

The Politics of Social Media

Facebook: Control and Resistance

Master thesis

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Abstract

This thesis examines the governance of contemporary social media and the potential of resistance. In particular, it sheds light on several cases in which Facebook has met with resistance in its attempt to exercise control. This social networking site has raised concerns over privacy, the constraints of its software, and the exploitation of user-generated content.

By critically analyzing the confrontations over these issues, this thesis aims to provide a framework for thinking about an emerging political field. This thesis argues that discursive processes and (counter)protocological implementations should be regarded as essential political factors in governing the user activities and conditions on large social networking sites.

A discourse analysis unveils how Facebook enacts a recurrent pattern of discursive framing and agenda-setting to support the immediate changes it makes to the platform. It shows how contestation leads to the reconfiguration and retraction of certain software implementations. Furthermore, a software study analyzes how the users are affected by Facebook's reconfiguration of protocological assemblages. Several tactical media projects are examined in order to demonstrate the mutability of platform's software.

Foreword

My inspiration for this thesis came largely from the thought-provoking discussions in the New Media and the Transformation of Politics course. Being a heavy social media user, I have been eagerly following the innovations and controversies in the field. The dubious practices of certain social media corporations have driven me to delineate the means to control and resist these media. After several meetings with my supervisor I decided to focus on Facebook. Considering the many software implementations the platform made during the past few months, this topic has been very exciting to write about.

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Introduction

The emergence of Web 2.0 has driven the excitement about the new qualities of the Web as a platform (O'Reilly, 2004). The second stage of Internet development gave rise to a plethora of web-based applications that are characterized by interactivity, collaboration and information sharing. Moreover, these applications enabled Internet users to produce and publish so-called user-generated content with great ease. Users have become 'producers', which means that they simultaneously consume and produce information (Bruns, 2008). Web 2.0 platforms which facilitate the production and dissemination of information have been growing tremendously over the past few years. They allow for the involvement in participatory cultures to share individual expressions or creations (Jenkins et.al, 2008). Furthermore, people with similar interests and goals are enabled to connect with each other on blogs, social networking sites, video- photo- and music aggregators, social bookmarking sites and collaborative platforms, such as wikis.

The term 'Web 2.0' has been criticized for being a piece of jargon, whereas it also functions as a placeholder for a set of ideas. The Web 2.0 ideology is characterized by certain promises, such as increased democracy, openness, the end of hierarchies, the power of many, 'free' services, the rise of the professional amateur, and a rich and convenient user experience (Scholz, 2007). Several concepts are often used by enthusiasts to promote these ideas, including folksonomy (Vander Wal, 2007), wisdom of the crowds (Surowiecki, 2004), crowdsourcing (Howe, 2006; Shirky, 2008), remix culture (Lessig, 2008), and produsage-based journalism (Bruns, 2008).

However, instead of merely highlighting positive implications, this thesis is concerned with critically engaging with the cultural, economic and political dimensions of Web 2.0. It is high time to snap out of the dream in which Web 2.0 solely entails 'empowerment' and let reality sink in. As the following anecdote about a Facebook user illustrates, it is not the qualities, nor the promises, but the inadequacies that require critical attention.

Christmas, 2007. Sean Lane purchased a diamond ring online for his wife as a surprise. Without his knowledge or consent, the following status update appeared on his Facebook profile: "Sean Lane bought 14k White Gold 1/5 ct Diamond Eternity Flower Ring from Overstock.com"¹. Consequently, each of his Facebook 'friends' knew about the

¹ Nakashima, Ellen. "Feeling Betrayed, Facebook Users Force Site to Honor Their Privacy." The Washington Post. Published November 30, 2007 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/29/AR2007112902503.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

purchase, including his wife. Immediately she sent him an instant message asking who he had bought it for. She clicked on the link which appeared on his profile and saw the ring with 51 percent discount on it. Irreversibly, Facebook had completely ruined Lane's surprise.

This unfortunate scenario occurred due to the implementation of 'Beacon' in November 2007. Beacon was a controversial advertising system that sent user data from 44 partner websites to Facebook to allow targeted advertisements². If users visited one of the partner sites, some of their actions would be automatically published on their profile. Unsurprisingly, many privacy advocates voiced concern about the service.

Although contemporary social media Web 2.0 platforms like Facebook enable their users to communicate and interact with 'friends' online, the example above shows how immediate changes implemented in these media can easily have a negative impact on the users. Moreover, it triggers questions about the possible means of resistance to the control and power in these networks to prevent such occurrences.

The realm of social media is an emergent political field that is here to stay, given the continuous development and expansion of social media platforms. This has enormous implications for the millions of individuals who use social network sites (SNSs). Although social media enable users to interact in new, enjoyable and useful ways, they are also criticized for their privacy issues, constraints of their software, and the exploitation of user generated content (boyd, 2008; Neervens, 2009; Fuller, 2008; Petersen, 2008; Lovink & Rossiter, 2010; Fuchs, 2010; Pasquinelli, 2010).

To better understand this field in terms of power and resistance, this thesis untangles several cases in which social media have met with resistance in their attempt to exercise control. By critically examining these confrontations, this thesis aims to uncover the politics of social media. In doing so, the governance of a contemporary SNS and the potential of resistance will be analyzed. Hence, this thesis addresses the following question: ***How do social media exercise control, and how can this control be resisted?*** This research question will be examined from different theoretical perspectives, each of which focuses on particular means of control and resistance in relation to social media, to generate valuable insights. In the following chapter these perspectives will be discussed successively in order to explore the relevant theoretical concepts for this research project.

² boyd, Danah. "Facebook's "opt-out" precedent". Published December 11, 2007
< http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/2007/12/11/facebook_optou.html > (accessed June 21, 2010).

1. Mapping the Politics of Social Media

1.1 Network-making Power

Power is the most fundamental process in society, since society is defined around values and institutions, and what is valued and institutionalized is defined by power relationships (Castells, 2009: p.1)

Elaborating on the notion of 'network' several theorists have studied the social and political implications of networked communication (Marres and Rogers, 2005; Baringhorst et al., 2009; Van de Donk et al., 2004; Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001; Castells, 2009; Galloway & Thacker, 2007). One of the main proponents of a particularly influential perspective on power and resistance in communication networks is sociologist Manuel Castells. In his latest book *Communication Power*, he is concerned with how power exists and is exercised within networks (2009). Castells argues that communication networks are the key fields of power in the network society (Castell, 2009: p. 46).

The network society is considered to be a society in which a combination of social and media networks is the prime mode of organization on an individual, societal and organizational level (Van Dijk, 2001; Wellman, 2000; Castells, 2000, 2009). Various authors working from this perspective study how the social organization of networked communication affects global politics, the relationship between individuals and organizations or their nation-state, and protest politics (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001; Van de Donk et al., 2004; Castells, 2009; Baringhorst et al., 2009). These authors assume that networks are primarily controlled through discourse. Castells' *Communication Power* is a clear example of this: "Discourses frame the options of what networks can or cannot do" (Castells, 2009: p. 53). According to Castells, power in the network society is communication power (Ibidem). He describes two mechanisms - programming and switching - that turn networks into major sources of power, both inherent to his definition of networks.

