Protest and Aesthetics in The Metainterface Spectacle

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Abstract

The article asks how political agency play out in contemporary uses of the interface. It, firstly, stipulates that the interface is a 'spectacle', belonging to a longer history of media spectacles, mass organization, politics and aesthetics. Secondly, that contemporary interfaces are metainterfaces, depending on a new organization of the masses characterized by mass profiling. Finally, it analyses how this play out in examples from art and cultural practices, and speculates on what political protest and revolution is in light of the interface.

Keywords

Digital art, interface criticism, media aesthetics, media spectacle, political protest.

Introduction

A spectacle is commonly understood as something that visually attracts our attention – typically a mediated experience. It is an object of desire that naturally lends itself to not only pleasure, but also manipulation. Media spectacles have therefore always been a central part of Marxist cultural criticism, ranging from Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer to Guy Débord, and beyond; and they have always been a contested zone for political struggle – for propaganda as well as for activism and situationist happenings. In this tradition of cultural critique, a spectacle presents an organization of the masses, but also a way for the individual to experience one-self as part of the masses. This can be used for populist manipulation, but potentially also opens up for critical reflection on the mediatized organization of the masses. In other words, the media spectacle is historically tied to relations of power and control; of control of the masses, but also of the individual to see and understand one's one position in the masses and thereby assume individual agency.

Try to think of the user interface as a contemporary spectacle that organizes and controls the masses, and also of the user's possibilities to experience this organization, and the possible agencies that relate to this. Arguably, the organization of the masses is a complex question. The interface spectacle is not only visually organized, as in traditional cinema and mass media, but belongs to a tradition of statistics that has roots in urban mass control as well as in advertisement – a tradition of data and profiling. As we have described elsewhere, the contemporary user interface must be seen as a 'metainterface': an interface that both seals off and gives access to a larger network of interfaces that exchange data; typically to profile the user and deliver customized experiences. It is an interface that is general (in everything), and abstract (nowhere in particular), and which is often associated with the proliferation of platforms, apps, cloud computing, and other phenomena. [1]

In this article we want to discuss the contemporary interface spectacle through examples of organization of the masses in a networked computational reality. More specifically, we ask: how does political agency play out in the contemporary metainterface spectacle? This question takes us beyond the use of seemingly innocent apps for divertissement, and into the question of how the spectacle is used politically – how its representations and collections of data are used for populist propaganda, as well as for critical scrutiny and other forms of agencies. This is not least relevant in light of political developments as displayed on Capitol Hill in January 2021, or in global nation politics where e.g., Russia has been accused of collecting data and profiling users in order to influence the outcome of elections. How does the metainterface serve such populist spectacles, and what potential forms of critical agencies may rise in this? In search for possible answers, we discuss the so-called twitter-revolutions in light of more recent events and uses of social media; in particular the artistic performance *HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US*. The work is one of the most high-profile political artworks of recent years, and we analyze how its protest against the Trump presidency, and the responses to this carried out by the Alternative Right movement, brings the relation between aesthetics and politics to the fore. Finally, we also compare the 'ideal' twitter-revolution to other perceptions of the revolution as presented in Amira Hanafi's work *A Dictionary of the Revolution;* a work that presents a quite different interpretation of the Egyptian revolution than its often-acclaimed association with social media.

The media spectacle

Before we enter more deeply into analysis, we want to begin by briefly touch upon the nature of the spectacle. Historically, the spectacle, as a view on and of the masses, involves a particular political agency related to the increased urbanization and rise of the masses following industrialization, as seen for instance in George-Eugène Haussmann's transformation of Paris into boulevards with views to see, be seen, and be controlled. In Haussmann's 19th Century Paris the boulevards did not only provide new urban experiences of strolling, Paris was also a city mapped out and controlled from above, and a city that was designed to control the masses (related to Paris' history of upheaval of the masses).

