtual to the physical. Mass mobilisation has long been a goal of social movements, but the advent of SNS and social media has dramatically reduced the time and effort required by activists to achieve high levels of turnout at protests. Coupled to the fact that the states in question had long been consistently repressive and belligerent towards their citizens meant that the undercurrent of discontent was afforded an immediate outlet through theses protests.

#### 3.4.3.3 Occupy!

Occupy protests are clear manifestations of GJNs, bringing together groups of activists from diverse backgrounds to protest against the shared threat of neoliberal economics and policies. The main drive of Occupy is the contention of economic systems that have deemed to have failed following the 2008 financial crisis and the continued support of the international financial sector in the wake of uncovered scandals and stories of fiscal irresponsibility (Tarrow2011). The first example of Occupy appeared on the 15th of May 2011 in the Spanish city of Madrid, where anti-austerity activists, trade unions and students appeared to take inspiration from the Tahrir Square occupation during the Egyptian popular protests and refused to leave a central square until after the Spanish elections on the 22nd of May. Police attempts to remove 250 initial protesters led to a mass occupation as calls for more protestors were circulated through SNS (Hughes, 2011). This, together with the documentation of civil unrest in Egypt, Greece and elsewhere in Europe, developed the occupation tactic as a transnational phenomenon, known as Occupy Everywhere (Juris, 2012), a reference to the Twitter hashtag that helped spread the movement across borders.

Occupy protest camps spread to major cities across Europe and North America, proving particularly popular in the United States where most major cities experienced some form of mobilisation (Costanza-Chock, 2012). Arguably the flagship camp of the protests was the Occupy camp in Zuccotti Park New York, which was established to highlight the ills of the financial system on the doorstep of its headquarters, Wall Street. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) generated a great amount of media attention in the US, allowing protesters to speak to both mainstream media outlets and citizen journalists to highlight their personal grievances with the economic and political system in America. Also highly visible during the Occupations were the technically adept activists who created mobile Independent Media Centres (IMCs) in the camps. Like the Zapatistas, these activists

maintained a counter-narrative from within Occupy that challenged mainstream media perceptions and also, importantly, maintained the communications channels between camps of protesters both nationally and internationally (Ibid). Through my own presence at an Occupy camp in London I was able to witness these kinds of transnational activist networks first hand, and gained a sense of the importance of Internet and Web technologies for fostering solidarity between geographically distant activist groups. I witnessed an open air live stream between protesters gathered outside St Paul's Cathedral at the Occupy London Stock Exchange camp and activists protesting under far more dangerous conditions in Syria.

What these recent examples serve to show us is that social media is seemingly an integral part of the modern political environment, and lends support to global justice networks in a very clear way. The use of Twitter and Facebook in recent political protests has been documented and discussed in both the mainstream media and in academia (Gaffney, 2010, Howard and Hussain, 2011, Lotan et al., 2011a). As the political applications of Facebook and Twitter have become apparent, so these SNSs have been under increasing scrutiny regarding their regulatory practices and the level of privacy and freedom enjoyed by users.

What is important with regards to positioning social media in relationship between GJNs and the Web is the increasing proliferation and individualisation of the medium by which activists can connect and disseminate information. The Zapatistas and Indymedia showed the world how Internet communications and the Web could be adopted for spreading alternative media in aid of specific protest campaigns. The emergence of blogs cemented the practice of alternative media in the mind of the Web accessing public and made the practice of alternative media commonplace. As social media has grown in popularity, the social machine element of the technology (as discussed in chapter 2), where value can be added to the technology by the inputs of the humans who use it, has led to a dominance of these tools for political discourse. For GJNs, they are not simply infrastructures of communication but rather highly important environments for the incubation, creation and maintenance of sustained contentious politics.

## 3.5 GJNs: From the Collective to the Connective

The above sections serve to show how instrumental digital technologies have, and continue to be, to the kind of networked activism on display in GJNs. It is perhaps prudent at this point to return to the theories that underpin this kind of activism, as it seems clear that political protests has come a long way since the 1960s and the theories that were developed at this time may lack the tools to clearly and helpfully frame what is

going on in the modern, networked world of Global Justice activism. While the kinds of activism presented in the examples above is relatively new, some scholars are beginning to question the theoretical models used to study them, and are presenting new and exciting models which provide a better toolkit for studying contemporary activism. Bennett and Segerberg are two such scholars, and their concept of **logics of connective actions** is worth discussing.

At the centre of their argument is the issue that digital communications technologies have made a transition from organisational tools that facilitate communication between activists, to integral actors in identity making processes of activists.

It is perhaps unsurprising "conventional collective action typically requires people to make more difficult choices and adopt more self-changing social identities" (Bennett, 2012). Historically, this has caused difficulties in movement participation and maintenance, but the authors argue that digitally networked activism allows for personalised action formations to occur, where nominal issues are traditional (e.g: Environment, Equality) but mechanisms for organisation are personalised, not dictated by group identity or ideology. This means more flexible political identities can be developed, based on personal lifestyles. While this theoretical framing can be applied to many different social movements, it is particularly beneficial to Global Justice Networks, allowing for individuals within networks to communicate via digital platforms and use Global Justice Activism as a vehicle of personal, political expression without having to feel locked in to a shared set of collective ideological frames. Logics of Connective action are a relatively new concept of social movement theory, as they elevate digital communications platforms above the simple organisational role that they traditionally play in other social movement theories. One of the goals of the case study presented in Chapter 5 will be to provide evidence of such logics of connective action, through observing the degree to which activists within GJNs maintain a personalised engagement with the kinds of activism taking place.

## 3.6 Conclusions

This chapter has presented the concept of Global Justice Networks as emerging from a need to address broad, global grievances towards neoliberalism and understand the role that networks play in this process. Contemporary political activism has become a much more personal, individualised process and, in the case of GJNs, examples have been given which show the increasingly important role that digital communications technologies, particularly social media, have played and continue to play in the visualisation of GJNs (the moments in history when people mobilise and physically express their dissent

through action). These technologies have undergone a transformation from being tools of organisation for collectives to embedded vehicles for self presentation and individuality by activists (Juris 2012), and in the following chapters I present my methodology and the case study undertaken in order to address the research question; how have contemporary social media tools changed activist engagement with Global Justice Network protests?

# Chapter 4

# Methodology

Given that the remainder of this research moves away from discussing the literature surrounding Global Justice Networks and moves towards answering the research questions set out at the beginning of this document, it would be prudent to reiterate the primary research goal at this point. The primary research question is: **"How have contemporary social media tools changed activist engagement with Global Justice Network protests?"**

The preceding chapter has developed an understanding of Global Justice Networks as being populated by a plurality of activists, movements and organizations. How then does one go about answering this primary research question in a way which acknowledges these variances? Beyond the common interest in resisting neoliberalism these actors have an extremely wide range of goals, tactics, contentious targets and ideologies. It is possible to visualize this range of actors on a spectrum, as shown in Figure 4.1:

At one end of this spectrum reside the "mainstream" social movements, environmental, social, human rights and fair trade organisations who exist well within established political norms and who campaign for change at government level. The groups use well established movement tactics to generate support (petitions, rallies etc.) and have a wide, though often not deeply entrenched, participant base. Therefore, the physical actions they create are often relatively rare, although they have a constant presence in public affairs and virtual social spaces. At the other end of the spectrum are the radical activist groups who seek to enact Global Justice concerns through a series of direct and confrontational actions. These actions include the occupations of buildings and public spaces, street demonstrations that cause disruption, and hacking attacks on corporate websites and servers in the virtual space. But this spectrum is by no means static, and within middle ground of the spectrum are those activists who engage with both groups. They are often perceived as the more "radical" wing of the "mainstream" and the more