Castells defines networks as "(..) a set of interconnected nodes (..)" which are "(..) complex structures of communication, constructed around a set of goals that simultaneously ensure a unity of purpose and flexibility of execution by their adaptability to the operating environment" (2009: pp. 19-21). Their goals and rules of performance are '(re)programmed' to the interests and values of the 'programmers'. Programming is enacted by actors who engage in decision-making to create, manage or affect networks; in this context it should not

be understood as the programming of software, but as a set of particular communication processes which determine the goals and the operating logic of a network. The second mechanism, by which the structure of a network is changed through a process of ‘switching’, is enacted by ‘switchers’, who (dis)connect various networks to form strategic alliances and fend off competition through co-operation (Ibidem: pp. 45-46).

Changes to networks at the level of programming or switching are the results of human action, which is framed by discourse (Ibidem: p. 53). Moreover, Castells argues that discourses are generated, affected, and diffused by communication networks, ultimately influencing individual and collective behavior by shaping the public mind (Ibidem). Both mechanisms operate with a type of power that he calls ‘network-making power’ (Castells, 2009: p. 45). Programmers determine or change the networks goals and rules of performance, whereas the switchers control the connection points - switches - between various strategic networks. These two holders of network-making power are not individuals by definition: they are positions in the networks, embodied by either a social actor in a specific network – a node - or a network of social actors (Ibidem: p. 47). Therefore each network needs to be understood in the terms that identify the power relationships specific to that network (Ibidem: p. 46). However, they all have a common trait: their programs are generated by “(..) ideas, visions, projects, and frames (..)”(Ibidem).

An example of programming is the networking of environmental activists and scientists that programmed the goal of acting with environmental consciousness about global warming by collectively using media networks to change the public opinion and awareness to ultimately influence businesses and decision-makers (Castells, 2009: pp. 305-306). An example of switching is the connecting of scientific with military networks by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to ensure its cooperation and domination in scientific networks and in US military technology³.

The utilization of both mechanisms is possible as well. For instance, Rupert Murdoch - a switcher and a programmer - strategically switches connections between cultural, media, financial and political networks and implements and enhances their specific programs (Castells, 2009: pp. 428-429).

Network-making power can be resisted by contesting social actors. Several authors have argued that affecting the (public) image of brands and corporations through digital media

³ Lu, Li et. al “ANN Network Theory Seminar Report: Manuel Castells.” Annenberg networks networks. Published March 3, 2010 <<http://ascnetworksnetwork.org/ann-network-theory-seminar-report-manual-castells>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

can be an effective strategy for social activists who engage in protesting campaigns (Baringhorst et al., 2009; Van de Donk et al., 2004). This will be further discussed below.

As a sociologist, Castells is concerned with the ways in which the exercising of power in networks influence society and drives societal change (2009). According to him, individual actors in the network society are nodes which can affect - but are also affected by - power relationships that are structured by networks (Ibidem: p. 20). Castells has a perspective on power, whereby the role of discourse and 'meaning' are indispensable: "Power is exercised by means of coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourses through which social actors guide their action" (Ibidem: p. 10).

For Castells, the role of discourse and the construction of meaning are essential to shape human minds through processes of image making in the media (Ibidem: p. 193). It is the second of four key tasks that, according to him, are inherent to the performance of media politics: secure access of power-holders to the media, formulate a message that serves the values and interests of power-holders, deliver the message through specific media and formats, and finance the execution of these tasks (Ibidem: p. 197).

However, when a large social networking corporation introduces new features or makes changes to their SNS, it immediately becomes 'news' which is spread throughout the blogosphere. These news events are framed differently through different types of discourse. As Linguistics Professor George Lakoff has put it: "Language always comes with what is called 'framing'. Every word is defined relative to a conceptual framework"⁴. Castells has identified framing and agenda-setting as mechanisms that power-holders utilize to construct a message through the process of image-making (Castells, 2009: p. 157). Framing is "(..) the promotion of a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution (..)" by selecting particular words to describe connected events and/or issues (Entman, 2004: p. 5). Adjacent to framing is agenda-setting, which refers to giving special relevance to particular policy issues. Framing and agenda-setting theory emerged from communication studies, which have focused on the mass media's influence on the political and public agendas (Cohen, 1963; McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Entman, 2004). Several studies in this field emphasize the importance of the discursive framing power of news and agenda-setting, which strategically can be used by political actors to promote certain interpretations to particular audiences (Entman, 2004;

4 Powell, Bonnie. "Lakoff, George. Framing the issues: UC Berkeley professor George Lakoff tells how conservatives use language to dominate politics." Newscenter. Published October 27 2003.
< http://berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2003/10/27_lakoff.shtml >(accessed June 21, 2010)

Cohen, 1963). In sum, this perspective raises the question: *How are social network sites discursively (re)programmed?*

1.2 Network(ed) Resistance

In the network society, the battle of images and frames, at the source of the battle for minds and souls, takes place in multimedia communication networks. (Castells, 2009: p. 302)

As mentioned above, network-making power can also be resisted by social actors who contest the actions of programmers and/or switchers. The concept of discursive resistance is embodied in Castells' notion of 'counterpower', which he describes as the capacity of "(...) social actors to challenge and eventually change the power relations institutionalized in society."⁵ According to Castells, "(...) power relies on the control of communication, as counterpower depends on breaking such control" (Castells, 2009: p. 3).

One way to exercise counterpower is reprogramming, which imposes new goals and operating logic onto a network, or networks, by engaging in discourse (Castells, 2009: p. 48). For example, in the 1990s there were many networked social movements who collectively protested against corporate globalization by utilizing electronic media networks to spread their message (Ibidem: pp. 345-346). Their exercise of counterpower not only put pressure on corporations and governments but also reinvigorated the anarchist ideal of autonomous communes and the goal to reorganize society through self-organized and self-managed networks: "By advocating the liberating power of electronic networks of communication, the networked movement against imposed globalization opens up new horizons of possibility in the old dilemma between individual freedom and societal governance" (Ibidem).

These social movements affected the image of globalizing governments and corporations by using the Internet as an effective tool for their protest. Professor of Communication and Political Science Lance Bennett has studied different configurations of networked protesting campaigns to identify a new form of global activism (Van de Donk et al., 2004: p. 144). Accordingly, the Internet and other digital media facilitate loosely structured networks, weak identity ties and the organization of issue- and demonstration campaigns (Ibidem). His perspective on online social activism is very much akin to Castells' perspective. However, Bennett argues that online activism has a downside as well: "The same

⁵ Castells, Manuel. "Communication, Power and Counterpower in the Network Society (II)." Revista Telos 2009 <<http://sociedadinformacion.fundacion.telefonica.com/telos/articuloautorin invitado.asp?idarticulo=3&rev=75.htm>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

qualities that make these communication-based politics durable also make them vulnerable to problems of control, decision-making and collective identity” (Van de Donk et al., 2004: p. 145).

Another author who elaborated on online protesting is Veronica Kneip. In ‘Changing Protest and Media Cultures’ she examines the practice of NGOs and/or coalitions of civil actors that try to influence corporate policies around sensitive topics such as labour conditions and environmental policy through Anti-Corporate-Campaigns. According to Kneip, trust and credibility is very important for large corporations because they are brand-centered, especially in the globalizing marketplace (Baringhorst et al., 2009: p. 173). Because brands represent their value, grassroots-organized attacks on corporate policies can be very powerful (Baringhorst et al., 2009). Would this also apply to the brand-image of large social networking corporations?