With modern urban development also came different forms of spatial and mediated spectacles, such as arcades (to see and be seen), as well as zoological gardens and also aquariums that somehow compensates for the boundless scale of urban development and growth of the masses. [2] It is likely that the interface at hand (the facial filter app, the social media interface and its overview of connections and likes, the feature and estimation list of the Uber app, etc.) can be seen as following this urban tradition and need for a human scale miniature perspective in face of a limitless (global) world of planetary scale. However, what interests us in particular is the *mediated* spectacle, which also, historically, ties the organization of the masses, and the individual's perspective on this, to populism, propaganda and political agency in capitalist societies.

In particular the cinematic spectacle lends itself to political propaganda and control of the masses, as noted by the German cultural and film critic Siegfried Kracauer. Kracauer who writes, for instance, about Leni Riefenstahl's infamous *Triumph des Willens*: "Triumph of the Will is undoubtedly the film of the Reich's Party Convention; however, the Convention itself had also been staged to produce Triumph of the Will, for the purpose of resurrecting the ecstasy of the people through it." As such, it is a film "symbolizing the readiness of the masses to be shaped and used at will by their leaders" – "a show simulating German reality and of German reality maneuvered into a show." [3]

Although lending itself to propaganda and the anaesthetization of the German people, the spectacle is far more complex than mere manipulation. In Kracauer's understanding, the spectacle (as what he calls "a mass ornament") is also an aesthetic reflection of capitalism's production process, the assembly line, and statistical control. All of these characteristics of a modern mass society are generally abstract or invisible and can only be recognized by the individual as an indirect experience; or, staged aesthetically as a mass ornament, for instance in the stadium spectacles of synchronized gymnasts: "The production process runs its secret course in public. Everyone does his or her task on the conveyor belt, performing a partial function without grasping the totality. Like the pattern in the stadium, the organization stands above the masses, a monstrous figure whose creator withdraws it from the eyes of its bearers, and barely even observes it himself." [4]

The loss of perspective embodies the desires of the worshippers: the experience of a common project that binds people together (as he writes, "The bearer of the ornaments is the *mass* and not the people," [5] but the stadium spectacles offer a reflection of the compulsive actions of a new mass, and a way to experience this as a mass ornament – in which the withdrawal of perspective and the hiding of an origin can even be a sublime experience. In this way, the mass ornament exists above the level of the individual, but nevertheless offers the individual a perspective on the mass. Although, it was this enchantment that fascism and Nazism misused in perverse ways and took advantage of in their propaganda, its effects are not uniform. [6] [7] Its social significance cannot simply be compared to that of a roman theatre, staged by the ruling power, as Kracauer notes; as he highlights how the mass indulges in sensations comparable to a godless cult. [8] In fact, it is such sensations that help the individual reflect the rationale of industrial production;

that makes the ornament 'real': a reflection in how reality is produced.

The metainterface spectacle is as complex as the mass ornament. Following Kracauer's line of thinking, we may assume that the mass ornamentation of customized media reflects a new moment in cultural production – the moment of a "metainterface industry" with ties to former cultural industries. [9] Just as in the 1920s and 30s, we may also assume that mass ornamentation make way for propaganda, but also realist (media) reflection. However, the mechanisms of both propaganda and realism function substantially differently than in the mass ornament of cinema or stadium spectacles: interfaces see us differently, and we see ourselves differently in them.

In the metainterface everybody takes and sees the same snapshot of the Eiffel Tower (as a compulsive action of the mass), but unlike former mass spectacles, nobody is seeing *the mass perspective*. The spectator of the new mass ornament, the user, is limited to responding emotionally to the feed (by sharing what is on one's mind, or liking what is on the minds of others) – there is, in other words, no one to see 'the figure' (in Kracauer's terminology). If the mass ornament (the spectacle) is the aesthetic mirroring of the ruling economic system and its inner rationale, there is nobody to see this; there is no sensation of this. As a particular datafied perspective, one might even question whether the mass itself can be the bearer of ornaments? [10]

The metadata protest

If the user is limited to an emotional response to a feed of snapshots that all look the same, and there is no one to see the figure of the mass, where does this leave the politics of the metainterface spectacle? How is politics aestheticized in the metainterface spectacle? And, how does aesthetics become politics? In order to extend reflections on the metainterface spectacle into such questions, we want to analyze and discuss contemporary examples of how the metainterface enters the fabric of political and social activism and protest.

