Social Glasnost: The Social Media Age and The Implosion of IR

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Introduction: Glasnost from Moscow to Montreal

Translated and paraphrased, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev reiterated on multiple occasions that without *glasnost*, there cannot be democratization or the political creativity of the masses, which both come from their participation in governance. However, contrary to popular belief, the signified meaning of the Russian term glasnost was not originally that of a policy introduced by Gorbachev in the mid 1980s, which called for increased openness and transparency in government institutions. According to long-time activist and dissident Lyudmila Alexeyeva (1990), glasnost has been in the language for centuries. It is an ordinary term that belongs to the people, a hardworking, nondescript word for transparency that refers to a social awakening discovered through just governance determined by open and participatory dialogue and debate. The word, which arguably sparked a revolution of a different sort a quarter-century ago, seems by its very nature to encapsulate rebellion from the bottom up. When paired with the Latin word *socii*, meaning “allies,” we are given “social glasnost,” or allies in the grassroots awakening—an ideal signifying phrase that will be employed throughout this examination to encapsulate the current sweeping changes that are taking place, digitally and socially driven by anyone with an Internet connection, or mobile signal in both the developed and more increasingly developing worlds.

Are revolutionary digital and social changes actually taking place? Just turn on the television, flip open the paper, or more increasingly, refresh your Facebook or Twitter homepage. Thanks social media (defined here as web and mobile based technologies which turn communication into interactive dialogue between organizations, communities, and individuals), the answer is an incontrovertible yes. Even as this paper is being written, over seven hundred students have been arrested for taking to the streets of Montreal to protest government policies regarding rights to education and assembly (BBC 2012), another clash between agents and structures. According to traditional media outlets such as the *Montreal Gazette* (2012) and virtual blogs such as *Mashable* (2012), the protesters have been exercising agency through the employment of the plethora of social media tools at their disposal, utilizing tweets, status updates, YouTube videos, and personal blogs in order to organize tribally, engage digitally, and dissent socially. Multimedia blogger and reporter Roberto Rocha commented, “as the world has seen with other youth-led revolts, from the Arab Spring to the Occupy movement, tech-savvy students in Quebec have been quick to bypass the mainstream media and tell their own stories online” (*Montreal Gazette* 2012). The digital implosion of society has tribalized the scale of human interaction into a global village, and our ability to coordinate, report, and publish without constraints and without permission has grown exponentially. Gone are the days when people merely affected the media; now we are the media.

Social media has given us a communications toolkit that allows anyone to become anything, from journalist to protest organizer, with global reach and at little cost. Nothing like this has ever been remotely possible before, and it is spreading bubonically; it is happening everywhere with a contagious inevitability. It is in this simultaneously unstable and exhilarating climate of social glasnost that his paper begins its examinations and argumentations. It will inform and then employ a poststructuralist lens to revise a central debate in International Relations for the social media age, the primacy of agency or structure in contemporary human behavior. In short, what effect do social media have, if any, on this debate? Is social media some grand agential triumph over the structural forces of conformity, or will the

system inevitably quell these revolutionary technologies and their agents into an Orwellian complacency satisfied with a spoon-fed status quo? Has that shift happened already? Moreover, does this conflict even matter in an arguably Huxleyan society brimming with an excess of information suspended in a subjective hyper-reality? Well self-aware of the subjectivity and constraints of any examination of socio-digital humanity, social glasnost seeks to explore "how" and "if" these questions affect the agency–structure debate, as well as why, and to what extent, this matters within the larger International Relations discourse.

Social glasnost will accomplish such ambitions by proceeding in two parts: theoretical and practical. Part One, the theoretical, will frame and illuminate the nuances of the poststructural methodology as well as the aforementioned agency-structure debate in the social media age through an amalgamation of the work of contemporary poststructural scholars including: Jacques Derrida, R.B.J. Walker, Jim George, Michael Foucault, Richard K. Ashley, Vivian Jabri, and David Campbell. It will follow this methodological commitment by incorporating key socio-digital concepts such as: "the medium is the message," "implosion," "tribalism," "the global village," "network," and "digital" from foremost media thinkers Marshall McLuhan and Manuel Castells, respectively. Part Two, the practical, will explore and navigate the latent tribal sociability uncovered by the pervious conceptual frameworks, as well as the potential for change via media amateurization. It will then examine the nexuses of social media and political agency by surveying select real-world examples of political change initiated and sustained by social media from the Arab Spring and Occupy Movements to Kony 2012 and beyond. It will then compare and contrast prominent contemporary digital thinkers from both the cyber-realist and cyber-utopian camps in order to examine how censored social media and the Internet itself actually are. It will finally conclude with a discussion of the shirking gap between audience and victim and a critical allusion to "New McLuhan's" (Jean Baudrillard), "simulacrum" in the social media age. Social glasnost will do this to argue that while censorship practices are widespread on the Internet, social media functions as an imploding technology that provides agents an advantage over structures, through empowering people and ideas that revolutionize our media realities by circumventing authorization, constitution, and hierarchy.

Part I: The Theoretical

Pushing Past Structure: Viewing through a Poststructuralist Lens

In order to investigate the connotations of the implosion of International Relations in the social media age, it is important to first lay out a strong methodological commitment. Therefore, poststructuralism is employed for its critical temperament, defined for the purposes of social glasnost not as a theory, but a strategy of critique, a method evocative of action, a rejection of empiricism, positivism, and the discursive analogies aggressively proliferated by the structuralism discourse. It is critical of the methods of structural production because it adheres to an epistemology that we cannot transcend what we know because our knowledge is socialized by our realities, hence it inevitably shapes our interactions. Poststructuralism is not a rejection of the existence of personal truths, but as Jacques Derrida (1983) insinuates, it is a way of interrogating what exactly it means to say that something is "true." Thus everything we know, we can only know in relation to other things that we know, draping our knowledge and our reality in an omnipresent relativity. There are no objective truth claims because we cannot access an objective reality without employing our own subjective lens. Moreover, we cannot fix these cognitive limits, so we must resist the hardening of ontology, and replace any ontological claims of the "is" with the "seems that way." Consequently, social glasnost will foreground the provisional nature on any claim to truth because truth comes about in specific contexts, which is not to say that anything we think is true, but rather that truth is beholden to our context.