Most importantly, Castells argues that “Resistance to power programmed in the networks also takes place through and by networks” (Castells, 2009: p. 49). Resistance to power in networks can be fueled by information and communication technologies, and thus form networks as well. Arquilla and Ronfeldt have correspondingly coined the term *netwar*: a new mode of conflict in which “(..) numerous dispersed small groups using the latest communications technologies could act conjointly across great distances” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001: p. 2).

Several theorists have adopted Castells’ perspective to examine political resistance to the nation state or a specific corporation through networked structures of communication (Dahlgren, 2009; Baringhorst et al., 2009; Van de Donk et al., 2004; Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001). Moreover, social networking sites can function as the means to enact counterpower (Castells, 2009: p. 326). Castells exemplifies this with NGOs who start a Facebook or Myspace page to encourage the participation of citizens in online activism (Ibidem). Paradoxically this can also lead to the reprogramming of the social networking site itself.

Another way of exercising counterpower, next to reprogramming, is what Castells describes as “(..) blocking the switches of connection between networks that allow the networks to be controlled by the metaprogram of values that express structural domination” (Ibidem: p. 48). For instance, a class-action law suit may result in a temporary or permanent disconnection between powerful co-operating networks.

These mechanisms of resistance instigate discourse in various media communication networks and are used by social actors who contest the actions of power-holders. This triggers

the question: *How effective are these mechanisms in resisting the network-making power of social media corporations?*

1.3 Protocological Control

Code is the only language that is executable, meaning that it is the first discourse that is materially effective. (Galloway, 2004: p. 244)

Heretofore a sociological perspective of networks has been discussed, dealing with human agency in social and technical communication networks. However, the software studies perspective focuses more on the agency of non-human actors in networks. Several authors have studied 'control' within the field of software studies (Fuller, 2003; Fuller, 2008; Galloway, 2004; Galloway and Thacker, 2007; Neervens, 2009; Langlois et al., 2009). Network theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker are particularly relevant for their theory about control and power in distributed networks. Borrowing from Gilles Deleuze, they conceive of the distributed network as a 'diagram': "(...) a structural form without a center that resembles a web or meshwork" (Galloway, 2004: p. 3). The former perspective primarily focuses on human nodes in the network, whereas Galloway and Thacker are much more focused on the character of edges within a network, that is, the character of the connections between nodes. In *The Exploit* they describe 'protocol' as the contemporary form of control, referring to "(...) all the techno scientific rules and standards that govern relationships within networks" (Galloway and Thacker, 2007: p. 28)

Protocol is their answer to how control exists after decentralization in distributed networks: all protocols together shape a new sophisticated system of distributed control (Ibidem, p. 30). "Protocol is twofold; it is both an apparatus that facilitates networks and a logic that governs how things are done within that apparatus" (Ibidem: p. 29). The authors continue the theorization of Deleuze's notion of the 'societies of control', by focusing on how control exists in distributed networks. Their definition of networks is "(...) any system of inter-relationality, whether biological or informatic, organic or inorganic, technical or natural" (Ibidem: p. 29). Imperative to the operation of these networks is their concept of protocological control which "(...) brings into existence a certain contradiction, at once distributing agencies in a complex manner while at the same time concentrating rigid forms of management and control" (Ibidem: p. 31).

According to the authors, networked power in the control society lies with the entities

that have control of the exceptional quality of networks or their topologies (Galloway & Thacker, 2007: p. 154). Those who have the ability to leverage control through protocol by ‘flipping the switch’ to disconnect or connect nodes, edges and networks can be conceived of as the networks’ sovereign. Flipping the switch leads to the shaping of an exceptional topology, defined by Galloway and Thacker as a (temporary) mode of organization of a network that is uncommon to itself (Ibidem: p. 40). Sovereignty touches network control by designating an abnormal flow of program execution (Ibidem: p. 162).

An essential aspect of social media, where protocological control meets the users, is the User Interface (UI). Popular Web 2.0 social media facilitate dynamic user-generated content, feature rich interactivity, and have a ‘user friendly’ design in spite of their complex interfaces (Vossen and Hagemann, 2007). New techniques to publish or produce content are easily adopted by the users, as the complex technical processes are simplified through symbolic handles (Langlois et.al., 2009). Buttons, tabs, scrollbars, and many others enable the user to interact through the software at the level of the user interface (Fuller, 2008: p. 149). However, the user interface should not be confused with term interface, which according to new media theorists Florian Cramer and Matthew Fuller refers to the means to “(..) link software and hardware to each other and to their human users or other sources of data” (Ibidem). Thus, an interface should be regarded as a distinct area of control, in which top-down changes to the medium’s software and hardware connections can be made without immediately noticeable changes in the users interface. The front end, visible to the user, is indiscreetly affected by the back end, which Galloway refers to as the ‘internal face’ (2010).

Inspired by McLuhan’s notion of remediation, Galloway argues that an interface always contains another interface internal to it (Ibidem). Most often the internal face is kept invisible to the user, but it is nonetheless always moving crossways within the medium itself, influencing the user’s experience through the user interface. Complex back-end processes are made invisible for the users, as the internal face hides from the user’s point-of-view (Galloway, 2010). However, part of the internal face, which often can be revealed in code, is the Application Programming Interface (API).

Popular social media, like Facebook and Twitter encourage their users and third party developers to utilize their API: the “(..) specifications and protocols that determine relations between software and software” (Cramer and Fuller in Fuller ed., 2008: p. 149). To understand how protocological control is exercised through social software, the user interface and API should both be considered as control apparatus.

Software dynamically constructs models of its user as a character with certain rights, abilities and limits (Pold in Fuller ed., 2008: pp. 219-220). In preferences, settings, or control panels software users can manipulate the aesthetics and functionality of the software, resulting in a more personalized user experience (Ibidem, p. 220). However, as media lecturer Søren Pold points out: “The relations between the software’s senders and receiver(s) or user(s) are defined, most often within very strict limits” (Ibidem). In ‘Preferences / settings / options / control panels’, he argues that software interfaces are normally structured around principles which are set up by the sender(s), which allow the user to only change certain things. Many changes in the interface and in the use of software can only be changed by the “(..) higher powers in the hierarchy controlling the software (..), the technical department” (Ibidem). Control is exercised through predefined options, preferences, and possible actions which are imposed onto the user. As Master student of New Media Annewil Neervens has put it: “(..) there is freedom within social networking sites, but to a certain extent; it is only the sort of freedom that is allowed and regulated by the senders” (Neervens, 2009: p. 28).

In her dissertation ‘(Re-)constructing Social Networking Sites: Examining Software Relations and its Influence on Users’, Neervens argues that the constraining of the SNSs software creates a so-called ‘digital-lock-in’ for its users (Ibidem). They must abide by the constraints of the software in order to use it (Ibidem). According to her, social software has the paradoxical nature of allowing users to create a personal place on the Web, while at the same time facilitating the conditions to expose the user (Ibidem). Furthermore, the digital lock-in is not limited to the use of a social networking service as a single space, because the use of the API by third-party developers or users possibly extends software constraints to third-party applications (Neervens, 2009: pp. 31-32). Although the ‘digital lock-in’ of social media seems to conspicuously limit the users in their actions, the constraints in social software should not be taken for granted.