The wider public experience of how interfaces and social desires come together first became evident with the so-called 'twitter revolutions' – the mobilization of a mass using social media. These include a number of protests taking place in the early 2010s, broadly covering diverse settings and political agendas, including, for instance, The Arab Spring (2010-12), the Gezi Park protests in Istanbul (2013), the 15-M Movement at Plaça del Sol in Madrid (2011-15), and various others. Arguably, these protests did not just take place on social media; they were events taking place in parks and at squares, and they involved people with feelings of indignation (as the movement in Spain labelled itself, "los indignados"). However, as a common characteristic, the use of the hashtag ("#jan25" (marking the beginning of the protest on Tahir Square in Cairo), "#spanishrevolution", etc.), demonstrated how the interface was integrated into the social and political tissue of the protests. Judging from phenomena such as #MeToo, #BlackLivesMatter, #UmbrellaMovement and more, this has been the case for much political activism and many protest movements ever since.

Put briefly, using a hashtag signifies one's identity with a discourse across media platforms and contexts. At the same

time, the hashtag is not merely a word, or key word, that embodies a protest movement and its social or political desires, it is also used by the individual platform as metadata to organize the feed on, say, Twitter (where the use originates). As most social media users will know, the # symbol ('hash') automatically turns the following keyword ('tag') into a link to a real-time feed of all posts with the given hashtag, and it also allows users to search within the platform for particular keywords. In other words, using a popular hashtag is a way to generate visibility to one's individual post; and often, the real-time feed turns into a particular kind of conversation of exclamations, opinions, information, images, videos, memes, etc. where users express themselves in relation to the hashtag of the protest (in this case); including, at times, also interfering with opposite or provoking opinions. Even plain advertisement or spam, which has an air of being machine-generated and out of context, often appears in the feed. In this environment, the protest is always on(line) as a feed, tailored 'just for you' as a list of exclamations, and a multiplicity of individual voices where an advertisement can appear as close as a friend combatant. In other words, it is a diverse cultural practice that involve both human and machine agencies.

Vis-à-vis the hashtag-protest as a form of mediated spectacle (a metainterface spectacle), it is well-worth questioning the construction of a mass perspective, and how one sees oneself as part of the mass. Obviously, tying microblog posts on racism, sexism, austerity, oppression together with hashtags, potentially generates a common discourse that may mobilize a mass across spaces. The #BlackLivesMatter, for instance, is not intrinsic to one platform or particular events in the United States, but travels across different individual and cultural contexts (for instance, although #BlackLivesMatter originates in a particular American context, it is also adopted by protesters in Denmark as a general label for protests relating to racism, Danish immigration policies, the Palestinian situation). [11] In this sense, it has both a "multiplicity", and a "narrative power," as noted by Anna Nacher in her study of the feminist Black Protests in Poland in 2016. [12] However, adding an informational layer (of metadata) to real events that are tied to complex political, societal, or other problems also *virtualizes* the protest, and reduces the resolution and diffraction of the incident in order to make it computable information. As Matthew Fuller has claimed, the interface (as a control mechanism, distributed throughout the system, across different processes or executions – and a tool that allows a user to manipulate, but never change these processes) is an extension of 'virtuality' into a technical system. Virtuality is, as he quotes N. Katherine Hayles, "the cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns." [13] In other words, what we claim here is that the protest's narrative ability, its ability travel across spaces and contexts, follow a particular cultural logic: that of 'virtuality'. Or, put differently, in order to make the protest travel across spaces and contexts on the platform, one needs to see them as informational, as metadata; one needs to perceive their virtuality, their 'interfacial' character.