Social glasnost employs this lens because the problematiques associated with appealing to an absolute truth are particularly evident in this Coxian age of a worldwide transformation in technological development and accessibility. A society in which "people now have the tools to participate in the making of their own communities, one in which economic life is intrinsically connected to the social, environmental, and cultural processes that are essential to a sustained and meaningful way of life" (George 1994: 214). Subsequently, the poststructural resistance seeks to go beyond the repressive, closed aspects of modernist global existence. In opposing the large-scale brutality and inequity in human society, it is a resistance active at the everyday, community, neighborhood, and interpersonal levels, where it confronts those processes that systematically exclude people from making decisions about who they are and what they can be (George 1994). It resists any "autocratic presumption of the right to rule, whether this

presumption is defended with crude force or by appeal to some natural superiority given by gender, race, class or expertise" (Walker 1988). Furthermore, it advocates that if people are given the opportunities to understand these autocratic presumptions that constitute them, it is possible to alter power relations and overturn irreducible "realities"; "in these circumstances it becomes possible to say no, to ask why, to understand how" (George 1992: 215).

It is important to clarify that poststructuralism may seem inaccessible to the mainstream is because it is positioned outside our common senses. As mentioned above, poststructuralism is not a theory in the "Traditional" sense (defined here as realist or liberal IR theory, which make hard ontological claims of discursive truth), because it does not tell us what matters in the world. Rather, it is a method, a way of looking at conceptions of reality that are in search of a theory. Understanding this requires critical inflection apropos personal social constructions. For as much as we protest it, the self is touched by political, cultural, social, and technological influences and biases, meaning an absolutely "free" interpreter such as a wholly unconstrained self simply does not exist (Giroux & Nealon 2012). Therefore, by employing this self-reflexive epistemology grounded in a fluid subjectivity, poststructuralism critically engages with Traditional theoretical ways of thinking and analyzing International Relations, thus exposing the field for what it is: "a textual tradition *become* 'reality'; a particular reading of (Western) philosophy and history *become* trans-historical/trans-cultural 'fact'; a way of framing 'meaning' and 'knowing' shaped by Newtonian physics and Cartesian rationalism" (George 1992: 216). What this exposure means is that International Relations is a discursive and subjective process in which identities are formed, meaning is given, and status and privilege are accorded and constructed; a process of knowledge as power (George 1992).

In short, the epistemology of poststructuralism embraces difference, "the proliferation of perspectives, dimensions and approaches to the very real dilemmas of global life" (Campbell 1992: 5). In Foucauldian terms, "we must not resolve discourse into a play of pre-existing significations, we must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no pre-discursive providence which disposes the world in our favor" (Foucault 1984: 127). Therefore, the subjectivity of a poststructuralist approach clearly exists outside the realm of scientific theory and discursive truth claims about reality. However, it is important to note that the forthcoming examination of the historical agency–structure debate through this lens does not seek to dismiss dominant ways of reading International Relations. It seeks to emphasize that they are indeed readings, "that they can be read in different ways and that their status is derived not from any correspondence with an essential (real) meaning but from a discursive strategy intrinsically connected to a dominant form of (socio-historical) knowledge and power" (George 1994: 192). In summation, the practice of reading is far from neutral. It is congruent with a particular modern discursive practice that objectifies the text and detaches the reader from it; this is inevitable. The key is to be aware of such, and revitalizing the agency–structure debate in the social media age is dependent on this poststructurally-induced realization.

The Great Debate: Agency versus Structure in the Social Media Age

Rather than territory or natural resources, it is knowledge that has become the chief index of power (O'Neill 2005). It is through this lens of knowledge as power that this paper will employ poststructuralism to refashion the fragmentary debate between agency and structure for the social media age, professing the former over the latter. In this context, agency refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices, whereas structure refers to the recurrent patterned arrangements that influence or limit the choices and opportunities available (Barker 2008). Furthermore, the central debate essentially boils down to the question of socialization versus autonomy between theorists committed to the notions of methodological holism (actors are socialized and embedded into social structures and institutions that generally shape the individuals' dispositions towards, and capacities for, action), and those committed to methodological individualism (actors are central, a result and consequence of the actions and activities of interacting individuals). The nuance of such a pivotal deliberation is that socio-digital tools have modernized it in the social media age, an age characterized by the ability of individuals to transfer information freely, and to have instant access to information that would have been difficult or impossible to find previously.

In short, the advent of the social media age in which "people are more intellectually engaged than ever because of the Internet" (Lallana & Ny 1996), gives more agency to individuals to act independently and make their own choices through subjective constructions of reality. Therefore, as in the legal context, when new evidence affecting the

outcome arises, a case must be reopened. Understanding the poststructuralist politics of resistance, makes possible people's participation in decisions that define and determine their lives, and extends the processes of agency into realms where it has never before been present, such as the home, the workplace, and the processes of cultural production. According to Walker (1991), the scale and vitality of globally organized structures have begun to raise questions about the character and significance of the state as the primary focus of political identity, community, authority, and power in an age where information can be flashed to all parts of the world simultaneously. Despite all appearances, sovereignty is not a permanent principle of international order; "the appearance of permanence is simply an effect of complex practices working to affirm continuities and to shift disruptions and dangers to the margin" (Walker 1991: 448). Moreover, to work with the principle of state sovereignty in the social media age is to engage with deeply embedded discourses about political life, in which the analyses of contemporary structural change are often formulated as if conceptualizations of sovereignty are concrete, and therefore, must be either entirely permanent, or perpetually defunct.