According to Fuller, an understanding of the complex interactions in software processes is required to undertake theorization of software (2003). In 'Behind the Blip: Software as Culture', he stresses the need for critical work in the research area of software studies that goes beyond treating software merely as a functional tool (Ibidem). He calls for an emphasis on software as a cultural phenomenon. In respect to software constraints, Fuller argues that: “Software is a place where many energies and formations meet. At the same time, it constantly slaps up against its limitations, but these are limitations of its own making, formulated by its own terms of composition” (Fuller, 2003: p. 15). More recently, stemming from software studies, Assistant Professor of Communication Ganaele Langlois et al. have

proposed a so-called ‘code politics’ approach to critically examine user generated content in relation to the software of commercial Web 2.0 spaces (2009).

A code politics study examines “(..) the articulations between the user, the software and the interface (..)” to “ (..) understand the conditions of code and software in relation to power, capital and control’ (Ibidem). In ‘Mapping Commercial Web 2.0 Worlds: Towards a New Critical Ontogenesis’, the authors argue that commercial platforms are essentially concerned with establishing the techno-cultural conditions within which user generated content is re-channelled through techno-commercial networks and channels (Ibidem). In accordance with Neervens’ argument, this re-channeling is encouraged by making the application programming interface available to third parties.

Langlois et al. call for a critical intervention in the Web 2.0 ontogenesis. That is, recognizing the cultural importance and critical potentials to intervene in the “(..) constant production and reproduction through the deployment of material, technical, semiotic, commercial, political and cultural flows (..)” (Langlois et al., 2009). Referring to Galloway, the authors assert that the rise of commercial Web 2.0 platforms requires a focus that goes beyond the informational dynamics of single or nested protocols, as these websites are assemblages of interacting protocols (Ibidem). They act as modular elements to operationalize different logics in the convergence of systems, networks and protocols to facilitate specific conditions of possibility, in the process of interconnecting users (Ibidem). Furthermore, to study protocological assemblages, Langlois et al. propose a platform-based methodology that “(..) facilitates a process of making visible the ways in which protocols are articulated so as to channel information in specific ways and thus enact specific economic, legal, and cultural dynamics.(..)” (Ibidem). By critically examining instances of protocological articulations, the correlations between protocol and the users’ control, the user interface and particular techno-cultural conditions can be mapped.

This software studies perspective allows us to analyze instances of protocological control in social media, with techno-cultural conditions and re-channeling in mind. Hence, the following questions will be addressed: *What are the implications of protocological control, exercised by and in social networking sites? How does protocological control affect the users in these media?*

1.4 Counterprotocological Resistance

The concept of resistance which reflects protocological control is defined by Galloway and Thacker as ‘counterprotocological control’. It is not an oppositional dynamic but rather an accentuation via existing protocols to expose new capacities in the network:

“Counterprotocological practices can be understood as tactical implementations and intensifications of protocological control” (Galloway and Thacker, 2007: p. 99). The authors also speak of processes of ‘hypertrophy’ rather than Luddite-inspired destruction of technology (Ibidem: p. 98). Furthermore, the authors do not like to refer to counterprotocological control as a type of resistance, because the protocol is not ‘countered’ or resisted, but applied in a different way, to “(..) take technology further than it is meant to go” (Galloway and Thacker, 2007: p. 98).

This is demonstrated in Galloway and Thacker’s definition of ‘exploits’, which are instances of counterprotocological control whereby the very elements of protocol that enable distributed networks are used against those networks. In other words, they are holes in existent technologies through which potential change can be projected (Galloway and Thacker, 2007: p. 81). The authors’ prominent example of an exploit is a computer virus.

However, they arguably could have elaborated on more examples of exploits. For instance, the use of the open-source Web browser plug-in called ‘Facebook Beacon Blocker’⁶ blocked the execution of scripts from Facebook to track the users’ activities on websites who took part in the Beacon project, thus undoing the connection between Facebook’s network and the network of partner websites. This plug-in could be considered to utilize an exploit, because protocol was implemented in such a way that the users’ activities were neither tracked from partner sites, nor sent to Facebook. This raises the following question: *What are the implications of utilizing ‘exploits’ in social network sites?* This question can be approached by discussing the concept of tactical media (Garcia and Lovink, 1997; Richardson, 2002; Lovink and Schneider, 2003).

In ‘Interface as a Conflict of Ideologies’ Mushon Zer-Aviv, New York University open-source lecturer and media activist, defines hacking as a tactical media approach.⁷ Tactical media have been described by various authors as ‘hit-and-run’ media practices to politically criticize, disrupt, or go beyond rigid dichotomies and thus as a form of activism

⁶ Weiner, Nate. “Block Facebook Beacon” The Idea Shower. November 7, 2007
<<https://addons.mozilla.org/nl/firefox/addon/10497>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷ Zer-Aviv, Mushon. “Interface as a Conflict of Ideologies.” Published, March 23, 2010.
<<http://www.mushon.com/2010/03/23/interface-as-a-conflict-of-ideologies/#more-183>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

(Garcia and Lovink, 1997; Richardson, 2002; Lovink and Schneider, 2003). More recently, Galloway has defined tactical media as “(..) the phenomena that are able to exploit flaws in protocological and proprietary command and control, not to destroy technology, but to sculpt protocol and make it better suited for people’s real desires” (Galloway, 2004: p. 176).

In accordance with Galloway and Thackers’ perspective on counterprotocological control, Zer-Aviv argues: “In the case of interface, the goal of tactical media is not to refrain from engagement with systems, but rather the opposite – extend it”. By moving from tactical media to what he terms ‘strategic media’ practices, Zer-Aviv shows that the resistance to software interfaces can be turned into ‘hit-and-stay’ practices. This conforms to the ideal of tactical media, as described by media theorist, net critic and activist Geert Lovink: “The ideal of tactical media is to be more than a temporary glitch, a brief instance of noise or interference” (Lovink, 2009: p. 243). In his book, *Zero Comments: Blogging and Critical Internet Culture*, Lovink argues that tactical media projects are disruptive, whereas they are characterized by ephemerality as well: “In essence, it doesn’t break with the strategies of disappearance” (Ibidem). However, Zer-Aviv argues that although strategic media may have the same goals as tactical media, it “(..) promises a more sustainable approach to system building, a system that can mature and grow and not only oppose power, but actually propose viable amendments”⁸.

Zer-Aviv’s example, Greasemonkey⁹, is a Firefox Internet browser extension which allows users to install ‘userscripts’ to modify websites on-the-fly and automatically execute Javascript hacks. Without affecting the source of the website, or using coding skills, users can simply change how the page is displayed, permanently if they want to. Moreover, by experimenting with open-source software and hacks, the users of social media can potentially expand their freedom to make certain changes that originally are not allowed or made possible by the original software programmers. In other words, they might do away with certain software constraints. This potential leads to a series of questions: *Can users break out of the digital lock-in? Can the hacking of SNSs through exploits be considered as an effective type of resistance to the control, embedded in the protocols of the SNS’s software?*

Furthermore, Galloway and Thacker argue that counterprotocological practices should avoid being anthropomorphized. However, if it is viewed as resistance to protocological

⁸ Zer-Aviv, Mushon. “Interface as a Conflict of Ideologies.” Published, March 23, 2010.