When 'tagged', the protests (including their documentation of oppression, and their social and political desires) not only become a narrative of resistance, they also become part of a 'statistical spectacle'. The metadata of the hash symbol is then also part of a much larger spectacle in which the collection of data takes part in the organization of the masses. The main principle of organization is 'the feed', an instrumentalist modelling of the protest (its events, its actions, its participants, its relations, etc.) as data. The objective of the feed is to generate visibility to what the protesters are likely to respond to affectively, to be adaptable to know 'the mood' of the protest. As a spectacle that organizes the mass and allows the individual to experience oneself as part of the mass, it is no longer about seeing the mass and oneself as part of the mass, but about knowing the mass, and knowing what one likes, detests, etc. as part of the mass. With this, the protest is not just made up of a mass gathered in a space, but it *becomes* the feed and subject to the platforms' instrumentalist modellings; subject to what Ned Rossiter and Geert Lovink in the analysis of the protests of the early 2010s have called "bursts of 'social media' activity", or "communication peaks, which fade away after the initial excitement". [14] And, the instrumentalist and pragmatic production of such peaks and bursts in moods is always withdrawn, without clear origin, one merely 'feels' it.

It is however also tempting to compare this kind of personalized spectacle to how the metainterface articulates processes of subjectivation; and how the spectacle reflects, more generally, a rationale of production in a neoliberal economy – a mass perspective that reflects capitalist production, but withdraws from our attention (as Kracauer's writes, "The production process runs its secret course in public" [15]). Although the hashtag relation and the sharing and liking of moods and sentiments of a protest seemingly unites a group of people in a common cause, one might ask if the metainterface (and the lack of a mass ornament) does not also contribute to a more individualized perspective on political change? In the individualized feed that invites to affective 'mood' responses (in the form of likes and shares), the protest risks becoming without consequences, and merely expressing our individual experiences of subjugation or disruption and our affective responses to this; it risks becoming incapable of constituting a different world.

HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US – capture the flag

Speculating on how the metainterface spectacle relates to more general articulations of the subject and the mass in a neoliberal economy, the lack of a mass perspective potentially also leads to a displacement of a common class analysis and consciousness. Shia LaBeouf, Nastja Säde Rönkkö, and Luke Turner art project *HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US* (or, particularly the responses to it from alternative right networks) serves as an illustrative example of this.

In 2017 the three artists initiated the project *HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US* – a live streamed durational work that ran between Jan 20 2017 and January 20. 2021 (i.e., the entire duration of Donald Trump's presidency in the United States). The work consisted of a mural outside the Museum of the Moving Image in New York, with the words "he will not divide us". Underneath the artists had mounted a camera (a live stream feed), into which the public was invited to chant "he will not divide us". In this way, the work, according to the artists, "acted as a show of resistance and insistence, opposition and optimism, guided by the spirit of each individual participant and the community." [16]

The work follows a series of works (#*IAMSORRY* (2014), #*FOLLOWMYHEART* (2015), #*INTRODUCTIONS* (2015), #*ALLMYMOVIES* (2015), #*TOUCHMYSOUL* (2015), #*TAKEMEANYWHERE* (2016), #*ANDINTHEEND* (2016), #*ALONETOGETHER* (2017)), all including live participatory performance, and with clear reference to network culture and social media (in the hashtag). As such their work make reference to a number of political movements, also trying to unite a mass using network culture and social media, and articulating what Anna Nacher has called a "weak opposition" whose efficiency lies in its "ability to reclaim and mobilize the narrative power of hashtags." [17] Such weakness should not necessarily be interpreted as similar to the incapability of forming alternative futures, as in Rossiter and Lovink's analysis of the Twitter revolutions as characterized by 'weak ties'. The weakness is also a form of resistance: as a rejection of a heroic understanding of protest (as a 'militaristic machismo') it points to a process of caring and social maintenance, and a wider common transformation. As Nacher points out, she strongly disagrees with perceiving digital activism as a failed promise: "What failed was rather a kind of novelty allure and media-hype generated by the early, enthusiastic analyses. Perceiving digital activism in general as a failed and corrupted enterprise may lead to throwing the baby out with the bathwater." [17] Consequently, one could say, that what failed was the Twitter marketing of Twitter revolutions.