Considering the fluidity of sovereignty, the subjectivity of reality, and the multiplicity of perspectives, the aim of working the agency–structure debate through a poststructuralist epistemology in the social media age is not so much to lay the framework for an emancipatory political project, but to rethink emancipation in terms of an aesthetic ethics in which an individual has the capacity to reinvent his or her mode of being. According to Jabri (1998), this call for a re-personalization of morality focuses attention on the subjectivity of the moral self and brings to the forefront questions relating to the individual's spatial and temporal location. A failure to come to such a realization suggests a confinement to a condition that allows the increasing internationalization and globalization of structures of domination. Therefore, we need not only a reimagining of political community, but a move beyond conceptions of the self as the sovereign subject of Cartesian rationalism (Jabri 1998). Such a turn requires the recognition of multiple sites of responsibility, and that contemporary political identities can no longer simply be defined in terms of citizenship located within the boundaries of sovereignty. For as Hall notes (1996), identities in the information age are increasingly fragmented and fractured, multiply constructed across intersecting and antagonistic lines, discourses, practices, and positions. "They are subject to radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (Jabri 1998: 595).

In summation, the poststructuralist approach to the agency–structure debate in the social media age laments for a critical form of ethicality that moves beyond current hyper-conformities by illuminating and emancipating (through agency), aspects of societies that are continually marginalized. We need to employ the new tools of social media to reimagine this normative discourse. As Jabri articulates (1998), this starts with the self, the individual self, as the problematized site of moral agency and creative expression. This is the poststructural agenda for the social media age, one that breaks Traditional ways of thinking and reading International Relations in order to recognize the growing reflexivity of the self within conditions which place every choice of lifestyle and self-actualization against a background that is increasingly global. This is the social media revolutionary's occupation, to perpetuate this message by performing it, while at the same time detaching from archaic conceptions of neutrality and reality. According to Ashley (1987: 429), "the job is a matter of doing interpretive violence to a tradition notorious for its celebration of violence." In doing so, it is important to adhere to a "Campbellian" methodology founded in the position that "social and political life comprises a set of practices in which things are constituted in the process of dealing with them" (Campbell 1992: 4), whilst simultaneously emerging from a "disparate and sometimes divergent series of encounters between the traditions of International Relations and themes increasingly prominent in other realms of political and social inquiry."

Mediums and Messages: McLuhan's Imploding Tribalization

So what does McLuhan, aptly labeled "Metaphysician of Media," whose fate has been sealed as an "intellectual servo-mechanism" of the techno-scape he so brilliantly described (Genosko 1999), offer to an examination of agency in the social media age? First and foremost, in 1962 McLuhan coined the timeless phrase "the medium is the message," meaning that it is not the study of the content itself, but of the way technical forms of media shape human perception that constitutes the most important theoretical issue facing media studies today. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium, results from the new scale that is introduced into our interactions by each extension of ourselves through new technologies. Consequently, social media has disrupted the

visual bias of passive forms of communication by creating a global village, a world contracted into a proverbial hamlet by social technology and the instantaneous movement of information from every quarter to every point at the same time, all through the dismantling of older patterns of mechanical expansion from the center to margins, from consumer to producer, from acquisition to involvement, from job holding to role playing (Stevenson 2010). In the global village politics is exponentially relocating, bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden "implosion," by which McLuhan (1969: 126) meant the "pulling out of spaces [and time] between components that is brought about by the speed of new media."

As Neil Hickey (2005) in his revision of McLuhanism notes, the total-field awareness engendered by the social media is enabling us, indeed compelling us, to grope toward a consciousness of the unconscious, toward a realization that social media is an extension of our own bodies. This imploding realization is reconfiguring all operations and associations by way of creating a heightened human awareness of responsibility, which sustained by communications, is creating networks that have no connecting center, extending our central nervous system into a sensuous global embrace with the rest of humanity. This renders redundant temporal (past and present) and spatial (near and far) distinctions. Under social forms of communication, the globe has become both historically and spatially visible because these new media technologies have restructured social life to the point that you do not need to be an expert to take part. We now inhibit an overlapping world that has obliterated much political hierarchy. The globe has imploded vertically, temporally, and horizontally. Moreover, according to McLuhan (1964), humanity has collapsed in on itself, returning to that village-like state characterized by oral societies; a tribalizing where the domain of politics is no longer readily separable from the sphere of communication by which policy is made public. More than just enlarging, the instant, real-time nature of the social media movement is decentralizing the family of humanity into a new state of multitudinous tribal existence that allows people to express their latent sociability.

The point of an accelerated social agency is not that it embraces and expands the power of a political structure that is able to colonize public discourse. Instead, the implosion of mass media amateurization and re-tribalization in the political domain is bringing about a society where the media is politics and politics is the media. A society of powerless individuals that are transforming into an interactive media-consuming mass, or as McLuhan occasionally puts it, an electronic circuit of energy, a cognitive surplus. Therefore, whenever we use or perceive any technological extension of ourselves, we necessarily embrace it. What McLuhan is touching on is this implosion of new technologies has tribalized human sociability, creating a digital society fluent in the language of network. Consequently, the electronically induced technological extensions of our central nervous systems are immersing us in a world-pool of informational movement, and are thus enabling humans to incorporate within themselves the whole of humankind (McLuhan 1964). The aloof and dissociated role of the individual amalgamated into the structure is succumbing to an intense new agential participation engendered by social media, which is bringing us back in touch with ourselves as well as with one another. Summarily, the potential in continued capacity of social media mediums of mass communication to shape the flow of interactive politics in a global village characterized by re-tribalization, is reason enough to draw on McLuhan.

McLuhan can be read in retrospect as a major anticipator of theories of poststructural break, of rapture from structure, leaving behind the pervious print-industrial-urban-mechanical era and entering a poststructural society with novels forms of cultural sociability. For while McLuhan provides brilliant insights into the role of media within modernity, and how the media functions as a key constituent of culture and society, McLuhan's advent of a poststructural era was signaled by his promulgation that we approach a technological process of consciousness, "where the creative process of knowing will be collectively extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media" (1964: 3). However, while Stevenson (2010) notes that McLuhan's views originally grew out of a particular socio-political environment that was rightfully excited by the possibilities created by new media, we need to remember that McLuhan's time was different from our own. This, however, is not to dismiss the ideas of the Metaphysician of Media as obsolete contributions. The important thing is not to treat McLuhanism as dogma, but to relate his many unique insights to the rapid implosions that are sweeping through the re-tribalization revolution. It is in building on McLuhan's suggestive insights and comments in new contexts that best respect his genius. For as McLuhan (1962) makes the analogy that the railway did not introduce movement, or transportation, or wheel, or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of pervious human functions, in that same vein, social media in the information age does not introduce more

sociability into society; it unlocks latent social tendencies within our species.