<<http://www.mushon.com/2010/03/23/interface-as-a-conflict-of-ideologies/#more-183>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁹ Lieuallen, Anthony et. al. Add-ons voor Firefox. Published April 8, 2009

<<https://addons.mozilla.org/nl/firefox/addon/748>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

control in social media, human motivation is intrinsic to it, even if there is agency of an object at play. Thus, in respect to the perspective discursive control this raises a question about the relation between discursive and technical forms of resistance: *How is discourse implicated in counterprotocological practices?*

1.5 Exploitation

Whenever a social media corporation exercises protocological control or network-making power, often the objective is to make money by exploiting user-generated content. Beacon is a prime example. The business models and strategies of social network sites can be thought of as ways to exploit users. They are communication networks in which millions of individual users produce and consume an immense amount of data every day. Today's network culture seems to be characterized by the extraordinary and growing abundance of informational output which runs parallel to the growing popularity of social network sites. To gain a better understanding of social media's impact on the digital economy, the critique of exploitation needs to be discussed on a theoretical level. Various authors have worked from the perspective of the exploitation of immaterial labour (Lazzarato, 1996; Terranova, 2004; Pasquinelli, 2008; Langlois et. al., 2009; Lovink & Rossiter, 2010)

In *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, Cultural Studies Professor Tiziana Terranova argues that "(..) information is no longer simply the first order of signification, but the milieu which supports and encloses the production of meaning" (Terranova, 2004: p. 9). According to her, 'free labour' is a widespread feature of the digital economy which is immanent to late capitalism (Ibidem: p. 94). "Late capitalism does not appropriate anything: it nurtures, exploits and exhausts its labour force and its cultural and affective production" (Ibidem). From this perspective, certain social media networks can be considered to exploit the free immaterial labour of users who produce digital content.

Matteo Pasquinelli, a new media theorist who elaborates on Terranova's argument, focuses on user-generated content in new media. In 'The Ideology of Free Culture and the Grammar of Sabotage' he argues that in the digital economy 'cognitive capitalism' is made possible, because the reproduction of immaterial objects is much easier and faster. This allows companies to extract 'rent' from user-generated content and to profit from their commodity value and workforce. Working from a Neo-Marxist perspective, Pasquinelli describes how big corporations (e.g. Google) make money from the production of user-generated content

without producing anything themselves. He views this as a parasitic form of cognitive capitalism where the profits, anonymously made, are not shared with the content producers (Pasquinelli, 2008: p. 8). According to him, social networking sites can be conceived of as networked information spaces which are used for capitalist accumulation. Pasquinelli builds on the existing critique surrounding the ideology of Creative Commons (CC) (2008). By discussing the arguments of Florian Cramer and Anna Nimus, he shows that the CC license preserves many restrictions and maintains the philosophy of reserving rights of copyright owners, rather than productively stimulating freedom for its audiences (Pasquinelli, 2008: p. 6). From this perspective it could be argued that SNSs are not merely networked information spaces of cognitive capitalism, but also networks that potentially problematize data ownership. For example, in 2009 Facebook controversially claimed eternal ownership of user-generated data, through its terms of service, which became a contentious issue¹⁰. Intellectual Property rights in relation to user-generated content are relevant for analyzing the exploitation in social media, because through the terms of use, corporations can actually reserve rights for the social networking site to own and exploit their data, rather than providing their users with freedom and rights concerning their data.

According to Lovink and the Australian media theorist Ned Rossiter, popular social networking sites function as ‘informational gold mines’ in which the selling of aggregated user data and advertising space turns the productive capacities of their users into profits for the sites’ owners (Lovink and Rossiter, 2010). In their view, social networks are designed to be exploited; they always will be data-mined (Ippolita, Lovink and Rossiter, 2009).

Furthermore, these authors signify the deadlock of changing ‘labour conditions’ in large corporately controlled social networking sites: ”No longer can the union appeal to the subjugated, oppressed experience of workers when users voluntarily submit information and make no demands for a share of profits” (Lovink and Rossiter, 2010).

However, a distinction needs to be made between ‘exploited’ users, who are only using Facebook for their ‘refusal of work’, and those whose job it is to use social media advertising platforms as a marketing tool. These users might, for instance, utilize tools like Google AdSense or APIs from social networkings sites to advertise and sell products. Thus, generally, social media corporations seem to exploit the data from their users, but also indirectly assist them in creating monetary value through the immaterial labour of others.

¹⁰Raphael, JR. “Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint.” PCWorld. Published February 17, 2009. <http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html?tk=rel_news> (accessed June 21, 2010).

Nevertheless, compared to any user, the aggregating parasitic corporations are making a lot of money. Rent-extracting corporations are growing at a terrifying rate, which signifies the importance of this matter. This raises the following questions: *How does the notion of 'exploitation' apply to the digital media content production in social networking sites? How does data ownership figure into this issue?*

1.6 Resisting Exploitation

It is when the technological infrastructure and design of these sites is combined with capitalism that the architecture begins to oscillate between exploitation and participation. (Petersen, 2008)

If we consider the exploitation of user-generated content as a specific form of domination of users of social media, the potential of resistance must be theoretically explored as well. As previously explained, when SNSs exercise protocological control or network-making power, it often relates to new forms of money-making and to new ways to exploit immaterial labor. This implies that counterprotocological control and counterpower should also be examined as resistance to exploitation.

Pasquinelli has developed a particular concept of resistance to the exploitation in networked information spaces. He expands the notion of the 'commons' by describing it as a dynamic space, a hybrid of material and immaterial. The commons, according to him, is a continuous exchange of energy, commodity, technology, knowledge and money (Pasquinelli, 2008: p. 3). To 'defend' this space, he asserts that we need to build the 'autonomous commons', based on four principles:

- 1) allow not only passive and personal consumption but even a productive use of the common stock — implying commercial use by single workers; 2) question the role and complicity of the commons within the global economy and place the common stock out of the exploitation of large companies; 3) are aware of the asymmetry between immaterial and material commons and the impact of immaterial accumulation over material production (e.g. IBM using Linux); 4) consider the commons as an hybrid and dynamic space that dynamically must be built and defended. (Pasquinelli, 2008: p. 6)

The concept of autonomous commons is founded on the principle of sabotaging cognitive capitalism, instead of being undermined by it (Pasquinelli, 2008: p. 12). However, he does not elaborate on the realization of constructing the autonomous commons, nor does he give any concrete examples, thus turning it into a seemingly utopian model of resistance against

exploitation of user-generated content. The realization of the autonomous commons could be examined by discussing open-source software¹¹ as means to create more ‘autonomous’ social networks.

As opposed to the autonomous commons, the concept of ‘organized networks’, put forward by Lovink and Rossiter (2005), implies more than just resisting value subtraction from networks by brick and mortar institutions. ‘Organized networks’ is meant to be read as a radical proposal which aims to replace the term virtual community (Lovink, 2009: p. 241).

According to the authors, ‘community’ ‘interaction’ and ‘involvement’ are idealistic constructs used by community theorist who are unable to grasp the political potential of networks as a social and cultural form (Ibidem: p. 242). Organized networks can be understood as new institutional forms, situated in digital media, which function as strategic sites of knowledge production through collaboration between formal social relationships (Ibidem: pp. 243-244). They are a “(..) product of command and control logic, and yet they undermine it at the same time” (Ibidem: p. 240). In respect to tactical media, organized networks go beyond intervention, and thus are concerned with their sustainability (Ibidem: p. 243). Moreover, they “(..) emphasize horizontal, mobile, distributed and decentralized modes of relation” (Lovink and Rossiter, 2010). Organized networks are informed by open-source movements, because of their characteristics: sharing, a culture of openness and project-based forms of activity (Ibidem). In reference to their construction, the authors call for change in social software: “Better social networks are organized networks involving better individuals – it’s your responsibility, it’s your time. What is needed is an invention of social network software where everybody is a concept designer” (Ippolita, Lovink and Rossiter, 2009). From this point of view, it is interesting to consider the implications of open-source social networking software.