Our intention here is not to judge the 'weak opposition' of LaBeouf, Rönkkö, and Turner's work, but to point to the unexpected spectacle it led to. Already on 10 February 2017, only three weeks after its installation, the Museum of the Moving Image abandoned the project. As stated by the museum in their press release, "the installation created a serious and ongoing public safety hazard." [18] A few days into the performance, multiple threads on the performance were running at 4chan, Tinychat, and Discord, including ones that organized pro-Trump and pro-alt-right performances – such as showing a sign "Make America Great Again" in front of the camera, changing the name of the museum to Museum of KEK (a misspelling of LOL, used on 4chan, and also the Egyptian God of chaos), advertising the site as a prostitution meetup on Craigslist, and more. This, naturally, resulted in various confrontations between the pro- and anti-Trump protesters, culminating in the arrest of Shia LaBeouf for shoving a man who addressed the camera with a "Hitler did nothing wrong" sign. [19]

After its removal from the Museum of the Moving Image, the installation was set up at El Rey Theater, Albuquerque (and later also at Foundation for Art and Creative Technology in Liverpool, le lieu unique in Nantes, and Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź), but the Internet trolls had already turned the performance into a viral meme. Eventually (on March 8, 2017), the artists replaced the installation with a livestream of a flag with the words "HE WILL NOT DIVIDE US", filmed from below, and containing only the sky, not to give away its location.[20] This initiated an insane game of 'capture the flag' by the Alt-Right online community. [21] They, for instance, detected the airplanes appearing in the sky behind the flag, and compared their condensation trails to flight radar information. They also discovered a tweet from LeBoeuf, and used this information to rigorously map the potential position of the flag. After locating a small town in

Tennessee, one of the participants drove around the town honking his horn until the sound was picked up in the stream. Eventually, they were able to take down the flag and replace it with a red Trump cap. [22]

The interventions by the Alt-Right community mirrors the event-centered elements of the art work itself, and may be seen as contributing to what Rossiter and Lovink in their analysis of the protests of the early 2010s called "carnivalist ruptures of the everyday life", and "revolts without consequences." [23] However, it also adds further dimensions.

Notably, the campaigns of the Alt-Right community are driven by particular network cultural practices; a particular version of what Olga Goriunova has labelled "new media idiocy", which, for instance would account for the production of memes as well as the collective forensics of 'capturing the flag': "Idiocy is a kind of individuation that produces, […] objects and behaviours, subjectivities, as well as collective performances." And, this process of individuation has become "a very successful way to concretize a collective movement: to be heard politically; to concretize an object of achieving media attention; to individuate the human and to experience her individuation through expression, and so on." [24]

Furthermore, there is evidently a strong organization behind not only this campaign, but also other Alt-Right campaigns – residing on message and image boards such as 4chan and 8chan, and more recently on Discord and Telegram, but possibly also with institutional ties to e.g., the Trump administration. [25] Rossiter and Lovink, in fact, already described the potential political agency of organized networks (or, 'orgnets') in their critique of the 2010s protest movements

> "The orgnet concept (short for organized networks) is clear and simple: instead of further exploiting the weak ties of the dominant social networking sites, orgnets emphasize intensive collaborations within a limited group of engaged users. The internet's potential should not be limited to corporate platforms that are out to resell our private data in exchange for free use." [26]

What Lovink and Rossiter here highlight, is that in order to contrast the lightweight nature of political activism on social media (which basically makes the hashtag protest another contribution to the mood-driven platform economy), one needs intensive collaboration and organization. The presence of this in phenomena like the 'capture the flag' campaign, or the other organized interventions by the Alt-Right presents an alternative to the weak ties of social networking platforms. Clearly, the message and image boards present another organizational tool to the protest movement; a tool that goes beyond hashtags, shares and likes.

The organized network of a game also resonates with contemporary theory of participatory, computational or rewired propaganda; and how propaganda has changed from a 'top-down' model of one (leader) communicating to the many (the masses), into a model of one communicating to a smaller group of 'followers' that also include fake identities, which then communicate to the masses. [27] [28] It is tempting to draw lines between this organization of politics and how Riefenstahl's staging of the Nürnberg party days represents "an inextricable mixture of a show simulating German

reality and of German reality maneuvred into a show." [29] The Alt-Right protesters' media spectacle is produced by the media along the media's own agency as an "aestheticizing of political life," which Walter Benjamin, at the time, also saw as "the logical outcome of fascism." [30]