Expanding the Global Village: Castells' Socio-Digital Networks

After diving into the theoretical McLuhanisms that set the foundation for understanding the forces that encapsulate the social media age, it is important to understand the practical technicalities of digital networks. Castells (2001), a leader in the field, defines "digital" parsimoniously as computer based forms of content or technology, while "network" as a complex structure of communication constructed around a set of goals that simultaneously ensure unity of purpose and flexibility of execution by their adaptability to the operating environment. Their structure evolves according to the capacity of the network to self-configure in an endless search for more efficient networking arrangement, whilst relying on virtual and off line interpersonal connections that are sometimes local, sometimes global, and that typically involve multidimensional linkages between people, institutions, and parallel networks. Therefore, digital networks are both societal and technological in that they are similar to institutionalized social relations, such as tribal affiliations and political dynasties, but also distinct from them, because to be networked entails making a choice to be connected across recognized boundaries. This is a choice that is now more attainable than at any time in the modern past because of the technologies, especially digitized communication, that allow such connectivity. Digital networks are imploding the realities of communication. They are tribalizing and socializing the performative norms of International Relations in new and empowering ways. They are changing the way we interact.

When self-generated in content, self-directed in emission, and self-selected in reception, many can communicate with many. We are indeed in a new tribal communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, whose language is digital, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive. This, observed Castells (2009), makes unlimited diversity and the largely autonomous origin of most of the communication flows that construct, and reconstruct every second the global and local production of meaning in the public mind. It does this by resolutely refocusing analyses away from places and structures to flows and networks, and this imploding reorientation serves as an indication that we are transitioning towards new social and tribal configurations, McLuhan's global village is beginning to take shape, even if highly unevenly and far from being fully developed. Furthermore, Castells' analysis uncovers the important fact that networks are much more than tactical creations used in political uprisings. What is happening, rather, is a rewiring of the central nervous system of civil society, with unprecedented empowerment of individuals who take advantage of communication tools. This analytical framework is extraordinarily open, it, like the socio-digital network to encapsulates, is flexible, devoid of fixed hierarchy, with no clear beginning or end, contains not one but many points of view, and is highly reconfigurable, with elements to be dropped or added subjectively.

In 2009 Castells observed that in the age of the Internet, individuals do not withdraw into the isolation of virtual reality. Rather, they expand their sociability by using the socio-digital networks at their disposal, but they do so selectively, constructing their cultural world in terms of their preferences and projects, and modifying it according to the evolution of their personal interests and values. At the intersection of communalism and globalization, we find the culture of cosmopolitanism, "the project of sharing collective values on a planetary scale and thereby building a human community that transcends boundaries and specificity on behalf of a superior principle" (2009: 120). The concept is also applicable on a smaller scale both geographically and politically. Networks are the new communities. Appropriating social media, people have built their own system of mass communication. "This is in fact the reflection of the rise of a new form of socialized communication: mass self-communication" (Castalls 2009: 121). It is mass communication because it reaches potentially a global audience through Internet connections. It is multimodal, as the digitization of content and advanced social software, often based on open source that can be downloaded free, allows the reformatting of almost any content in almost any form, increasingly distributed via wireless networks.

In summation, according to Castells (2001: 4), "we are entering, full speed, the Internet Galaxy in a state of informed bewilderment." This Internet Galaxy is an interactive world originating out of the information technology revolution, the economic crisis and continual restructuring of capitalism, and the blooming of agency through cultural social movements such as libertarianism, human rights, feminism, and environmentalism. The interaction between these processes, and the reactions they continue to trigger have created "a new dominant global structure, the network society; a new economy, the information economy; and a new culture, the culture of real virtuality" (Castells 2000:

336). This digital network society is transforming politics from party politics (centered on political parties with diverging ideologies representing different social classes), to information politics. That is, politics fundamentally framed into substance, organization, and process by the mediums of a digital network system. Furthermore, in response to the rise of the digital network society Clay Shirky observed (2011: 29), "as the communications landscape gets denser, more complex, and more participatory, the networked population is gaining greater access to information, more opportunities to engage in public speech, and an enhanced ability to undertake collective action." In the political arena, these increased freedoms can help loosely coordinated publics' demand change.

Part II: The Practical

A Plausible Promise: Ridiculously Easy Group-Forming

Given digital socio-networks' flexibility and their interconnected but dispersed nodes, social media are useful tools in providing cohesion by providing infrastructure for networks effects that in a political context can be the foundation of a revolutionary movement. In the 20th century, making the news was almost entirely the providence of 'professional' journalists, the people they covered, or "newsmakers," and the legions of public relations soldiers who manipulated the masses (Gillmor 2004). The structures of publishing and broadcasting created large, arrogant institutions fittingly called "Big Media," who treated the news like a lecture. In short, they told you what the news was and you bought it. Today's news reporting is more of a conversation than a lecture. The lines have blurred, even imploded between producers and consumers, changing both ends of the spectrum. The digital socio-network of communication is now a medium for everyone's voice, not just the few who can "afford to buy multimillion dollar printing presses, launch satellites, or win the government's permission to squat on the public's airwaves" (Gillmor 2004: XIII).

Moreover, sociability and tribalism seem to be core human capabilities, showing up in almost every aspect of our lives as both cause and effect. These aggregate relations among individuals and groups, among individuals within groups, and among groups themselves form a network of astonishing simplicity (Shirky 2008). We have always relied on sociability for survival, and this centrality of group effort to human life means that any mediums adhering to the "plausible promise" (Raymond 1999), change the way groups function and have profound ramifications for everything from commerce and government to media and religion. Meaning that if a technology's purpose and vision are large enough to generate interest, yet realistic enough to inspire confidence (thereby offering plausible promise), it will enable new kinds of group forming capabilities through the epochal transfer of socializing tools from various professional classes to the general public creating an "architecture of participation." Coined by publisher Tim O'Reilly (2004) to describe the nature of networks that are designed for user contribution, the architecture of participation dictates that we need to pay attention to the architecture of systems if we want to understand their effects. The architecture of Linux, the Internet, and the World Wide Web are such that users pursuing their own interests build collective value as an automatic byproduct, a sort of Web 2.0 (web application features that facilitate participatory information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration).