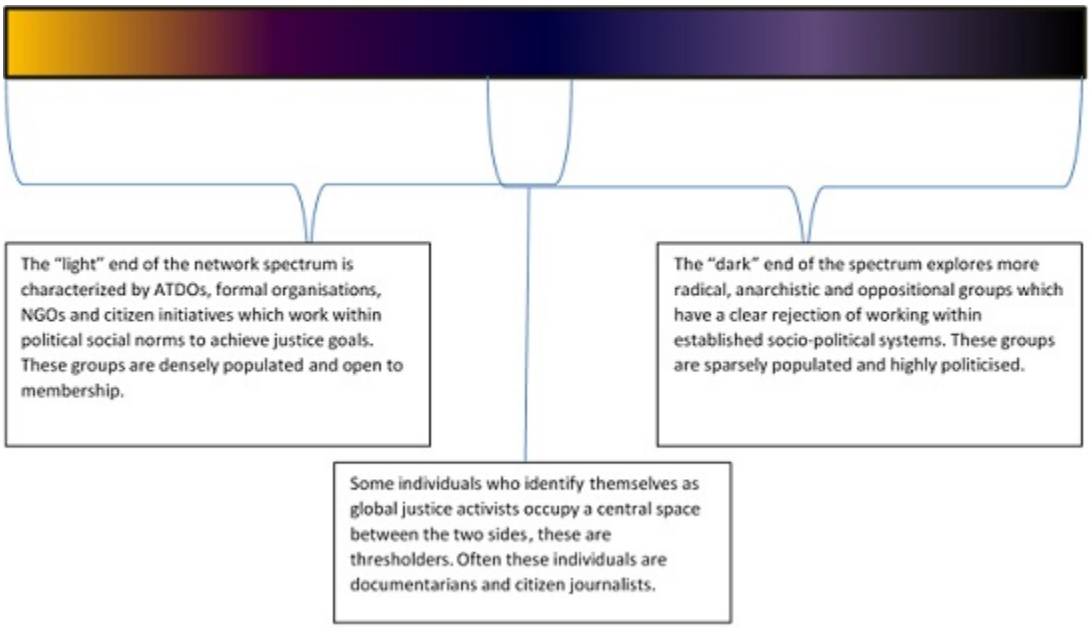


FIGURE 4.1: Activism Scale

"mainstream" element of the "radical". The roles these activists take on within a particular group varies depending on their position, and they are an interesting, sometimes overlooked group that can be researched.
What we have then are three broad groups of GJN actor. Mainstream actors, radical actors and transient actors. As has been discussed, it is not possible to claim that these activists all share the same goals and methods of accomplishment beyond the broad environment of campaigning for global justice, but they do share access to the same kinds of Web tools that have been shown to be of such value to the persistence of GJNs.

The research questions seek to explore how these activists engage with social media. What is therefore needed is a methodological approach which generates data from one of these categories of actor. Such a methodology is explored below, and it takes an ethnographic approach; physical ethnographic methods are present in the form of participant observation, field research and the collection of visual and audio symbols which can be analysed for meaning. This kind of data collection method is an important but underused method in Web Science, and its use in this research will help to provide information regarding its efficacy in this field. So that the importance of this information is not lost in the concluding sections of this research, a secondary research question has been included; **Can an ethnographic methodology benefit Web Science research?** Section 6.2 in the conclusion of this research goes further in answering the secondary research question of this research.

Understanding how contemporary social media tools have changed activist engagement with Global Justice Network cannot be understood entirely by positivistic research. Collecting and interpreting data regarding the pervasiveness of certain technologies and theorising their impacts on politics will only get research so far in developing an understanding of the societal shifts currently experienced and the life-cycle development of the GJNs. Researchers do not need to be removed from the scenes of interaction, and the nature of the Web and the allure of large scale data mining and other methods of data collection has the potential to place many researchers in a completely observant role, creating social theory from positivist research that deals only in hard data and evidence. While of great importance to academia, such data can be complimented and enhanced with studies which explore the scenarios, environments and symbols which cause the data; the humanistic qualities which give rise to the manifestations of theories of the position of the Web in society. While I start my research with particular questions, these questions are to be thought of as guidelines which will direct observations in the field.

By engaging directly with the kinds of users most likely to be developing political narratives through the Web, it should be possible to observe the experience process first hand and build a strong observation of the role of the Web in a political community, thereby presenting a study that is complementary to the vast quantities of empirically driven data that can be generated through new methodologies of social enquiry.

## 4.1 Qualitative Methods: Ethnography and Participant Observation

The qualitative element of the research encompasses ethnographic methods which allow for the immersion of the researcher in the physical events and social situations which GJNs bring about. The aim of this part of the research is simply to generate a large amount of observation data (written as field notes) which are then refined through thematic analysis in order to uncover forms of Web interaction which can be explored further, either through subsequent ethnography or through analysis of quantitative data (for example sentiment analysis). Atkinson and Hamersley (1994) identify five substantive features of ethnography:

- The exploration of the nature of a social phenomenon
- The collection of unstructured data
- The emphasis on a small number of case studies

- The explicit interpretation of meanings and functions of human action, presented through verbal descriptions, with statistical analysis as a subordinate.

(Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994)

These features, incorporated into ethnographic research with varying emphasis, produce a resultant piece of work that is highly literary in its presentation, but which explores non-fictional themes and characters, drawing conclusions from the author's direct experience with the subject, his observational field notes and data produced from conversations and informal interviews. Such work is often partially autobiographical in nature, as authors often attempt to satisfy the urge to comment on the subjective experience of their particular study (Tedlock, 2008). Such an urge is understandable, as participant observation requires the researcher to take some role in the field, and become accepted by participants (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1995) and acceptance of this urge allows ethnographers to produce works which are creative in their presentation, yet substantive in their contribution to research.

Contemporary ethnographic research can be considered to occupy both physical and virtual arenas. Physical ethnography, the dominant tradition, involves the research becoming situated within communities, spending time with them, observing their habits and their community structure. Ethnographers in the physical environment can exist within an entirely removed and distant observational space, or they can occupy a more embedded, participatory space. The positive and negative aspects of observational and participant observational research have generated much debate in the field, with some authors arguing that it is difficult to obtain a completely removed observational role that does not in any way inflict the presence of the researcher on to the observed groups. Similarly, critics of participant observation argue that the method involves the researcher becoming too involved in the events they are documenting, and thus too susceptible to impacting the research themselves.

The decision to choose ethnography as a method to observe GJN activists is an easy one to make. In much the same way as cultural ethnographers argue that indigenous people live on the margins of global capitalism (Tedlock, 2008), GJN participants attempt to distance themselves from the same system, and in doing so place themselves in an interesting arena for enquiry. This method is then applicable for the exploration of the more radical visualizations of GJNs, occupations and direct actions, where activists are usually unaccommodating towards standardized quantitative research methods such as

surveys, associating them with established academic and research methods that may not have their interests at heart.

As for specific ethnographic field work that explores Global Justice activism, this research is strongly influenced by the work of Jeff Juris, who has carried out a great deal of ethnographic work in this field. Working as a "militant ethnographer" (Juris, 1999), Juris embeds himself with Global Justice activists and has documented their close association with technology (Juris et al., 2008, Juris, 2005b), their membership cycle (Juris and Pleyers, 2009), identity making processes (Juris, 2008) and the decentralized, horizontal nature of global justice networks (Juris, 2005a). His accounts well reflect the narrative style of ethnography and his recent work explores the emergence of GJN visualization, representative of "logics of aggregation" in the form of the Occupy movement (Juris, 2012). Juris' experiences in the field show how useful ethnographic accounts arise from both researcher participation and a keen methodological rigor when it comes to collecting field notes.

### 4.1.1 Field-Notes

Central to the success of any ethnographic work are the field notes which the researcher takes in order to record experiences and observations. Van Maanen notes that there exist three main forms of field notes "realist" tales, which document events and observations in a formal and uninvolved manner, providing explanation for observations rooted in pre-existing theory; "confessional" tales, which are characterised by the absorption, personalisation conveying the sense of experiential immersion undertaken by the ethnographer and "impressionist" tales, which lack a detailed analysis of any kind and which ask the reader to form an interpretation of events based on their particular reading of the observations (Van Maanen, 1988). The development of field notes into more substantive "tales" allows the researcher to pander to their particular literary idiosyncrasies, making the field notes a personal reflection for the researcher, created in a comfortable manner.

In the context of this research, the ethnography that is undertaken leads to a variety of factors that need to be considered. The ethnographer is not only observing particular individuals, but their wider physical and virtual networks, as well as the technologies that they are interacting in. Therefore the ethnographer has to always consider not only what he can see, but what he cannot, that is to say the virtual presence of activists on the Web and what that virtual presence may be doing while the physical activist is doing.