Or, put differently, for the individual participants, hiding behind their interfaces, one may still question in what ways they are themselves bearers of the mass ornament? The idiocy of the memetic carnival protest also seems to limit their perspective and prevent the participants to see the figure of the mass, so to speak; and, again, limit them to their individual experiences without constituting what Mark Fisher calls "a *we* that is both the agent of struggle and what is struggled for"; or as he continues: "Subjugated group consciousness is first of all a consciousness of the (cultural, political, existential) machineries which produce subjugation – the machineries which normalise the dominant group and create a sense of inferiority in the subjugated." [31]

Being able to see how the mass perspective is constructed might be a sense of its innate machineries; a productive class consciousness-raising. Seeing just oneself, on the other hand might potentially lead to a "class resentment without class consciousness or class analysis," as put by Wendy Brown, who continues: "This resentment is displaced onto discourses of injustice other than class but, like all resentments, retains the real or imagined holdings of its reviled subject." [32] This is presumably the kinds cynicism captured in expressions such as "Hitler did nothing wrong" (as shown on the sign that triggered Shia LaBeouf).

A Dictionary of the Revolution

If the metainterface articulates a datafied and instrumentalist organization of the mass in which one only sees one self, where does it leave the grand narratives of refusals, protests and revolutions?

In one interpretation, the metainterface spectacle and the mood-driven 'feed' with its disparate voices and exclamations, make way for the articulation of subjugation with no class analysis and consciousness of the machineries that produce subjugation (including those of the metainterface itself); of knowing and sharing the feeling, but not knowing and sharing the consciousness of what produces it. The protest risks becoming weak, merely a shared mood – bursts of social media activity driven by the platforms' mood algorithms. With some level of organization, the sinister parts of such feelings and moods of the class can even turn the lived reality into a (racist, sexist, etc.) carnival show or game of idiocy; an aesthetization of politics with no shared vision of an alternative future (other than that of the white male supremacist).

In another interpretation, the weakness expresses a different kind of organization (as pointed to by Nacher). The metadata, the mood algorithm and the feed does not just produce a weak organization of the mass as a shared feeling, it also produces everyday narratives of subjugation; narratives that reject the understanding of the protest as a heroic revolt of change, and instead highlights the importance of common transformations in the everyday that lies in caring and other affective actions of social maintenance in our relation to the other. As a final example of a spectacle that further highlights such aspects of the protest, but operates through a different interface, we want to analyse the work *A Dictionary of the Revolution* (2014-17) by the Egyptian-American artist Amira Hanafi. [33]

The (online) dictionary consists of 125 texts related to the word 'revolution', made by circa 200 individuals, interviewed by Hanafi. The work was initiated a few years after the Egyptian revolution in 2011, which led to the abdication of the country's longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak, the democratic election of Mohamed Morsi from the Muslim Brotherhood in 20012, the protests against Morsi, and the military coup and inauguration of the current president, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi in 2014. In other words, it is a dictionary narrated by people who have lived through a complex political situation. Looking into the dictionary you therefore see the many different individual voices and understandings of words associated with the revolution (Brotherhood, the Army, elections, hope, etc.); what the words mean to people, and how they relate to the Egyptian situation, and in what ways the Egyptian revolution was revolutionary. 'Revolution' is described as a word "with no meaning", or "whose meaning we don't understand." Rather, it has an affective meaning and purpose: "We build on it and we hold on to it, only because we don't want to spoil the moment […] the beauty of the moment for Egyptians who went out in the streets." In this way, the work is a mapping of the affective relationship between the order of the revolution and the order of language, and of how the order of language is constantly negotiated by the voices of the people in the space and time that appears when a ruling power is overthrown.

Another example is the word 'tamarod' which means 'rebellion' in Arabic, but which also refers to a person who breaks with tradition, and takes an unconventional approach. After the election of Morsi, it became a label for the resistance movement against Morsi, and after July 3 where the military and El-Sisi deposed Morsi, "we found out that Tamarod was a lie like everything else, and that Intelligence created it. But that doesn't negate that the people themselves protected Tamarod, because Tamarod isn't its individual members. I mean, the members of Tamarod didn't make twenty-two million." In this way, the dictionary is a reflection of the metamorphosis of language and the complex processes of signification: "As they say, language is a living thing."