In other words, the sociability of participatory technological mediums adds up to one big change: forming groups has become substantially easier. Furthermore, the cost (in an economic sense of anything expended) incurred by creating a new group, or joining an existing one has fallen astronomically in recent years. However, there are more than just technologies of sociability at play here. Economics matter. In theory, since humans have a gift for mutually beneficial cooperation, we should be able to assemble as needed to take on tasks too big for one person. In practice, the difficulties of coordination have prevented this from happening. In the past, when an organization took on a task, the difficulty of coordinating everyone needed to be managed somehow, and the larger the group, the more urgent the need. According to Shirky (2008), the standard, almost universal solution was to create hierarchy and to slot individuals into an organization by role. To a point, this approach clarified lines of responsibility and communication, which usually made very large organizations reasonably manageable. Nonetheless, an organization tended to grow only when the advantages that could be acquired from directing the work of additional members were less than the transaction costs of coordinating them.

By making it easier for groups to self-assemble and for individuals to contribute to group effort without requiring formal management, social media has radically altered these old limits on size, scope, and sophistication of

unsupervised efforts. While they have not removed all the limits that initially created the organizational dilemma, these tools enable alternative strategies for keeping that complexity under control. In short, the essential advantage created by new social media tools is "ridiculously easy group-forming" (Paquet 2002). The plethora of examples regarding humanity's employment of communications networks, the Internet, and mobile phones as platforms for group-forming has persuaded many scholars that we are social creatures which possess an underlying desire to be part of a group that shares, cooperates, or acts in concert. In the past this has always been constrained by transaction costs. However, now that group forming has gone from hard to ridiculously easy thanks to social media; "Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010: 55); we are seeing an explosion of experiments with new groups and new kinds of groups.

Tools of the Trade: The Mediums of Social Media

Communications tools do not get socially interesting until they get technologically boring. The invention of a new social tool does not induce change until it is around long enough for most of society to embrace it. Only when a technology becomes normal, ubiquitous, so pervasive as to be invisible do the really profound changes happen. According to Shirky (2008: 105) that time is now as "we are living in the middle of the largest increase in expressive capability in the history of the human race." In one generation, we have gone from being able to reach millions to billions. Now that mobile phones and the Internet have merged and spread the world has a platform that creates both expressive power and audience size. In 2009, 172 million smartphones were sold; in 2011, 468 million; and projected for 2015, 631 million, and while these are small numbers compared to the more than five billion cell phones in use worldwide, this kind of growth means that many more people will soon be able to access a richer array of content through their phones (Seib 2012: 44). Moreover, blogs show that we can have more technology without necessarily de-personalizing and alienating the global village. They point the way towards restoring voice to the citizenry at large, for in an ever-expanding population, with an ever more sophisticated elite set of knowledge workers setting the public agenda, blogs provide multiplicity to the quality of public discussion in the socio-digital age.

According to blogosphere theorists David Kline and Dan Burstein (2005), the blogging phenomenon may well represent an implosion of new forms of citizenship in the political and socio-economic sense, as well as a door-opening tool giving visibility and voice to diverse individuals with diverse ideas that could never have been seen or heard before. Furthermore, the newer incarnations of social media, such as Twitter and Facebook, are further examples of the marriage of personal political communication and journalism. To a considerable extent, these media are used more for reporting than for proselytizing (albeit with some mixing of the two). When one opens the Twitter site, the question posed is, "What's happening?" This replaced "What are you doing?" which lent itself to recitations of personal trivia (Seib 2012). The new query is likely to elicit a more reportorial response, although plenty of seemingly more personal information still pops up. While Tweets themselves are limited to 140 characters and so are basically a headline service, they can provide links to more substantive content, including video. In the midst of a street demonstration, the terseness that the 140-character limit requires works just fine. Moreover, Facebook offers a mix of journalism, declamation, and notice board. The
"friend-to-friend" multiplier effect can build audience at great speed.

Of course, critiques of the diversity of social media do have warrant. Social media users do not necessarily always reflect the larger population, which includes millions of poor, rural, illiterate, or semiliterate people who have little in common with young, well-educated activists. In a global context, however, with more than 800 million users and still rapidly growing, Facebook, if it were a physical nation, would be the third-most populous state in the world, behind only China and India (Seib 2012). Moreover, every new user is a potential creator and consumer, and an audience whose members can cooperate directly with one another many-to-many, is a *former* audience; people once considered as an audience have now actively joined the conversation. Even if what the audience creates is nothing more that a few texts, emails, or tweets, those messages can be addressed not just to individuals, but also to groups, and they can be copied and forwarded endlessly. Nonetheless, social media tools are not merely an improvement to modern society; they are also a challenge to it. New technology makes new things possible, and if enough of those previously impossible things start occurring, change can become revolution. The linking of symmetrical participation and amateur production makes this period of change remarkable because anything that increases our ability to

share, coordinate, or act increases our agency to pursue our goals in congress with one another.

Never have so many people been so free to say and do so many things with so many other people. In this dawning age of media abundance, access to the means of production and distribution is no longer limited to a "self-ordained priesthood of professionals" (O'Connor 2012, 17). The freedom driving mass amateurization of communications removes the technological obstacles to participation because as network technologies proliferate, new methods of creating content and new channels to distribute it have become available to everyone (Shirky 2008). Moreover, with barriers collapsing, power no longer resides solely within the structural legacies of the archaic media brands that are still grasping for control with their old methods and channels. With its influx of uncomplicated tools and ideals, social media has an enormous potential to make communication more diverse because many of the significant changes of the information age are not based on the newest technological developments, but on simpler tools such as email, mobile phones and social websites. Revolution does not happen when society embraces new technologies, it happens when society embraces its latent social and tribal behaviors.