## 4.2 Thematic Analysis and coding of ethnographic data

Analysing field notes to develop findings is a fundamental process for qualitative research. Coding processes are ongoing, with the researcher developing techniques of analysing collected notes in order to sport patterns and triangulate occurrences, tying them to common meta themes (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). In order to analyse the qualitative data collected during the ethnographic immersions in the field, the technique of thematic analysis is applied to the data. Thematic analysis is a process by which information is coded into a set of themes which exist at both manifest (directly observable) and latent (underlying) levels (Boyatzis, 1998, p.vii). There are three distinct stages of thematic analysis; designing the research and deciding on sampling, developing themes and a code (a process which can be driven by theory, prior research or inductively and validating and using a code (Boyatzis, 1998, p.29).

## 4.3 Identifying a case study

In June 2013, a series of protest events were organised in central London by a number of activist groups and NGOs who were part of GJNs. The UK was holding the presidency of the G8 that year and talks were being held in Northern Ireland on June 17-18 to discuss, amongst other things, the creation of new financial regulations to reduce tax evasion and encourage further transparency in corporate taxation systems. A loose collective of activists made up of members of trade unions, environmental activists, members of the London squatting community and anti-Globalisation activists planned a week of action, protests and disruption, from a squat in central London, near Piccadilly Circus. They called themselves the "Stop G8" group. Events which were to make up the week of action were kept vague, as the collectives behind Stop G8 wanted protesters to express themselves by conducting their own personal demonstrations against particular targets, mainly the offices of finance, energy and mining firms in central London.

Stop G8 demonstrations were to be a clear visualisation of GJN activists form the closed or dark section of the chart presented at the start of this chapter. Having learned about the planned demonstrations, I planned to attend them for the duration of the week of action, basing myself in and around the squat in London and conducting ethnographic research with the activists in order to observe their interaction with the Web and social media during their period of protest. I present my findings in the following chapter.

# Chapter 5

# Qualitative Case Study: G8 Protest Events, Central London, June 2013

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter lists the three main findings that were gleaned from my experience with the Stop G8 group of activists. I have presented three overarching themes with regards to the main Research Question, **How have contemporary social media tools changed activist engagement with Global Justice Network protests?**. These themes are: **The abandonment of cohesive, alternative media spaces in favour of autonomous social networking**, **Public appropriation of protest events in the virtual space** and **The growing mistrust of Web tools as representing capitalism, governments, and the establishment.**.

By way of evidence for my findings I have included data from the ethnographic research, including direct quotes from interviews with activists and photographs to support the findings.

## 5.2 Finding 1: The abandonment of cohesive, alternative media spaces in favour of autonomous social networking

Upon entering the Stop G8 convergence space, an abandoned police training academy in central London, I immediately discovered that provisions had been made for the building to have Web access, with Wi-Fi enabled for the second floor of the building and a dedicated "Independent Media Centre" assigned to one of the second floor rooms for activists wishing to have a base for writing blogs and uploading content. Here were activists building a virtual space anchored in a physical space which could be used to accentuate their activities during the week, with the idea that the presence of the IMC would drive virtual action from those present in the building.

Given my knowledge of the importance of Indymedia to GJNs historically, I expected this space to be one of the main focal points for activists. However, it became apparent after two days in the convergence space that this space was broadly archaic, and rarely visited by activists outside of a small group of veterans. This lack of interest in staffing or maintaining an Independent Media Centre represented a shift in activist perception regarding the value of such spaces. While the IMC was created out of deference to the important of Indymedia within GJNs, it was populated by veteran activists who lamented its decline. The reasons for this abandonment was not clear until a conversation between two such veteran activists who blamed social media for atomising the process of creating alternative media:

*"How things have changed, we used to have loads of photographers, loads of videos etc., where are they now?"*

*"They're out there with their phones, uploading to their private Facebook accounts"*

Following this conversation, I was able to observe and glean from activists in the protest space their opinions on Web use for media dissemination through brief conversations and observation. It became clear that the majority of the activists present were not concentrating their behaviour around using the Web, yet considered themselves adept in their use of social media and mobile devices. They had accounts with dominant social media, possessed mobile phones with Internet and Web access and felt content to use their media without support from the self-defined IMC, to the point where the idea of "independent media" seemed to be synonymous, in the minds of the younger activists present, with the idea of "social media". The veteran activists I spoke to had a strong loyalty towards the method of collective media curation. They advocated for a media narrative within the group which could help maintain cohesion and presentation to the

outside world. Those I spoke to on this issue were upset that this collective method of media creation had seemed to have become too similar to an authoritative, mainstream media that the majority of the activists distrusted;

*it seems everyone has this ingrained hatred of mainstream media, it transfers over onto cameras and recording equipment, not necessarily where it's [the media being created] going but because they're associated with mainstream media."*

While I did note on many occasions activists using mobile phones, Web tools and social media, I found no real dedication to the task, no real media team. In fact, the organisers of the convergence space were very keen to restrict documentation from within the building. Photographs and blogging were discouraged on grounds of privacy and personal identity. While I do not dispute these as legitimate causes for concern, the fact remained that a restriction on media within the space meant that it was hard for the activists to present a clear alternative narrative to the media reports that developed around their protests during the week. Various individuals spoke to journalists but were unable to speak "for the group", only able to present their opinions and ideas as individuals. My notes from the time;

*Instead of just trying to contain one aspect of Web use and promoting another, the activists thought instead to just try and ignore the need to have a clear narrative and accepted that there would be many people providing media during demos and that these people would somehow help.*

On the one hand, this continued reliance on the use of mobile Web tools to disseminate information represented the continued importance of the Web as a tool for narrative development on the part of these activists. But the shift away from the communal forms of narrative development appeared to reduce the role of social interaction within the physical Stop G8 community. As the cohesive virtual environment that is contained within the IMC is replaced with a far more fragmented, personal ones defined by social media, activists became far more identifiable as individuals existing on a social network. They may have solidarity and homophile with others on their network, but this change reflects a loss of clarity and community on the part of the collective. Where once the creation and maintenance of alternative media and blogs represented the identity of a large group of activists, the story that emerged from these observations indicated that activists who were using the Web during action seemed content to engage with their own personal social network, with their friends, followers and various online connections entirely free of any overarching narrative or organization. During the "Carnival Against Capital" street demonstration I observed some activists, predominantly younger members of the group, documenting their actions, photographing police offers, using Facebook and Tweeting

and ReTweeting messages of solidarity and talking to their friends. While such documentation does disseminate information onto global information networks, it appeared to do so at the expense of collaborative processes taking place in the physical protest space which have important symbolic and solidarity acts for a movement and are historically symbolized by Indymedia and IMCs.

## 5.3 Finding 2: Public appropriation of protest events in the virtual space.

A second theme of the week of observation centred around the "casual" involvement and documentation of protest in the online space by members of the public. This was something clearly observed during demonstrations in the street. Many bystanders, members of the public otherwise unengaged with the demonstrations were quick to take photos and share these, again predominantly on social media. Upon approaching some of these members it became clear that they had little desire to interact with the protesters and learn more about the events. In some ways their use of mobile technology and social media to "share" the protest provided action enough, but an action rooted in visual display, and not deeper discursive engagement. It was noted that the presence of such a "public audience", together with the knowledge that smart phones were being pointed at them, encouraged individual Stop G8 protesters to engage in highly vocal and visual acts of demonstration. The Stop G8 activists were well aware of the meaning attached to mobile phones pointed at them. They acknowledged the presence of this "other" virtual environment represented by the public and began a performance for this gathered audience. Designed to be visual and emotive, these performances were predominantly represented with the chanting of slogans, creation of drumming circles and the wearing of symbolic clothing, such the Guy Fawkes masks that have become synonymous with youth activism and internet subculture and appear to be an important aspect of contemporary identity making processes in the younger members of the group. These visual tactics were certainly attention grabbing, but they lacked the information that a public would require to become informed about the event. It appeared that, for both sides, the act of producing a mobile phone and documenting the protest created a physical barrier that protected the bystander from becoming mistakenly identified with the protest. Whether or not every bystander who documented a protest subsequently shared this online is unknown, but casual conversations with members of the public revealed that many certainly did, and that the voices of the protesters are in danger of being drowned out in the online space by these kinds of public responses, filming, photographing and Tweeting the issue to create the illusion of saliency. This certainly has concrete drawbacks for the movement, several citizen journalists who had been active

within the protest space in the days preceding the demonstration and who were arguably able to provide detailed audio and visual commentary regarding on-going events were unable to use their livestream blogging accounts to full affect due to crowding of the network, which was over capacity, even for central London. Much of this crowding came from members of the public, documenting, but not engaging, with the demonstration, a social phenomenon shown in the following photographs:

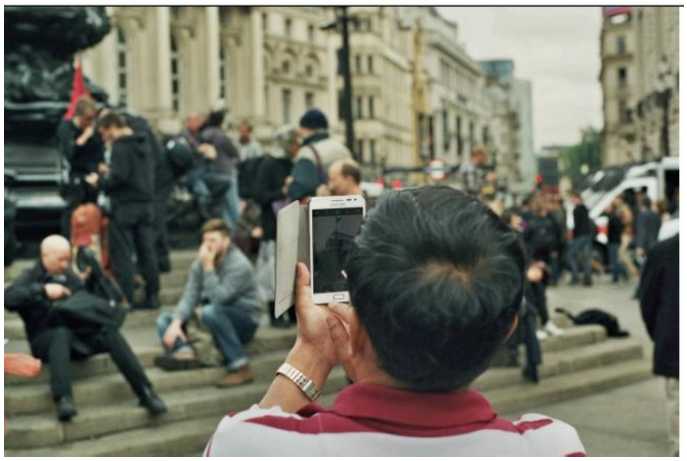

FIGURE 5.1: I began to notice members of the public stopping to photograph the demonstrators. This was to become an emerging theme throughout the day.

FIGURE 5.2: Here, a woman passing the demonstration pauses to film a group of drummers. Using an iPhone, she takes a few pictures, before continuing past the demonstration.

Activism relies on convening ideas as much as it does on conveying images. Sometimes the two can be combined but it seems that one is being favoured over the other. The reliance on the public for documentation of events, like the reliance of individual activists to report the media without need of IMCs, could lead to the loss of the kinds of contextual and ideological information that need to be conveyed alongside the images and videos of protest. As one activist put it in the run up to the day of protest; *There will be a hundered camera phones there. They won't be our camera phones"*

FIGURE 5.3: Similarly, a woman uses an iPad to record some of the action. Observing her for a few minutes, I noted that her engagement was restricted to this passive documentation. Watching, recording and then moving on. She did not seem aware of the political motivations behind the protest, but had an almost bored curiosity that seemed to be satisfied by this act of documentation.

FIGURE 5.4: Two men film the passing demonstration on mobile devices. Again, no other interaction with demonstrators was observed.

Indicating the presence of at least some concern regarding the nature of contemporary documentation of protest.

## 5.4 Finding 3: The growing mistrust of Web tools as representing capitalism, governments, and the establishment.

Throughout the week of participant observation, one dominant narrative amongst the activists, mentioned in passing, joked about, and seriously deliberated, was the (then)

FIGURE 5.5: A woman using a tablet to record the passing protest. Again, this was the extent of her engagement.

recent discovery of the level of surveillance that USA intelligence agencies had on members of the public around the world. The complicity of big US technology companies, Google, Facebook, Microsoft in allowing access to this data was just being understood by these activists. It is important to note that stories of police and state infiltration are common in activist networks, they lend the movement legitimacy and insert a sense of excitement into activism, reinforcing the "them" and "us" narratives which dominate such networks. The knowledge of online activity being collected by nation states confirmed for many of these activists, their suspicions, reinforcing information that affirms a narrative. Indeed, many of the conversations overheard during the planning stages of protests regarding Web use centred on what not to say and what not to share. Many of the "Stop G8" activists regarded the convergence space as a "safe" space and so there were embargoes on filming and recording, even painting was discouraged for fear it might give knowledge of the layout of the building, the numbers of people there and the identities of particular individuals. Much of this behaviour seemed at odds with the fact that the convergence space was in central London, and therefore anyone approaching the building would be caught on a number of CCTV cameras. Many of the activists within the convergence space were aware of this, but the ability to stop documentation and information sharing within the building represented a way to control, in some small way, the sharing of personal data which has become ubiquitous in modern life. Faced with the inability to control a virtual environment (an inability that seemed to be self-created given the lack of attention given to the IMC in favour of social media), the activists in the Stop G8 space were trying to shape their physical environment so that it was hostile to a virtual one.

This suggests a growing, but perhaps still implicit, realisation within this activist community that the kinds of Web services and tools commonly used today may not have

the best interests of horizontal activist networks at heart. Furthermore it could account for why many activists were happy for the public to engage with the Web as documentarians, understanding as they did that such engagement was part and parcel of being an observer of protest, but not an actor. In an attempt to discover why attitudes to the activists appeared to have moved away from using these tools, I set up a discussion event with the activists in the convergence space that would focus on perception and use of social media and the Web in contemporary protest. The discussion was sparsely attended, and one activist commented on this:

*"Historically, this room would be overflowing with people. Even five years ago there would have been 100 people. You wouldn't be able to get in through the door for people wanting to do radical media. The Indymedia crew, all these different people. And the fact that the room is almost empty now... well...."*

Pursuing this conversation unearthed a story detailing how it was felt by some protesters that the London Occupy camp, centred around St Paul's Cathedral and the London Stock Exchange, had divided before its disbandment and the Web media team had been perceived to be a separate entity to the majority of protesters in the camp. The media team was seen to be "playing towards the press" and many of its members accused of pursuing personal agendas of being appointed as bloggers and commentators for left wing, mainstream media outlets:

*"We didn't experience any of this [mistrust] initially down at the [Occupy] camps. We had a very open door policy but then we also experienced the back end of that, as the camp began to... as the momentum began to drop, it almost felt like the media team broke off and became a separate entity. [They] started playing towards the press, which really pissed a lot of people off. I think this is where there is some aggressiveness towards [online] media."*

The resentment this caused was related as being a fundamental reason that those activists within "Stop G8" who had previously been associated with the Occupy movement had a mistrust of exclusively media orientated activists and it serves as a good example of the kinds of stories that become part of the "folklore" of activist groups and which are used to influences attitudes and behaviour.

In relation to this idea of activism becoming a source of personal promotion, it seems prudent to mention a conversation that occurred with public bystanders during the street demonstrations. I observed at one point during the demonstrations three people filming a standoff between police and protesters, uploading the pictures to Facebook. Upon approaching them, it was discovered that they worked for a local mobile application

development company and were interested in developing apps that might be beneficial to protesters:

*"Yeah, we should make apps for this... stuff that helps people protest, look us up, this is what we do"*

While perhaps good intentioned, the encounter demonstrates how protest can be viewed as having economic value to systems which use social capital as a source of wealth. While it may be unlikely that such tools could be developed, or indeed gain support from activists, the idea of commercially driven tools for activists is a far cry from the ideals underpinning Indymedia. Indeed, as Indymedia seems to have lost its importance to these activists, who nevertheless use mobile technologies and social media to communicate with one another, there is perhaps a space for tools of protest which could be occupied by such applications which are designed to interact with corporate social media. Such tools are necessary given the hostility towards commericalised social media tools:

*"I go into these meetings and someone says "hey there's this great new tool!" and I say "yeah? What is it?" they say "Vine!" "Is it owned by Twitter?" yeah!" I was in a meeting and somebody couldn't shut up about Vine, I'm sure it's very sexy but don't under any circumstances use it [as a tool to save activism]."*

This finding and the broader levels of mistrust of a "mainstream Web" certainly need to be explored further. It is entirely possible that the very use of social media may be lulling global justice activists towards being open to such exploitation. Perhaps, with its now ubiquity, social media can be seen to be fulfilling the demands of neoliberal systems, the corporations and process which define them. Again, discussions with the activists appeared to validate this opinion:

*"The Web is the largest P2P network in the world. It's basically, the tech of the web is our... it's basically anarchist. It was built by anarchists, core anarchists, the whole web is an anarchist institution. So yeah we need to use the open internet and stop being captured by these "this is fantastic, let's use that" [narratives]. If it's owned by a corporation, they have to make money at some point. Don't go near it, we need to have this "don't go near these sparkling toys" [narrative] even though they sparkle and they're beautiful and they're made of gold and they're given to you for free... don't go near it."*

The above quote is interesting because it shows the projecting of a political philosophy onto a technology. Arguing that the Web is inherently anarchist in its ideology means that a narrative can be established which shows how modern capitalism and neoliberalism has appropriated the Web for its own ends. Rather than adhere to this appropriation and work within its boundaries, this activist wants to see a social transformation which

creates an ideological narrative that draws people away from using mainstream Web tools and embraces what he saw to be the anarchist ideology that underpinned the Web when it was created:

*"We have to build our own media again, and it's not rocket science. The Web is the largest P2P network in the world. it's basically, the tech of the web is our...it's basically anarchist it was built by anarchists, core anarchists, the whole web is an anarchist institution. So yeah we need to use the open internet and stop being captured by these 'this is fantastic, let's use that' if it's owned by a corporation, they have to make money at some point. Don't go near it, we need to have this 'don't go near these sparkling toys' even though they sparkle and they're beautiful and they're made of gold and they're given to you for free...don't go near it."*

Other activists appeared to have given up on the technological side of activism, seemingly due to the heavy presence of social media in both activist communities and general public life:

*"So I'm not looking for tech solutions anymore, I've done all that, I've built so many tech projects, I'm looking for social solutions, real alternatives. That's what I'm interested in."*

The need to cultivate a social change in Web use is certainly not novel, but these comments, together with the subsequent dominance of the NSA spying scandal in mainstream media over the past few months, may indicate that such an ideological shift is possible. Certainly, it is interesting to see how Web tools are appropriated or abandoned by those who have fundamental ideological disagreements with them. I would hesitate at this point to draw comparisons between these activists and the activities of the "new social movements" of the 20th century (such as Feminism or Environmentalism, characterised by acts of disengagement from dominant social norms), but this is certainly an idea to be explored further.

All three findings here share a common, overarching theme. They point to contemporary GJN activism that seems to be in an ideological crisis when it comes to using the Web. The processes of environmental enactment and social cohesion are moving towards an increasingly individualistic space and are controlled by the forces of mainstream technology and the capitalist systems they represent. For radical activists trying to make sense of this coexistence with the forces they despise, the easiest option appears abandonment of control of the virtual environment, handing it over a cohesive narrative once dominated by Indymedia s to the public and to social media. Content to exist within their own personal networks or else be documented by others. The Web appears no longer to be a radical tool of GJNs, and any future change must come from shifts

in socio-political perceptions, and not technological innovation. The technology space is now dominated by capitalism, the desire to develop applications and tools that encourage social cohesion for the benefit of capitalism have rendered these particular activists impotent in the face of technological determinism.

## 5.5 Conclusions

The three main findings from the week of ethnography are presented. These findings do not challenge the main body of literature surrounding GJNs, that GJNs are characterized by decentralized, horizontal global networks and rely heavily on the Web to engage in contentious politics, rather they explore the notion that changes in the political and social environment within which the Web is employed has led to activists being forced to reconsider, re-conceptualise and make sense of their place within a socio-technical system, and activists have moved to adopt Web technologies, the social media tools I observed in my ethnography which are embedded in the current online social environment. I believe this to be a contribution to research regarding contemporary activism, social movement studies and indeed to Web Science.

The idea of a new way of doing politics, driven by non-hierarchical associations, decentralized networking and open access to software (Juris, 2005a) still exists, but the visualisation of activism through capitalistic social media and the broadening of interaction between activists and the public may be lessening its impact, or even locking activism into a system of exploitation. The latter section of this report has explored, in a small way, how activists who make up more radical visualisations of GJNs have come to view popularized Web based activism processes as being symbolic not of change, but of entrenchment with political systems they seek to change. The ethnography carried out with these activists has shown that while the Web is still important to them as a tool of communication, these activists are relinquishing their control over their ability to create an environment they can shape.

# Chapter 6

# Conclusions

## 6.1 Addressing RQ 1

The primary research question for this research was:

**How have contemporary social media tools changed activist engagement with Global Justice Network protests**

In the work above, I have presented an account of Global Justice Networks; their history and relevance within wider social movement theory. By engaging with social movement literature, the position of GJNs within social movement studies has been discussed. GJNs are best discussed without adhering to restrictive models of social movements, whether macro-theoretical or micro-theoretical, but rather conceptualised as overlapping, interacting and competing networks of protest within a wider umbrella of global justice concerns.

Using historical sources, the relationship between the Web and GJNs has been presented, a relationship which can be traced back to the 1990s, and which is incredibly important for GJN visualisations. The early 2000s and the creation of Indymedia, as well as blogging and initial "citizen journalism" projects, were influential in accelerating GJNs around the globe, and creating widespread protests against shared concerns by often uncommon groups and driving alternative media collectives to present counter-narratives to dominant neoliberal discourse. In this sense, this research argues that GJNs were in a healthy, robust position in terms of visualisation and participation in the mid-2000s.

The contemporary element of this research has looked at how modern, popular Web tools, the most current in the wave of Web technology so consistently utilised by GJNs, are continuing to shape the development of GJNs. I have identified several key ways

in which these more personal and autonomous communications platforms, social media and ubiquitous Web use through mobile devices, have had effects on GJNs.

Using an ethnographic research method, we have seen how the foundations of contemporary GJN visualisations, the blogging and coordinated, deep and deliberative anti-neoliberal discourse of the 2000s, typified by Indymedia, has been undermined by personal social media use and weaker ties of communication between activists. While it is true that it is easier than ever before to aggregate and analyse the data that is created around GJNs, and that to some extent it is easier for activists to engage with one another in a contemporary world of social media, discussions with individuals acting within GJN visualisations have unearthed growing divisions between the physical act of participation in protest and the technological act of participation with protest. My ethnographic study of a week of action in London in June 2013, in concurrence with the G8 summit, found core activists within the protest group uncertain and skeptical of their future relationship with Web technology. This skepticism is at profound odds with the more evangelistic tone of historical sources discussing blogs and Indymedia. Activists feel their ability to organise and develop meaningful political opposition to dominant discourse in being undermined by a fragmentation and populism enabled through online participation. The public can too often be associated indirectly with events through online methods of aggregation, so-called big data or social media mining, which provides detractors evidence to suggest GJNs are unorganised or based on weak political ideas. Activists have also been found to be increasingly worried that the everyday Web experience has been co-opted by the forces which they explicitly contend with; capitalism, neoliberalism and established political governance. This co-opting was not evidenced in the early days of the Web, when there was a relatively clear divide between a political, discursive Web and a economic business Web. The rise of social media has enhanced the concept of social capital, and as companies and businesses can make money out of people's experiences and social interactions, so capitalism has crept further into the social sphere. GJN activists are in a quandary; they need the Web to maintain and grow networks, but are forced to engage with technologies they might struggle to reconcile with, thanks to those technologies having a commanding user base worldwide.

It is certainly an interesting time for Global Justice activism, the shift from deep, distanciated and small pockets of activism to global, but weaker networks of participation may be further evidence of a growing trend towards populism discussed by academics and political commentators around the world. My research has highlighted several ways that the Web is continuing to shape activism, and I cannot hide in my analysis my growing conviction that the current set of changes may not be altogether for the good of GJNs and social movements.

## 6.2 Addressing RQ 2 and discussing the relationship of this research to the Web Science method

The secondary research question for this project was **Can an ethnographic methodology benefit Web Science research?**. In presenting the findings above, I believe I have shown that such a methodology, unusual in it's reliance on sociological methods, can have enormous benefits for the discipline.

As was discussed in chapter 2, Web Science is the product of a desire on the part of academic communities rooted in physical science and engineering to understand the increasingly complex and deep relationship between people and the Web. The manifesto for the discipline clearly states the Web Science research needs to be interdisciplinary and have a scope that can encompass all actors, both human and technological. The most contemporary Web Science research, again discussed in chapter 2, is achieving the tenets of the manifesto by presenting the concept of "social machines".