The entry 'ideal girl' addresses how gender and power are related in conservative religious societies, but also points to the violence and oppressions of revolutions. Women, and in particular younger women, are notoriously harassed by military and the police who submit them to humiliating undressing and 'virginity tests', obviously with the purpose of creating control:

"At the end of the day, they saw her as a woman, with a certain form. Based on something that she has no control over, that she can't change—the form in which God created her biologically. Based on that form, she can be marked by any stain that you can imagine: she can be insulted, she can be exploited, the whole situation can be exploited and the most terrible charges thrown at her and everyone around her. The whole idea is that… is that God made you a girl, so you must endure. Don't participate in anything, don't go out, stay afraid all the time that

someone will expose you because of your body and because you were created a girl."

Bodies, genders, humans, and society are weaved together by language, power, revolt and a failed revolution. Obviously, the media and media technologies also play a significant role in this weaving. In the entry "the Media" it reads: "The media broadcasts all the vocabulary in the world. Someone says a word, but it's the media that says it to the people, and the people interpret it. I myself didn't know a lot of words. They teach us to talk." The revolution is also an act of language, or of mediation, where the media industry diffuses its vocabulary, but also defines it – for better, or for worse. As mentioned above, the Egyptian revolution is often labelled as a 'Twitter revolution', but social media and hashtags do not seem to play a significant role in the dictionary. Although it is mentioned how cameras are "broadcasting directly from the street", the principal reference is television. In this sense, the perception of the Egyptian revolution as a Twitter-revolution is also a construction, and perhaps even a branding of the (at the time) new social media platforms as 'democratic'. Academic critique of social media and its role in the revolts, too, may be seen as a successful part of this.

In this sense, the work points to other ties than the weak ties of the hashtags. The linguistic keywords of the revolution are not just algorithmically trending on Twitter or other social media platforms; they are real words undergoing far more composite processes of signification. Considering the role of the media, they are not just subject to moods of what people like and share, propagated in feeds on a platform; feeds that display a stream of exclamations and disparate voices that all seem to be talking about the same thing, but rarely together. Rather, the meaning of key words, and what comes to be a key word, is subject to relations of power and control (as in the case of 'tamarod') in which the control of broadcast media is still important. And, perhaps more importantly in the work, it is subject to 200 different individual voices linked together (in a hypertext). The 160 key words in the vocabulary appear in a beautiful diagram created by an algorithm, reading and interpreting the texts, identifying the key words, and suggesting relations between them. How the algorithm works remains unclear, but the voices all belong to anonymous individuals who raise different opinions, giving the words different meaning, and making them ambiguous. Rather than the algorithmically framed and individualized perspective on a discourse (with low equivocation, and where everybody sees, feels, understands the same), it seeks to present a perspective on the entire discourse, how it changes over time, and how people relate to it in different ways: how they discuss the revolution in language, and language as a revolution.

As a spectacle *A Dictionary of the Revolution* is very far from turning a social reality into a show. As an interface it makes the words of the dictionary multivocal and gives the mass a voice in which one can see oneself as part of the revolution and the mass, and for outsiders to see this. It points to the linguistic, social and media technological dimensions of the revolution as a spectacle (of how it organizes the mass, and how one sees oneself in this). The dictionary provides evidence of the revolution, and of how revolutions become meaningful. Reading and exploring the diagram creates a sense of how the revolution – far from being a Twitter-revolution – manifests itself though its ambiguities; the doubts, the linguistic ambivalences, counter revolutions, and even the diagram itself as a care-full knowledge resource on which to build revolutions to come.

Conclusions

We have tried to demonstrate how the appearance of a metainterface – an interface that is always present (sensing us, available in our pockets, etc.), but is no-where in particular (abstract and in the cloud), and where global platform providers make up a foundation for all other interfaces – lays the ground for a new media spectacle: a new organization of the masses, and a new moment for political agencies.