In sum, this paragraph raises the following research questions: *Is it possible to realize the construction of the autonomous commons to resist to the exploitation in social media? To what extent can exploitation be resisted against through counterprotocological control and counterpower? What are the implications of open-source social networking software for the exploitation of user generated content, and how does this relate to notion of organized networks?*

¹¹The development of open-source software as means to create social networks will be discussed in the empirical analysis.

1.7 Methodology

The three theoretical perspectives discussed above allow us to examine particular aspects of the politics of social media. The perspective according to which networks are controlled through discourse can reveal how social media corporations and contesting actors enact processes of image-making through framing and agenda-setting, but it obscures how alterations in the technological architecture can influence the governance of social media. For this matter I will turn to the software studies perspective, through which instances of protocological control can be examined. It should be kept in mind that an overly focus on protocol control conceals how this type of control is authorized by and articulated in particular techno-cultural conditions. Therefore, this cohesion will be examined in the software study chapter. The third perspective helps to unveil how user-generated content is exploited by corporations. It does, however, not distinguish between individuals who consciously and unconsciously take part in this process. Similar to the theoretical chapter, each of the three research chapters will apply a distinct approach to control and resistance.

The research questions raised above will be addressed through several case studies, in which social media have met with resistance, in their attempt to exercise control. This thesis primarily focuses on control and resistance in Facebook and will refer to other social media, when relevant. The worldwide popular social media platform has millions of registered users and immense collections of user data which continue to grow. Facebook is a highly relevant platform to examine because it has undergone many top-down changes, which have subsequently led to periods of immediate contention. These instances have generated many concerns over privacy, the constraining software and the exploitation of user generated content. Moreover, the corporation has been very aggressive in its attempts to monetize its network.

The empirical enquiry consists of a discourse analysis, a software study, and an analysis of strategies of (resisting) exploitation. In the second chapter I will conduct a discourse analysis of blog posts and news articles that were published before, during or after particular periods of contention. This will reveal how the corporation and contesting actors engage in the process of image-making through discourse, and how the discursive mechanisms of framing and agenda-setting are put to use.

Subsequently, the software study in the third chapter consists of examining how protocological control and counterprotocological control are exercised in Facebook, and what

their implications are on user control. Firstly, several instances of protocological control will be analyzed, followed by an analysis of tactical media projects and initiatives that utilize exploits. In each of these instances specific techno-cultural conditions will be identified. The fourth chapter will consist of an analysis of money-making strategies to examine the exploitation of user-generated content in this medium. The potential of resisting exploitation will be discussed through the evaluation of exercising counterpower and utilizing exploits, as well as through the realization of the autonomous commons. Subsequently, the development of alternative open-source social media software and its implications on social networking sites and organized networks will be analyzed.

Finally, in the conclusion I will describe by what means and to what extent the corporation's instruments of control have been resisted. Last but not least, I will discuss several political theories to shed more light on the notion of the politics of social media and its implications for various modes of government.

The data to conduct this research was gathered by querying¹² the Web for relevant news articles, blog posts, press releases, applications and hacks. In most cases, the data relates to a particular issue of contention. These are entry points for this research project, as social media controversies are instances of 'articulations' which can be examined. Drawing on the French sociologist Bruno Latour, articulations stand for the established relations between interacting human and non-human actors in particular occasions (Latour, 1999: pp. 141-142). In addition, three interviews have been conducted with the initiators of tactical media projects (Appendices A - C).

¹² The list of used search key words can be found in Appendix D.

2 Network-making Power vs. Counterpower

2.1 Introduction

In the network society, discourses are generated, diffused, fought over, internalized, and ultimately embodied in human action, in the socialized communication realm constructed around local–global networks of multimodal, digital communication, including the media and the Internet. (Castells, 2009: p. 53)

In this chapter several cases will be analyzed in which Facebook's attempt to exercise network-making was countered by contesting social actors. The goal is to examine how the corporation and contesting actors engage in the process of image-making through discourse, before, during or after instances of (re)programming or switching. Is it possible to evidently identify framing and/or agenda-setting? How does this affect the construction of meaning in relation to Facebook? How effective are the instances of (re)programming and/or blocking/disrupting the switches?

Facebook, founded by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004 as a small Harvard student network, has grown rapidly over time. It's currently the biggest social media service with over 500,000,000 registered users¹³. The Beacon project is just one of the many implementations, which have met with criticism from users, bloggers, civic action groups, public interest organizations, and academia. The Wikipedia entry called 'Criticism of Facebook'¹⁴, created in 2007, accumulates a huge collection of Facebook issues. For this discourse analysis, however, I will focus on three particular cases that have turned into contentious issues: Beacon (2007-2009), the changing privacy policy (2009) and Facebook's Open Graph (2010). Firstly, I will describe the discursive reasoning by Facebook executives and contesting actors before, during and after the periods of contention. This will be followed by an analysis of image-making through framing and agenda-setting. To conclude, the effectiveness of discursive (re)programming and switching or blocking/disrupting the switches will be evaluated.

¹³ Wauters, Robin. "Zuckerberg Makes It Official: Facebook Hits 500 Million Members", TechCrunch. Published July 21, 2010 < <http://techcrunch.com/2010/07/21/facebook-500-million/> > (accessed July 27, 2010)

¹⁴ Wikipedia. "Criticism of Facebook." < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Facebook > (accessed June 21, 2010)

2.2 Beacon

Facebook's press release¹⁵ in November 2007 presented Beacon as 'a new way to socially distribute information on Facebook'. Moreover, it stated that users gained the ability to share their actions with the 44 partner websites in order to receive targeted advertisements. Several testimonies of partners in the program depicted Beacon's functionality as something enjoyable and effective; by the automatic sharing of information through activities on third-party websites users can, for example, let friends know what movie they saw or what their vacation destination would be. Crucially, the press release suggested that Facebook retained a 'philosophy of user control' in which the users have control over their privacy.

However, shortly after the implementation of Beacon, thousands of users contested Facebook's move, through a protest/petition group on Facebook, set up by the civic action group Moveon.org, which collectively emphasized that their privacy control was at stake¹⁶. The Facebook protest group grew to 50,000 members in nine days¹⁷. The language framing employed by the contesting actors painted a picture in which the user lost the control over their privacy, rather than 'retaining' it like the press release had suggested.

Facebook must respect my privacy. They should not tell my friends what I buy on other sites--or let companies use my name to endorse their products--without my explicit permission.¹⁸

Matt in New York already knows what his girlfriend got him for Christmas... Why? Because a new Facebook feature automatically shares books, movies, or gifts you buy online with everyone you know on Facebook. Without your consent, it pops up in your News Feed--a huge invasion of privacy.¹⁹

Beacon was launched as an opt-out system, which means that the users' ability -as described in the press release- to share their actions on third-party websites became a privacy intrusive inevitability instead. The implementation of Facebook's Beacon can be thought of as an attempt to exercise network-power through programming because the corporation projected new goals onto Facebook through a press-release that spread across online media-networks.