Research methodology in Web Science has to date broadly focussed on collecting snapshots of human behaviour **on** the Web through data mining and quantitative methods. To date there has been little research within Web Science that presents analysis of human behaviour **with** the Web. The research presented above, particularly that of Jeff Juris, does show that ethnographic and other qualitative research is being undertaken, but that these studies lie on the fringe of Web Science, if indeed their authors are aware of the discipline at all.

With this research, I hope to have brought the ethnographic method to occupy a stronger position within Web Science. I believe it to be a method which can offer enormous benefits to the field, particularly when combined with the quantitative methods of big data collection performed so skilfully by colleagues in computer science.

By way of evidence, I will now examine how the ethnographic method has brought about the findings of this research, and what those findings might offer Web Science. For the first finding, the abandonment of cohesive alternative media spaces in favour of autonomous social networking, the ethnographic method gleaned stories from seasoned activists regarding the changing relationship of social movements with the Web, and social media in particular. The tales told by veterans of happier times, when IMCs were common and there was a stronger, physical community running media communications on behalf of movements would not have been clear in a quantitative study simply recording instances of discussion online regarding a particular topic. Yes, activists now use personal social media accounts to drove political discourse, but the ethnographic

method uncovered the unease which many feel towards this fragmented media dissemination; how some activists feel it makes it easy to dismiss their points and delegitimises movements through lack of cohesion. Web Science research would do well to remember that the medium is not the message, and that forms of online discourse are not necessarily legitimised simply through quantified use, but that such use should be explored by discussing with the users their motivations and potential compromises for picking this or that communications platform.

Finding 2, the public appropriation of protest events in the virtual space, is similarly developed by implementing the ethnographic method to show how social movements are affected by wider, yet shallower participation networks in the form of causal public engagement. As with finding 1, a Web Science study which used only quantitiative methods to mine data from the Web regarding a GJN visualisation would perhaps produce a detailed and extensive network of participation, and could claim to have shown the power or efficacy of that visualisation. However, this research has shown how fleeting and uninformed engagement with a protest visualisation or event can be, and that there exists online a great deal of background "noise" which must be taken into account by researchers who seek to discuss the importance of social movements. At the least, it seems clear that such noise, or slacktivism, should at least be acknowledged, and no good piece of Web Science research can justify simply stating that a certain amount of tweets, retweets, likes or #tags is indicative of power. At best, research which undertakes to study such online aggregations of political action should augment numerical findings with discussions with users regarding their depth of engagement with the political subject matter, the better to maintain academic rigour within the field.

Finally, finding 3, the growing mistrust of Web tools as representative of capitalism, government and the establishment is of great importance to Web Science, providing as it does a clear indication of the socio–political-technical forces driving modern society. The benefit of the ethnographic method is perhaps clearest here. Interviews, discussions and conversations with GJN activists have highlighted a growing skepticism amongst a group which has traditionally embraced Web technology as a tool of liberation. While this might not seem particularly unsurprising to researchers and theorists within Web Science, it is sociological evidence, clearly shown through a strong sociological method, and so provides weight to particular theories which argue the Web could lead to a more controlled, less free society. This may not be true, and further ethnographic studies to explore this deeper, more philosophical question will doubtless be undertaken. Web Science is uniquely placed to provide both evidence in the form of data and discussion in the form of theory on this phenomenon.

## 6.3 Concluding Remarks

In this research project I have presented a research question and literature which explores the two main subjects of this work, namely the Web as a socio-technical construct and Global Justice Networks as transnational networks of a plurality of activists. feel that the presentation of this work through an ethnographic case study satisfies an initial enquiry, and gives the strong sense that more research should be undertaken with regards to the primary and secondary research questions either with the data collected or in contemporary studies of a similar nature which may involve further qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods analysis.

This research has shown that social media and Web technologies are deeply entrenched in the lifecycle of GJNs and in activist networks in general. The folklore surrounding the Arab Spring and Occupy Movement has contributed to the belief that modern activism cannot function without these technologies. This might be true, but activists do seem to be aware of the risks and difficulties in using social media for protests. Particularly they are aware of issues of identity and organisation, that while social media is effective at organising dissent and protest on a global level, the traditional aspects of protest, the use of physical spaces used to generate strong bonds between activists, such as organised alternative-media centres, are being lost in favour of individual practices. They are also aware of the increasing involvement of the public in their actions, documenting and often condemning or supporting their actions online, but with little actual involvement.

The ethnography showed the extent to which activists are suspicious of the strong alignment between social media tools and the companies which maintain or create them and the dominant political ideology, namely capitalism and neoliberalism. Historically the Web has been seen as a great levelling technology, and while this may have been true at the turn of the millennium, it seems that, for these activists, the “system” has regained its composure after being tested by horizontal media networks, and firmly regained control of these technologies. Indeed, for some of these activists, the dominance of social media on our lives has become not a symbol of greater connectivity and autonomy, but of growing control by states over citizens.

It seems then that contemporary activism is currently in a crises. Increases in protest visualisation and the networked effects of social media has led to a state where protest is becoming an increasingly uninspiring and controlled form of political contention. This neutralising of protest power is being led by the technologies which are commonly used and which have political power and interests aligned with governments, and not with citizens. It may be that a new wave of politically conscious technologies which will reinvigorate activist networks now that the ”hype” of the mid to late 2000s has waned

and citizens are increasingly suspicious of the role that corporate Web tools play in their lives.

The role that the Web plays in the narratives of Global Justice Activists is important, deeply entrenched but heavily contended and discussed within the activist networks themselves. We can no longer say that the Web is a tool for political freedom, and returning to the quote by Langdon Winner presented at the start of this research, it seems that emerging social media tools are being developed with capitalist, neoliberal and conforming aspects at their heart, designed to appeal to the many within neoliberalism, not the few without. This may lead to the adoption of more overtly political technologies. There was a brief period towards the end of the first decade of this millennium when it looked like such technology would emerge, but none has captivated the mainstream yet. If such technology did emerge, it would doubtless be welcomed in GJNs as a new Indymedia, provided it could address the concerns highlighted in this research.

Regarding further research in this field, I strongly believe that the effect of particular Web tools and technologies within communities, and the underlying ideologies instilled into those technologies by developers and engineers, is a greatly understudied aspect of the social and computer sciences. As the discipline of Web Science grows, I expect to see more studies to emerge and to look at this issue through the particular theoretical lenses of specific disciplines. As society becomes more entangled in a digital world, and as that digital world becomes curated more and more by specific technological institutions, the study of society becomes a socio-technical one, and researchers must be able to include analysis of digital existence into their research, ideally using an interdisciplinary approach which best reflects the nature of the contemporary citizen.

# Appendix A

# Appendix B: "Thematic Analysis of Ethnographic Data"

The following appendix details instances within the ethnographic notes where particular themes were uncovered. As has been discussed, three broad themes were identified; the abandonment of alternative media spaces in favour of autonomous social media, the public appropriation of protest events in virtual space and the mistrust of web tools as being representative of Capitalism and Establishment. Instances were noted through a thematic analysis undertaken in the qualitative research software platform NVivo, each reference below is a documented observation, whether written or visual, which supports the findings presented in the above research.

## A.1 Theme 1: The Abandonment of alternative media spaces in favour or autonomous social media. Recorded Conversations

**Reference 1. Conversation with activists regarding perceptions of recording equipment within the Convergance Space**

"Also I don't know, it seems everyone has this ingrained hatred of mainstream media, it transfers over onto cameras and recording equipment, not necessarily where it's [the media being created] going but because they're associated with mainstream media."

**Reference 2. Discussion with activist regarding LiveStreaming protest events.**

"I think one thing we did, unfortunately we didn't carry it through but there was a big issue about someone live streaming an eviction, we had an eviction at the beginning of

this year, one of the guys there he live streamed for Occupy, had a lot of followers...Julian Assange followed him, that's kind of what he does that's his contribution and after there was a long debate about; do you add a link on live stream because its going straight to the Internet, you have no control."