The metainterface differs substantially from other media, in that the spectacle is always also statistical; resting in the assumption that perspective is computable (and non-visual), and with this a particular instrumentalist hiding of the perspective. In other words, the individual users behind their interfaces cannot see the workings of the machinery that produces the feeds, the likes, the shares, and the mood-driven collective. In the metainterface spectacle, political, social, or other confrontations therefore easily become confrontations of 'truths' – one statistical cinema confronted with another; one user's feed confronted with another's. Hence, we believe that a better understanding of the metainterface spectacle is important, in that it allows for new understandings of how contemporary politics and political activism is intrinsically related to the functioning of the interface. In other words, is it possible to understand, say, the Black Protest (Czarny Protest), held nation-wide in Poland in October 2016, or the events on Capitol Hill in the United States in January 2021, without also understanding how they were organized on message and image boards, and how they were distributed (and disrupted) on social media platforms?

Through the analysis of a particular incident (*HEWILLNOTDIVIDE.US*, the performance' conflicts with the Alt-Right communities, and the following organized 'capture the flag'), we have attempted to demonstrate both similarities and differences in the contemporary political media spectacles. Political confrontations and protests are increasingly dependent on layers of information patterning – of software that can interpret the hashtags and the likes, and provoke consciousness-raising awareness at the level of the individual spectator of the live feed and participant of the hashtag protest, and form a mood-driven community at the basis of this. The material of the protest is always also informational (hashtag-able, share-able, copy-able, etc.), eventually giving the protest a 'virtual' and 'carnivalist' characteristic. However, this has (like social media in general) undergone a paradigmatic shift from being a global organization of information networks to a more local organization of information networks, and with this it also lends itself to certain orgnets' maneuvering of reality into a show; a show of idiocy, memes, and trolls that simulates a contemporary (in this case American) reality.

Albeit more briefly, we have also tried to tie this kind of political activism to a process of neo-liberal individuation, and to question political agency in the metainterface industry. The individualized perspective of the metainterface may create a sense of affective community coherence (a *we* that

shares the same feeling), but one may question whether it is capable of creating a consciousness of the larger apparatus that produces and normalizes the subjugation (a *we* with a class consciousness)? Whether change is individualized and collective ties weak, or whether the collective is capable of envisioning the constitution of a different reality?

Can the masses be granted rights, and not just expression, in the metainterface spectacle (to paraphrase Walter Benjamin)? In the perspective of German critique of the media spectacle, this would demand the possibility to reflect the larger apparatus that produces the mass perspective. As a final example of a care-full reflection of the larger apparatus that produces both oppression and revolution, we have included Amira Hanafi's *A Dictionary of the Revolution*. It is a work that presents a different spectacle of the revolution than the often-acclaimed spectacle of democratizing social media (and its failures). The work suggests a different interface spectacle in which one can navigate the discourse as metadata, but where the bodies and voices of the revolution are never reduced to information patterns. It suggests that diagramming the revolution as a discourse is a way of providing evidence of how oppressions and revolts play out – of their many cultural, technical, legal and other executions. As such, it functions as an instrument of knowledge that can help us observe the features, patterns and correlations of a discourse. It presents a secular perspective on the masses of the revolution in which the revolutionary subjects (the participants) articulate their shared experience of a revolution, perceive themselves as part of the revolutionary mass, and begin their analysis of the complex apparatus that produced the (failed) revolution: a 'class awareness' of what people say and experience.

Although Hanafi's work does not directly claim the use of a large dataset, metadata and complex natural language processing (as does corporate and state intelligence in their 'interfacial' perception of the revolution as informational events), the question of the algorithmic architecture and how machine agency constructs knowledge and power can be seen as crucial in granting the users and masses rights, and point to further studies of the metainterface spectacle. A critical metainterface spectacle might well demand that the various tools for data analytics should no longer be restricted to corporate platforms or the NSA, but reclaimed by political and social organizations. However, the cultural and social engagement with the algorithmic architecture and an instrumentalist perspective should not be carried out in a carefree manner. Diagraming, data analytics, and also dictionaries, and other techniques (as carried out across corporate, literary, political, activist platforms), and the significant differences in the ways they deal with evidences, data, subjects, bodies, affects, language, discourse, and more, are examples of how the metainterface spectacle has become a new aesthetic and political battlefront.

Acknowledgements

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