People Formerly Known as the Audience: Latent Sociability and Tribalism

According to co-director of the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University Yochai Benkler (2006), humanity's latent social and tribal behaviors the come in the form of nonmarket creation of group value through "commons-based peer production," where the creative energy of large numbers of people coordinate and organize large, meaningful projects mostly without traditional hierarchical structures. As a result, there are more voices and more ways for empowerment that allow many people to act on the belief that life should be "more participatory, more decentralized, less dependent on the traditional models of organization, either in the state of the big company" (O'Connor 2012: 13). The power to coordinate otherwise dispersed groups through commons-based peer production will continue to improve because according to Benkler (2006), social motivations reinforce personal ones. New social tools that encourage membership and sharing are constantly being invented and however minor they may seem, these tools improve shared awareness, group coordination, autonomy and competence meaning that they can be pressed into service for political means (Benkler 2006). Furthermore, much of the world can now use these tools, and within a decade, most of the world will be able too. This inevitable increase in scale, both of the underlying social media and of the population that uses it, is creating a "network effect."

This network effect is the name given to networks that become more valuable as people adopt them. Robert Metcalfe (1995), the inventor of the Ethernet networking protocol, gave his name to a law that describes this increase in value. Metcalfe's Law usually states that the value of a network grows with the square of its users, so when the size of a network is doubled, its potential connections quadruple. If taken as adhering to plausible promise, then Metcalfe's Law conceives of value to both individuals and groups, but then what is likely to happen to various societies with the spread of ridiculously easy group-forming? Of course, there will be more groups, organizations, institutions created than have ever existed before, but is this a good thing? Good for whom? When seeking to address such subjective questions the principle challenge is not deciding whether these tools will spread of reshape societies. The proliferation of social media via the network effect has shattered the Coasian ceiling, and therefore, tools that facilitate group formation are less like ordinary technological change and more like an event, something that has already happened. In short, the old view of online as a separate space, a cyberspace apart from the real world is over. Now that computers and increasingly computer-like phones have been broadly adopted, the whole notion of cyberspace is fading. "Social media tools are not an alternative to real life, they are part of it" (Shirky 2010: 37).

Furthermore, this digital information revolution is allowing us to treat free time as a general social asset that can be harnessed for communal projects and goals. According to Shirky (2010), this shared global resource of interconnectedness can be referred to as a "cognitive surplus." Its potential however, is just that, a potential. The cognitive surplus does not mean or do anything by itself. To understand what to make of this resource, it is important to address not just what sorts of actions it makes possible, but the "how's" and "where's" of those actions because if a change in society were immediately easy to understand, it would not be revolutionary. Consequently, the revolution is centered on "the shock of the inclusion of amateurs as producers, where we no longer need to ask for help or permission from professionals to say things in public" (Shirky 2010: 52). Furthermore, this ability to speak publically and synergize our capabilities is so different from historical precedent that it is important to rethink the basic concept

of media. It is no longer merely something we consume. It is something we use. This fundamental change of how we interact is spurring the debunking of many previously stable conceptualizations of media.

Jay Rosen aptly described the participants in this new phenomenon as "the people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2006), which he defines simply as "the public made realer, less fictional, more able, less predictable." This post-audience network effect is rapidly breaking down the old constraints of organized action by embracing the network effect because according to Shirky (2010: 84), "we have always wanted to be autonomous, competent and connected; it's just that now social media has become an environment for enacting those desires, rather than suppressing them." However, the most promising way to think about social media is the realization that media alone does not change people's minds. Instead, the media first transmits opinions, and then they get disseminated via our latent sociability. It is this second social step that political opinions are formed. This is the step in which the Internet in general, and social media in particular can make a difference through the spread of both media consumption and media production, allowing people to publically debate a multitude of issues. It is for this reason that access to information is far less important, politically, than access to conversation because it compensates undisciplined groups by reducing the costs of coordination. "As a result, larger, looser groups can now take on some kinds of coordinated action, such as protest movements and public media campaigns, that were previously reserved for formal organizations" (Shirky 2011: 35). Furthermore, larger networks of citizens now have political clout, largely due to of social media, meaning that democratization is less about political change driven by elites and more about more about social networks (Howard 2010).

On the Ground: The Nexus of Social Media and Political Agency

According to Phillip Seib, Director of University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy: "media do not create revolutions; people with courage do. Media can, however, accelerate the pace of a revolution and help build its constituency" (2012: 41). When pitted against a government, a revolutionary movement can use social media as an information equalizer in telling its story, managing logistics, and accomplishing the many small communications tasks that must happen in concert if the uprising is to succeed for information via the Internet will reach people, and when it does, it will prove to be liberating and empowering. Furthermore, as US State Department Senior Advisor for Innovation Alec Ross affirms, the Internet acted as an accelerant during the Arab Spring because networks disrupt the exercise of power. They devolve power from the nation state, from governments and large institutions, to individuals and small institutions (Halliday 2010). The overarching pattern here is the redistribution of power from governments and large institutions to people and small institutions, for as uprisings began to take hold, organizers can and have used media in various ways, ranging from communicating within a neighborhood to reaching the outside world. The audiences are a mix of local, national, regional, and global activists and spectators, many of them eager to learn from their colleagues' successes and failures.

The examples of agency imploding via social media on the socio-digital network in the global village are limitless. Accordingly, recent events reiterate how the public sense of shared grievance and potential for change can develop rapidly. Dictators for a long time had many political enemies, but they were fragmented. So opponents used social media to identify goals, build solidarity and organize demonstrations. One such case was ignited on December 17, 2010, when a young Tunisian street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself afire, within months, much of the Arab world was ablaze as well (O'Connor 2012). This inspired Palestinian intellectual Rami G. Khouri (2011: 126) to claim, "the only serious mechanism for democratization is Arab public activism." Khouri continues that it is not well-meaning foreign aid, small experimenting groups of civil activists, or the manipulation of the public systems from the top; rather, it is the public taking to the streets and demanding to change from autocratic to democratic systems that create real change in the global village's socio-digital network (MacLeod 2011). Furthermore, while it is clear that Bouazizi's fatal self-immolation was a large part of the spark of what later became known as the "Arab Spring" or "Arab Awakening" that employed social media to dispose of dictators not only in his country, but in neighboring Egypt and Libya as well, this spark has also reverberated among other repressive rulers and regimes in Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, and beyond.