**Reference 3. Discussion with activist regarding public perception of the convergence space**

"A lot of the views and things that activists have been fighting for, they do overflow into the mainstream a lot more than, well maybe I wasn't' aware of it but it seems like they overflow more and if we're not going to engage with the wider populace and tell them what we're doing and why we're doing it then, well, that's a problem. That's a huge problem that the representation of this building is by whoever's on the front, those four people on the front. It's nice to say that we have no representation but this building is represented, whether we want it represented or not and people are going to make their own assumptions you know."

**Reference 4. Conversation with activist regarding benefits Web tools designed for activists.**

"This happens again and again, as activists we don't support our tools, the Indymedia network has disintegrated and Undercurrents, this thing that started out quite healthy, now has no support; has fallen to pieces. I have a project called visionONTv, it's still there but you know it's not really used. So we're sucked into these pointless dead ends again and again and again and we're spat out and that's another generation of activists wasted on Web technology and we don't have any memory of it, we just keep doing it again and again."

**Reference 5. Conversation with activist regarding benefits of Web tools designed for activists.**

"The last pure network which was built from the ground up was the Indymedia network and there hasn't been anything since then, Occupy came close, UKUncut was quite good they had a hybrid strategy. They had their own aggregating website which is where the central organizing was but they aggregated the social media, they took it and repurposed it which was very clever but after that we're stuffed."

**Reference 6. Asking an activist at the convergence space whether it was OK to record and document events within.**

"Yeah I mean, not in the building, we've got strict no photos, no journalists on duty, I mean you can come in as yourself but no...well that was agreed before....I don't personally have a problem with it but it was agreed and there are no bloggers.

**Reference 7. Further conversation with activist regarding documenting events within the convergence space.**

"A lot of people who come to these events, from what I gather, would prefer for one reason or another not to ever be photographed or filmed."

**Reference 8. Further conversation with activist regarding documenting events within the convergence space.**

"But then...there are all CCTV cameras outside... !"'

**Reference 9. Further conversation with activist regarding documenting events within the convergence space.**

"Well, I mean I'm not arguing, you know. Their logic is a different story."

**Reference 10. Further conversation with activist regarding documenting events within the convergence space.**

"Their logic is fundamentally flawed because technology is so small and portable that everything in this building is recorded. And all they're doing, they're not hiding from the police or the security services, or even from the newspapers, they're hiding from their friends. They're hiding from us, from our media from the people next door that's all they're hiding from. That's the reality of the situation, and that's unhealthy. That's and unhealthy attitude, because you know if we hide from ourselves and don't hide from all the bad people, which is actually what's going on then that's a bit mad, or a bit crazy a bit unbalanced. Maybe we need to spend some time rebalancing ourselves and getting ourselves settled and have a bit of sense."

**Reference 11. Further conversation with activist regarding documenting events within the convergence space.**

It [Indymedia] reflected back in the movements and they saw it and went and did more of it, it was a virtuous circle. Now we're in the opposite, we're in a death spiral, no photography, no recording anything, just traditional media coverage because nobody wants cameras there. That's a death spiral, that's activism going down.

**Reference 12. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests.**

"Historically, this room would be overflowing with people. Even five years ago there would have been 100 people. You wouldn't be able to get in through the door for people wanting to do radical [social] media. The Indymedia crew, all these different people. And the fact that the room is almost empty now...well...."

**Reference 13. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests.**

"Ways to connect with 10s of 1000s of people [and other activists say] nah I want to use a [physical] shield a bit more. Which is great I think those things are great and amazing but it's why these two ideas have to conflict for no good reason."

**Reference 14. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests.**

"Yeah, because we should be telling the beautiful story, documenting the people making the shields, asking they why they do it, why does this work' And if we make a fantastic film about this, then somewhere in Brazil or Argentina they'll take up that idea and suddenly there's this strategy and tactic and it really knocks...you amplify this. Alternative media is about amplification, and you know instead of having some terrible story in The Sun or something about dirty anarchists with shields or whatever your narrative will be completely different."

**Reference 15. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests"**

"I'm not so interested in reporting the G8, I'm more interested in how we can recreate this buzz and this healthy media. Using the G8 as a way of doing that. Well we haven't got enough people here to cover the G8 at all, we wouldn't achieve anything, but can we recreate this energy and can we recreate grassroots traditional media' Maybe we could."

**Reference 16. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests.**

"I think tomorrow it would be really nice to tell a story but in general we just have to make it, I know it sounds terrible, but it has to be cool and it would be really nice to have, instead of 'well we'd rather not have any journalists!' "No photos and GRR!" you know that "cool, hardcore!" you know, you just make it like the opposite thing, so 'we'll be taking photos and recording because we think people need to tell a story and if you don't agree with us then fuck you. And people will listen to that and go "yeah...fuck them!" and they'll agree with us because it's cool."

**Reference 17. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests.**

"There are people just getting involved and there are people who have been involved for ten years and people essentially don't know the answer to whether or not they want to be photographed, and they will just go with whatever feels right, with what they perceive

the trend set is in their environment. We didn't experience any of this initially down at the [Occupy] camps. We had a very open door policy but then we also experienced the back end of that, as the camp began to, as the momentum began to drop, it almost felt like the media team broke off, and became a separate entity, started playing towards the press, which really pissed a lot of people off. I think this is where there is some aggressiveness towards media."

## A.2 Theme 1: The Abandonment of alternative media spaces in favour or autonomous social media. Written Observations.

**Reference 1. Observations in the Convergance Space Independant Media Centre (IMC)**

Upstairs, the media room and the IMC space had the same few people who had set up wifi etc. This space was relatively empty throughout the day.

**Reference 2. Observations in the IMC**

The Indymedia room was a space that was meant for individual activists to be able to publish to Indymedia and also a space where they could phone in events that were occurring during the week, which could then be published and placed on the Indymedia website. It was rarely used, as this conversation shows;

G: "How things have changed, we used to have loads of photographers, loads of videos etc, where are they now?"

H:"They're out with their phones, uploading to their private Facebook accounts".

**Reference 4. Observations comparing physical documentation activities within the convergance space, where little documentation was occurring, with online descriptions of the protests via Twitter**

Suddenly, all the Twitter elite appear. LP tweeting on police response, ST blog that details... OJ tweets to say 'Defending the right to protest after today's StopG8 events on @lbc973 after 5'.

Are these people the new elite, the go-to commentators for the media' While I don't doubt their sincerity, it seems that their actions fuel the fragmentation.

**Reference 5. Further observations of disparity between my experience at the protest event and online depictions of the same.**

Except for citizen journo's using Bambuser etc, no media is presenting a narrative of stopg8 that fits with my experience this week. The convergence space was used to facilitate discussion and have useful conversations. I felt more secure there than in any other place during the action and the organisational team did a great job of securing the space and making people feel comfortable with a safe space policy, restrictions on alcohol and photographs and the promotion of autonomous work spaces and groups. The downside to the restrictions and photos etc meant that it was hard to get a narrative that expressed the mood from inside the building and which could be used to counter later claims of danger from within. It seems that the organisers and hardcore activists who were present were so keen to restrict the personalisation of information from within the building (because it was uncontrollable and potentially a tool of police etc) but also unable to delegate a team of writers and artists who could provide a creative counter narrative that would be of use. Instead of just trying to contain one aspect of Web use and promoting another, the activists thought instead to just try and ignore the need to have a clear narrative and accepted that there would be many people providing media during demos and that these people would somehow help.

**Reference 6. Observing social media use in street protests.**

Social media use, twitter as a source of updates but the main use is external to the group at the demo, so it seems. Several activists using bambuser to livestream. Main twitter accounts StopG8 and OLSX. However I am inclined to agree with H, much of the social media use appears to be restricted to the personal sphere of the individual.

**Reference 7. Thoughts regarding observations of social media use at protests.**

Activists use videos and photos to prove their point, other use the same videos and photos to prove the complete opposite. Rather than opening the debate, the web is developing communities which may be global in membership but which are increasingly interpersonal and unable to reason with one another, the peer pressure of social spheres and constant legitimising of opinion from peers leads to partisan communities.

**Reference 8. Thoughts regarding observations of social media use at protests.**

People filming and posting to a social network creates metadata and an impression of an issue as being salient. But this impression is momentary and is not sustained by the general public. The virtual relationships surrounding the story seem to be weak and transitory. It is hard to say if this has a meaningful impact on individual political narrative.