¹⁵ Facebook press release. "Leading Websites Offer Facebook Beacon for Social Distribution." Published Nov. 6, 2007 < <http://www.facebook.com/press/releases.php?p=9166> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁶ Facebook group. "Petition: Facebook, stop invading my privacy!" < <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5930262681> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁷ Facebook group. "Petition: Facebook, stop invading my privacy!" < <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5930262681> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁸ Adam G et. al. "Facebook must respect privacy." MoveOne.org. Published November 20th, 2007 < <http://civ.moveon.org/facebookprivacy/071120email.html> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁹ Facebook group. "Petition: Facebook, stop invading my privacy!" < <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=5930262681> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

Although Castells attributed his notion of switching (Castells, 2009: p. 51) to large networks, such as financial and media networks, the implementation of Beacon can be seen as switching as well, as the 44 specific partner sites shared user data with Facebook in order to strategically push targeted ads through the connection and co-operation of different media networks. In addition, this can also be seen as an example of Galloway and Thacker's flipping the switch (2007), because the corporation gave shape to an exceptional topology, an uncommon mode of network organization.

The press release suggested an enjoyable - privacy aware - program to bring consumers, products and companies closer together: "In keeping with Facebook's philosophy of user control, Facebook Beacon provides advanced privacy controls so Facebook users can decide whether to distribute specific actions from participating sites with their friends"²⁰. This act of discursive programming projected the image in which bringing all of these networks together would be beneficial to everyone while the users would remain in control of their privacy. However, this attempt was not altogether successful. In fact, it led to a confrontation with civic action group and protesting users. In Castells' terminology, this confrontation can be understood as a reprogramming of the Beacon network by raising public awareness about privacy concerns. Facebook changed Beacon from an opt-out to an opt-in service; there would be no more automatic publishing of user transactions on partner websites without explicit user permission. The goal of their network shifted from making money with third parties by automatically publishing of personal user data to the goal of a more 'privacy aware' user platform, after the contesting actors had protested. It would namely enable users to control which information they shared through Beacon, if it was their choice to do so.

A month after the launch of Beacon, the critical discourse had its effect. Zuckerberg apologized for 'doing a bad job', 'missing the right balance' and 'taking too long to decide on the right solution' in a blog post²¹. Later, in 2008, 20 user plaintiffs filed a class-action law suit against Facebook and its project partners for violating their privacy. Consequently, the service was shut down in 2009. The switches between the networks of Facebook users and partner websites were successfully disrupted.

20 Facebook press release."Leading Websites Offer Facebook Beacon for Social Distribution." Published Nov. 6, 2007 < <http://www.facebook.com/press/releases.php?p=9166>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

²¹Zuckerberg, Mark. "Thoughts on Beacon." The Facebook blog. Published December 5, 2007< <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=7584397130>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

At the same time, Facebook e-mailed their users about the settlement. In the e-mail²², they proposed a settlement which stipulated that the class members would receive compensation. Beacon would be completely terminated and Facebook would invest \$9.5 million to establish a foundation for the promotion of privacy, safety and security. Recently, the settlement has been approved, with a slightly different fund investment value²³. When Beacon shut down, Facebook's Director of Policy Communications Barry Schnitt also made the following statement:

We learned a great deal from the Beacon experience. For one, it was underscored how critical it is to provide extensive user control over how information is shared. We also learned how to effectively communicate changes that we make to the user experience. The introduction of Facebook Connect – a product that gives users significant control over how they extend their Facebook identity on the Web and share experiences back to friends on Facebook – is an example of this²⁴

Facebook Connect is a platform that enables Facebook users to log onto third-party websites, applications, mobile devices and gaming consoles through a set of APIs. It is used by Facebook members to connect to others through these media, which allows developers and third-parties to post information on the users' profile²⁵. Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg stated in relation to Facebook Connect that "Everyone is looking for ways to make their Web sites more social"²⁶. The following year, instead of effectively promoting privacy, security and safety, Facebook again raised more privacy concerns with a renewed privacy policy.

²² Eldon, Eric. "Facebook Emails Users About September's Beacon Settlement." Published December 3rd, 2009 <<http://www.insidefacebook.com/2009/12/03/facebook-emails-users-about-septembers-beacon-settlement/>>(accessed June 21, 2010).

²³ However, Facebook will invest \$6 million, instead of 9,5 \$6 million according to: Vascellaro, Jessica. "Facebook CEO Says New Privacy Controls Coming." the Wall Street Journal. Published May 25, 2010. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704113504575264531670369618.html?mod=WSJEUROPE_newsreel_technology> (accessed June 21, 2010).

²⁴ Reyes, Pencos. "It's over for Beacon on Facebook News Feed.", Pencos Reyes Networks. Published September 21, 2009 <<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=44128827947&topic=10974>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

²⁵ Stone, Brad. "Facebook Aims to Extend Its Reach Across the Web." The New York Times. Published November 30, 2008 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/01/technology/internet/01facebook.html?pagewanted=1&r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

²⁶ Stone, Brad. "Facebook Aims to Extend Its Reach Across the Web." The New York Times. Published November 30, 2008 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/01/technology/internet/01facebook.html?pagewanted=1&r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

2.3 Changing the 'Privacy Policy'

In December 2009, Facebook rolled out a new privacy policy. Considering this in terms of reprogramming, the new goal assigned to the network should be identified. The blog post²⁷ by Chris Kelly, Facebook's chief privacy officer, suggested that the new and 'simple' privacy settings would give "(...) people even greater control over the information they share and the audiences with whom they share it". In addition, it would "(...) give some people more individualized controls over particular features (...)". Kelly argued that neither policy nor practice would be altered by the new tools: "You can feel confident that Facebook will not share your personal information with advertisers unless and until you want to share that information". Facebook also pushed what a so-called 'transition tool' to let users decide to what degree they wanted to share their information. These statements again suggested a greater privacy control, improved and simplified. However, many people have contested this and argued the opposite.

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) noted several problems with Facebook's move and even argued that the changes reduced the amount of control that users have over their personal data: "These new "privacy" changes are clearly intended to push Facebook users to publicly share even more information than before"²⁸. In the transition tool, the 'recommended' default setting was to share your posted content with everyone. Besides, Facebook changed their definition of 'publicly available information', which resulted in the elimination of privacy options for the publicity of name, profile picture, current city, gender etc. In addition to this, the option to not share any information through the Facebook API was removed. As a consequence, any (third party) application that the users connected Facebook with would have access to all their publicly available information. This particular instance demonstrates an expansion of users' digital lock-in (Neervens, 2009) through top-down decision-making about the software.

In respect to framing (Entman, 2004), Schnitt reacted with an interesting response: "Any suggestion that we're trying to trick them into something would work against any goal that we have. Facebook would encourage people to be more open with their updates because, he said, it was in line with the way the world is moving". Many contesting actors, including

²⁷ Kelly, Chris. "Improving Sharing Through Control, Simplicity and Connection." The Facebook Blog. Published July 1, 2009. < <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=101470352130> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

²⁸ Bankston, Kevin. "Facebook's New Privacy Changes: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly". Electronic Frontier Foundation. Published December 9th, 2009. < <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2009/12/facebooks-new-privacy-changes-good-bad-and-ugly> > (accessed June 21, 2010)

blogger Marshall Kirkpatrick who is known for his unwavering research into the company, , whowhemphasized that instead of improving privacy control, the new policy and settings were rather implemented to create more traffic and increase the visibility of user activity²⁹

Thereafter, in January 2010, Zuckerberg argued the following in an interview³⁰: "We view it as our role in the system to constantly be innovating and be updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norms are". According to him, sharing information on the Web more openly with more people has evolved to a social norm over time. Subsequently, Zuckerberg's words met heavy criticism from the blogosphere. Kirkpatrick, for example, wrote a blog post³¹ called: "Facebook's Zuckerberg Says The Age of Privacy is Over". According to him, after many years, Zuckerberg radically changed his view on the importance of user privacy. In an interview, conducted in 2008, he even stated that privacy controls was "the vector around which Facebook operates"³². Zuckerberg did not relate 'the contemporary social norm' to the goal of increasing of traffic and advertising revenue. However, Schnitt did so earlier³³:

By making the world more open and connected, we're expanding understanding between people and making the world a more empathetic place.