Ultimately Bouaziz's spark resonated as far away as New York City, where the Occupy Wall Street movement began nine months to the day after his desperate act in opposition to voicelessness and powerlessness (O'Connor 2012).

The Occupy movement gave rise in turn to more than a thousand similar protests around the world and the creation of a global movement. From London, Madrid and Rome to Athens, Tel Aviv and Tokyo, millions were suddenly on the march, demanding, as had Bouazizi, more respect, hope, dignity and democracy. They called themselves "the 99%" in opposition to the ruling 1%, the dictators like Ben Ali, Mubarak, and Gaddafi, but also those they dubbed "banksters," the investment bankers and financial manipulators who had gamed the economic system to their own benefit and then, supposedly too big to fail, forced the rest of society to bail them out. On the heels of the Great Recession, the American Autumn, like the Arab Spring that preceded it, became as much an economic as a democratic revolt. Moreover, beyond the symbolic level of Bouaziz's sacrifice, the social similarities between these movements are obvious. According to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2011), they all lie within the internal organization of the movements themselves, specifically the way these movements have all developed according to what they call a "multitude form," characterized by frequent assemblies and participatory decision-making structures.

Driven by this agency inducing "multitude form," implosion is continuing well into 2012. Take the newest activism phenomenon, "Kony 2012" as a prime example, a short film created by Invisible Children and released on March 5, 2012 to promote the charity's "Stop Kony" movement to make Ugandan indicted war criminal and International Criminal Court fugitive Joseph Kony globally known in order to have him arrested by December 2012 (Campbell 2012). Employing his self-titled blog, David Campbell critically examines the movement without adhering to the seemingly contagious temptation to engage in mindless critique. Regardless of right or wrong, Campbell (2012) argues "the campaign demonstrates you can get attention for distant stories, and that emotion and reason can work together." Furthermore, that the critics may be right in that the Kony video homogenizes and infantilizes the issue, but some of those same critics have homogenized and infantilized viewers of the video, for even with a flawed video, awareness can only be a problem in itself if you believe that people are just passive recipients rather than active viewers. Campbell (2012) then concludes that Kony reiterates the importance of social media, as well as the supply of agency that can drive attention amongst those who don't use traditional media. For as the implosion of social media has shown, it is important not write off the actions or motives of those who made Kony 2012 viral, even if we fervently wish it had been another video in another campaign.

Back to "Reality": Cyber-Realists vs. Cyber-Utopians

From the Arab Spring and the Occupy movements, to Kony 2012 and beyond, clearly social media has some effect. As Hardt and Negri (2011) note, much has been made of the way social media such as Facebook and Twitter have been employed in these encampments. However, the use of social media tools, including but not limited to: text messaging, email, photo sharing, and social networking do not have singularly preordained outcomes. Regardless of the assertion that communicative freedom is good for political freedom, it is still important to address the problematiques inherent in the instrumental modes of Internet statecraft. Moreover, such network instruments do not always single-handily create the movements, but they are convenient tools because they correspond in some sense to the horizontal network structure and democratic experiments of the movements themselves. Moreover, the ongoing controversy regarding what extent social media helped create the democratic surge of the aforementioned movements brought to the fore earlier disagreements between "cyber-utopians" and more skeptical "cyber-realists" such as Malcolm Gladwell and Evgeny Morozov (O'Connor 2012). According to legal scholar Dawn Nunziato (2009), the regulation of cyberspace has evolved so as to grant certain private entitles (search engines, broadband/backbone providers, and email providers) a certain amount of control regarding censorship practices. Furthermore, in *The Net Delusion*, Morozov (2011) claims that the idealism of a desecuritised World Wide Web being a Radio Free Europe on steroids is a "net delusion," which views the Internet as an alternative jurisdiction that is almost impossible to regulate, a network free of influence serving as a monumental forum for free expression.

Ronald Deibert, prominent digital thinker and Director of the Canada Centre for Global Security Studies as well as the Open Net Initiative, chimes in with his support for Morozov and Nunziato. According to a recent study by Deibert (2012), censorship now involves a panoptic fusion of regulation in which states are involved in best practice sharing alongside a multitude of other actors with a stake in cyberspace policies and practices. The majority of non-state actors are large private corporations who manufacture filtering software used to block content. Internet security companies, such as Fortinet, Secure Computing, and Websense, create off-the-shelf filtering products that block access to categorized lists of websites. While these products are primarily marketed to businesses, they are also

employed by censoring states like Tunisia (Secure Computing), Iran (Secure Computing), Myanmar (Fortinet), and Yemen (Websense) to block access to politically sensitive content (Deibert 2012). These governments simply "tick off" those categories of websites they do not want their accessed, such as "advocacy groups" or "militancy and extremist groups," the two most "securitized" categories in Websense's database. Moreover, Gladwell (2010) continues to offer his infamous critiques of social media at a more societal level through his phrase "slacktivism," defined as social media's casual participants who seek social change through low-cost activities that are high in sentiment, but low in useful action. Out of these and many more cyber-realists come two key critiques regarding the actuality of social media's agency in the global village.

The first critique, spearheaded by Deibert (2010), Morozov (2011) and others is at the practical level, arguing that the tools themselves are ineffective due to censoring practices by both public and private institutions. The second, by Gladwell (2010), sits at the theoretical, and insists that social media movements produce as much harm to democratization as good because repressive governments are becoming better at using these tools to suppress dissent. However, the response of the cyber-utopians is refreshingly tangible. The critiques may be reasonably accurate, but they are not central to social media's power. According to Shirky (2011) and Campbell (2012), the fact that barely committed actors cannot click their way to a better world, does not mean that committed actors cannot use social media effectively, for as the aforementioned examples show, social media is not a replacement for real world action, but a way to coordinate it. Moreover according to sociologist Zeynep Tufekci (2012), "slacktivism" can also be seen as the encroachment of politics into people's everyday worlds which tended to be dominated by mundane concerns of day-to-day existence, such as the consumerism transmitted through traditional media, making it a step in the unraveling of the professionalization of human rights and cause advocacy. So, not only are these people not slacking, they are acting symbolically in spheres that previously had higher barriers to entry.