**Reference 1. Conversation with member of public observing protest.**

'What is the G8, is it an English car'? A man asks me about the protest, but does not engage further. He simply films the demonstration for perhaps 3 seconds and then walks away.

**Reference 2. Observations from engaging with members of public observing protest.**

Instead I hung around the scene and tried to observe who was filming etc. A mix of activists outside, public and press. Three people were filming, making light of the situation (taking photos, uploading to Facebook and tagging each other as the police). I asked them why they were doing it; they said they were just interested because they lived around the corner. They worked for an app company and were like 'yeah, we should make apps for this, like stuff that helps protest, look us up, this is what we do'. Their company is called Golden Gecko. It seemed to me that they were a good example of the ways in which protest can be commercialised through the incorporation of certain apps onto platforms.

**Reference 3. Observations of members of the public observing protests.**

Also, a recurring theme from the day was the use of mobile technology to simply document a moment but not explore a narrative. Public, bystanders etc using phones and social media to project the self onto the demo, in a 'I'm here, there's a protest, I don't know what about'. I heard a lot of people saying stuff like 'What are they protesting about? I dunno' But not many people came to ask what the protest was about.

**Reference 4. Observations of members of the public observing protests.**

I guess my main sticking point from the day has been the overwhelming amount of interpretation that the general public did towards the protesters. The use of single images, tweets and comments not to dissect a situation and provide debate, but instead to single out particular elements that agree with a disposition.

**Reference 5. Observations of members of the public observing protests.**

So what's interesting is that this is a perceived audience. While lots of people might be watching/documenting, the sheer number of documentation appears to undermine the nature of the protest. People filming and posting to a social network creates metadata and an impression of an issue as being salient. But this impression is momentary and is not sustained by the general public. The virtual relationships surrounding the story seem to be weak and transitory. It is hard to say if this has a meaningful impact on individual political narrative.

## A.3 Theme 3: Mistrust of Web tools as being representative of Capitalism and the Establishment. Recorded conversations

**Reference 1.Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests**

"Uh yeah, I began to question all the internet stuff around, well FB around 2 years ago and everything else around a year ago. And I think for me it began with Fb and whole idea of one place concentrating all this info and the fact this is a corporation that people don't realise it that way and it's making huge amounts of money for what are a very limited amount of people. Because it's free that's not the same in the minds of everyone."

**Reference 2. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests**

I think they have a logic in them these things, they start out open and they start out open to draw people in and then they have to make money at some point and then they close down the useful bits which they then sell and they have a basic thing which isn't very useable and then you as an activist who has built their life around these things and you can't do the things you want to do without paying lots of money. So us as activists we're sucked into the next big thing and we all use it for a while, it eats us, gets commercialised, you know facebook now you have to pay to get people to see your feed, there's a payment button, so nobody sees your posts anymore. Our page used to get 1000 views a month; it went down to 100 because we're not paying. So, all these people have built these tools which are suddenly useless."

**Reference 3. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests**

"I go into these meetings and someone says 'hey there's this great new tool!' and I say 'yeah? What is it?' they say 'Vine!' 'Is it owned by Twitter?' yeah!' I was in a meeting and somebody couldn't shut up about Vine, I'm sure it's very sexy but don't under any circumstances use it [as a tool to save activism]."

**Reference 4. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests"**

"Facebook succeeded for really bad reasons. There were lots of social networks, tonnes and tonnes of them, FB was built by snobbery, they had a marketing strategy. They

launched it in Harvard, snobbiest University you could possibly get, everyone wanted to be a member then they launched it down the hierarchy of Universities, they launched it in the high ranking Universities, everyone wanted to be a member because Harvard wanted to be a member, then they launched it in the middle ranking Universities, everyone wanted to be a member because these better universities were a member. Then they launched it in community colleges and things, it was the sexy place to be and then they launched it to schools and then the world. So Facebook didn't succeed because the technology was better, it's technology was unbelievably crap, it succeeded because it had a good marketing strategy."

**Reference 5. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests"**

"We have to build our own media again, and it's not rocket science. The Web is the largest P2P network in the world. it's basically, the tech of the web is our...it's basically anarchist it was built by anarchists, core anarchists, the whole web is an anarchist institution. So yeah we need to use the open internet and stop being captured by these 'this is fantastic, let's use that' if it's owned by a corporation, they have to make money at some point. Don't go near it, we need to have this 'don't go near these sparkling toys' even though they sparkle and they're beautiful and they're made of gold and they're given to you for free...don't go near it. Or use it and abuse it, I say use and abuse, you know you can abuse it, send it links but don't send it original content. Coz by that link people who are imprisoned, huge numbers of people, can find their way outside the prison."

**Reference 6. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests**

"So I wouldn't trust any centralised, what's called client-server activist infrastructure, because somebody who is running that server is sitting in a building somewhere, probably in a commercial building and you know....the whole internet is an open network, so if anyone wants to find out what is going into that server they just have to put a tap on the ISP that provides the connection to that server and then they can just grab all the IP addresses. So all this Indymedia 'We don't log IP addresses' is bullshit, because they just have to put something on it, one stage up and then log all the IP addresses. So we have this pseudo-security, this false sense of security on all client-server relationships. But the internet is a Peer 2 Peer network so if we build P2P tools, then we actually have security, but there are you know, Skype was an original P2P tool, a corporate one but we did used to use that, but that's not been bought by Microsoft and changed into a client-server model, they changed the technology without tell anyone. And so, situation is, TOR is interesting if you set it up yourself and have some geeks who really know

what they're doing then it's pseudo-security, kind of makes it you very hard to find out about."

**Reference 7. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests**

"No. the internet is fundamentally open, an open network. When you do torrent files and you download pirated movies, everyone shares your IP address so everyone else knows who you are. There's a lovely website where you can type in your ip address and it tells you all the movies you're downloading, it lists them. So you know all the piracy groups have this information, it's stupidly open. This is why it works, this is why it's beautiful, this is why we love it but if you're gonna do things in secret, don't do it on the internet, go whisper it in the back of a room. Don't organise secret things, organise open things, it's an open tool. Stop organising...stop this security stuff on the Internet, it's too dangerous. It's way too dangerous."

**Reference 8. Discussions with a small group activists who attended a group seminar I ran on the role of social media in protests"**

"All traditional tech is vertical, has gatekeepers etc. so you can play their game, not a bad thing to do but it's a limited thing, which is what people next door in alt media are doing, playing the mainstream media game. It's worth doing but it's not us as activists, it's not our project we've gotta build something which works in our way and does our thing. So I've been doing that for a long time working on projects over than time, problem is they disintegrate and fall 2 pieces. This to do with activist culture, to do with our inability to build sustainable alts. So yes, these alt media they come out of tech but basically their failing always social. So not looking for tech solutions anymore, I've done all that, I've built so many tech projects, I'm looking for social solutions, how do activists build sustainable tech, real alternatives. That's what I'm interested in. I could talk about the numerous projects and campaigns but that's perhaps we'll do that as we go around, but that's probably all for now."

## A.4 Theme 3: Mistrust of Web tools as being representative of Capitalism and the Establishment. Written observations.

**Reference 1. Observations regarding the discussion I held with activists regarding social media use in protests.**

Main outcome of the talk was that we should move the discussion away from the infrastructure, which appears to be where the arguments for/against are limited. We know what the Internet can do, we know what the technologies can offer, the focus now should be to adopt the ethos of the FOSS and Creative Commons and include social contracts into all action and group formation, whether that be on facebook or on an open source, decentralised platform.

Activists should not have to get subsumed by the system, they shouldn't have to market themselves on the platforms that are popular, rather they should use the these systems as extensions or environments within which they can interact with a particular type of person and gain some entry, but provide a link back to an autonomous space on the Web where a community can be developed. Kind of taking it back to the forum days.

**Reference 2. Observations regarding the discussion I held with activists regarding social media use in protests.**

Many activists appear to believe that the web is intrinsically anarchic in its conception, design and the infrastructure that it promotes, however it is clear that this design can be appropriated to achieve capitalistic ends. So what is the Web? Capitalist? Anarchist?

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