Whether blogs, Tweets, Facebook or YouTube postings, or other social media tools are being employed, the effects of creating content on the individuals who do so must not be overlooked, for this is about the empowerment of previously disengaged citizens who discover that they now have a far-reaching and relatively safe means of expressing themselves. Furthermore, while governments and corporations are increasingly shutting down their communication grids to deny dissidents the ability to coordinate in real time and broadcast documentation of an event, this strategy falls victim to the "conservative dilemma." A term coined by media theorist Asa Briggs (2002), it refers to the dilemma of choosing between censorship or propaganda that is created when an institution accustomed to having a monopoly on public speech disagrees with popular opinion. However, neither choice afforded by the conservative dilemma is effective as a source of control over the global village. As Shirky (2011) notes, if a government were to shut down Internet access or ban mobile phones, the consequences would be two-fold. First, it would risk radicalizing otherwise pro-regime citizens. Second, it would risk harming the economy. In short, since institutions jeopardize growth when they ban social media technologies that can be used for both political and economic coordination, this approach created an additional dilemma. There can be no modern economy in the developed or developing world without working telecommunications, so any ability to shut down communications over large areas or for long periods is fundamentally constrained.

Conclusion: Transcending the Simulacrum

Due to the protection afforded by the tribal nature of the global village, and the mutual inclusivity of social media and a functional economy in the socio-digital age, the compass needle seems to edge in the direction of the cyber-utopians. For as Tufekci (2011) notes, cyber-realist rhetoric aside "television functions as a distancing technology while social media works in the opposite direction: through transparency of the process of narrative construction, through immediacy of the intermediaries, through removal of censorship over images and stories." Since the Vietnam War, television has never really shown the truly horrific pictures and footage of warfare and this massive censorship by mainstream news organizations from their inception has been incredibly damaging. According to Tufekci (2011), it has severed this link of common humanity between people "audiences" in one part of the world and victims in another. However, through person-to-person interactivity, social media creates a sense of visceral and intimate connectivity that is in direct contrast to television, which as mentioned above, is explicitly constructed to separate the viewer from the events. In short, the distance between those who report the news through social media and those who receive it is narrower than that between news organizations and their audiences. Furthermore, according to Seib

(2012), the providers and recipients using social media belong to the same species; they are not "the journalists" and "the public," between whom a considerable divide often exists.

Therefore, poststructural modernity is optic, characterized by radical semiurgy, by a proliferation of signs, spectacle, information, and new media (Kellner 2010). Hence, there is no activism that does not have a strong symbolic side. Today's "meaningless click" is actually a form of symbolic action that may form the basis of tomorrow's other kind of action. Take Andy Carvin, a self-proclaimed "Twitter anchor." According to Tufekci (2011), unlike traditional television anchors, Carvin is immersed in the story, his "tweets" are personal thoughts, his position is openly subjective, and his newsgathering process is transparent. Rather than the "final package" we are passively fed on the nightly news, Carvin's Twitter feed engages the audience because his news curation is holistic and messy. The pitfalls, the unverified stories, the difficulty of getting reliable news from closed regimes and war-zones, translation issues, misunderstandings, they are viewable by the audience in real time. The visibility of the process contradicts Baudrillard's famous assertion that we are increasingly moving towards a "procession of simulacra" (2001), in which the simulation (mainstream media) increasingly overtakes notions of the real, creating a hyper-real which breaks the link between representation and object, ultimately erasing any sense of reality. In short, while the Gulf War may have not happened according to Baudrillard, thanks to the agency introduced by the implosion of social media, people can ensure that everything from the Arab Awakenings to the Occupy Movements, most definitely did. The proof is in the status updates, tweets, and blog posts of the socio-digital, which are not relayed by an anchor, but by the medium of the people.

What the cyber-utopians and this paper are alluding to is that narrative and symbolic action seem to be central forces in human societies. Our actions show that we are a highly symbolic, socio-tribal species and signaling our preferences to others is a key dimension of human action. McLuhan's global village is a meta-concept; it's not just about what you know internally, but what you express and what others know that you believe and that you know that others know. Hence, the public sphere is formed not just through people's silently held beliefs, but also through overt signaling of ideology and narratives, and this signaling increasingly takes place online. As the poststructural foundation of social glasnost tried to point out, for the human animal, there are no pure facts or discursive truth claims. Instead, there are narratives, subjective interpretations of reality. We act differently depending on our embedded realities, even if we seemingly profess to the same "facts" as others. Humans accept, reject, and make sense of our surroundings within narratives. Therefore, all human societies operate in a world of socially constructed norms and ideals. As Tufekci (2012) reiterates, if norms shift, then action also shifts, however, not always in a straight line, and not always in a simple fashion because the world is complex and narrative power is but one kind of power among many.

In conclusion, building on his examination titled "What's at Stake in the Agent–Structure Debate?" (1989), David Dessler notes that when a methodology that challenges a more Traditional way of practicing International Relations is introduced, it faces two difficulties. First, the academic community's familiarity with established theories works to obscure and undermine fresh and unfixed ways of critically reading and thinking. Second, the new method's initial state of underdevelopment leaves it vulnerable to skeptical attacks from those who (correctly or otherwise) perceive any methodological ambiguities and uncertainties. This is exactly where social glasnost sits. Like poststructuralism, it is a rethinking of something traditionally accepted, and as such, it is merely the beginning of what I hope to be a much larger and more in-depth exploration regarding how social media endorses agency in that central debate. It is not infallible, nor does it strive to be, for like the younger generation that drives it, social glasnost is impulsive, irrational, and above all, open to a multitude of subjective interpretations. However, in times of revolutionary change (and looking at the headlines, it would be difficult to argue against now being such a time), the Traditional seem to play it safe, anchored down by some misguided sense of a discursive reality. In this sense, the future belongs to the flexible, for those employing social media do not cling to the idea of knowledge as spatially and temporally fixed. Social glasnost is fluid, its revolution being not just a political one, but a digital one that encompasses nearly every aspect of the way we live, work, play, vote, govern, and do business, and which is rapidly and radically transforming how we communicate. So stay flexible, stay political, and stay critical, and then tweet about it, because as author and futurist Alvin Toffler (1984: 271) used to say: "the illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn."

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