And we know that when users find their friends, are found by their friends and learn more about the world around them - they find more value on the site. From a business perspective, if users are finding more value from the site they will come back more and engage in more activity. And you can imagine the business consequences of that.

The critique of actors who contested the new privacy policy and default settings to share more information publicly was not effective at all. Instead of immediately making new adjustments to calm the criticism, Zuckerberg promoted his ideology of 'openness and connectedness'.

Furthermore, it is remarkable that shortly after Zuckerberg's statement, the implementation of Google Buzz³⁴ - another social networking service – onto the network of Gmail users also was a push of social networking features based on a similar ideology of 'openness', that was immediately resisted. But was the critical discourse effective in this

²⁹ BBC News. "Facebook faces criticism on privacy change." Published December 10th, 2009. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8405334.stm>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³⁰ Kirkpatrick, Marshall. "Facebook's Zuckerberg Says The Age of Privacy is Over". ReadWriteWeb. Published January 9, 2010. <http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/facebook_zuckerberg_says_the_age_of_privacy_is_ov.php> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³¹ Kirkpatrick, Marshall. "Facebook's Zuckerberg Says The Age of Privacy is Over". ReadWriteWeb. Published January 9, 2010. <http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/facebook_zuckerberg_says_the_age_of_privacy_is_ov.php> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³² Kirkpatrick, Marshall. "Mark Zuckerberg on Data Portability: An Interview". ReadWriteWeb. Published March 10, 2008. <http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/mark_zuckerberg_on_data_portab.php> (accessed June 21, 2010)

³³ Kirkpatrick, Marshall. "Why Facebook changed its Privacy Strategy". ReadWriteWeb. Published December 10, 2010. <http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/why_facebook_changed_privacy_policies.php> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³⁴ Generally, it functions like any other social medium; it generates an information stream which other users of the same platform can follow.

case?

2.4 Buzz Off!

Google Buzz was introduced to Gmail users in February 2010. Although many people are usually excited to be part of testing Google's unfinished products, like Google Wave, the case of Buzz demonstrated that the opposite is possible as well.

Shortly after Buzz was implemented into Gmail users' accounts many privacy concerns were raised. The introduction was anything but flawless. Instantly, Gmail users got a 'Buzz' tab, in their Gmail account interface. They were automatically assigned to follow other users on Buzz, whom they chatted and emailed the most with³⁵. In addition, if they visited a profile from another user, the communication between that user and his/her followers was openly visible³⁶. Another criticized and dubious feature was related to other Google services that Gmail users might use. Pictures from Picasa and personal activity on Google Reader were automatically shared through Buzz³⁷. Considering the users' privacy concerns, many argued that Google Buzz was implemented quite intrusively. For a short but crucial time, Google Buzz users' intercommunication and activity on other Google services was openly visible for their automated followers. Was this Google's intention?

The following was posted to their blog on the day that Google launched the service: "Buzz brings this network to the surface by automatically setting you up to follow the people you email and chat with the most³⁸". But even more explicit: "(...) Buzz itself is not designed to be a closed system. Our goal is to make Buzz a *fully* open and distributed platform for conversations³⁹" (emphasis added). In another Google blog-post about the meaning of openness, it is even stated that open systems *win*, and lead to "more innovation, value, and *freedom of choice* for consumers, and a vibrant, profitable, and competitive ecosystem for businesses⁴⁰" (emphasis added). Contrary to this idea, the way that Google Buzz initially was implemented led to anything but freedom of choice for consumers.

³⁵Howlett, Dennis. "Google Buzz off." Published February 11, 2010 < <http://www.accmanpro.com/2010/02/11/google-buzz-off/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³⁶Knack.be."Google Buzz schendt privacy." Published February, 17, 2010. < <http://knack.nnews.be/nieuws/technologie/google-buzz-schendt-privacy/-/site72-section27-article46646.html?cid=rss/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³⁷Jackson, Todd. "A new Buzz start-up experience based on your feedback." Gmail blog. Published February 13, 2010. < <http://gmailblog.blogspot.com/2010/02/new-buzz-start-up-experience-based-on.html/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³⁸Google blog."Introducing Google Buzz".Published February 9, 2010 < <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/02/introducing/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

³⁹Google blog."Introducing Google Buzz".Published February 9, 2010 < <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2010/02/introducing/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴⁰Rosenberg, Jonathan."The meaning of open." Google blog. Published December 21, 2009

Many different actors expressed or reported heavy disapproval of Google's move, including (micro)bloggers, news websites and citizen journalists. Crucially, two privacy complaints were filed against Google Buzz, by the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC)⁴¹ and a Harvard law student⁴². The EFF and danah boyd also made their statements about the lacking privacy control. Promptly after what Google framed as 'loud and clear feedback'⁴³, the corporation literally let go of its initial goal of a fully open and distributed platform by making drastic changes to Buzz.

Google even personally responded to the blogger Harriet Jacobs. In her blog post 'F*ck you, Google'⁴⁴, she describes her negative encounter: making her personal Google Reader data available and automatically connecting her account to her abusive ex-husband's account:

F*ck you, Google. My privacy concerns are not trite. They are linked to my actual physical safety, and I will now have to spend the next few days maintaining that safety by continually knocking down followers as they pop up.⁴⁵

Jacobs' story is a significant example of produsage-based journalism (Bruns, 2008), as her blogged thoughts became part of the news and the issue itself. Her story was amplified to such an extent that she even received an email from the Google Buzz product manager, who apologized for the extremely confusing product experience and informing her that they would do something about her reported issues⁴⁶.

After acknowledging the criticism, Google responded with apologies for causing the concern and not getting "everything quite right"⁴⁷. Apologizing after pushing new programs is a sequence of events that we can recognize in the Beacon case also.

< <http://googleblog.blogspot.com/2009/12/meaning-of-open.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴¹Paul, Ryan. "EPIC fail: Google faces FTC complaint over Buzz privacy". *Ars Technica*. Published February 17, 2010.

<<http://arstechnica.com/security/news/2010/02/epic-fail-google-faces-complaint-over-buzz-privacy-issues.ars>> (Accessed July 21, 2010).

⁴²"Harvard Law student brings class action lawsuit over Google Buzz". *The Harvard Law Record*. Publish February 18, 2010. <<http://www.hlrecord.org/news/harvard-law-student-brings-class-action-lawsuit-over-google-buzz-1.1165204>>. (Accessed July 21, 2010).

⁴³Jackson, Todd. "A new Buzz start-up experience based on your feedback." *Gmail blog*. Published February 13, 2010. <<http://gmailblog.blogspot.com/2010/02/new-buzz-start-up-experience-based-on.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴⁴Harriet, J. "Fuck you, Google." Published February 11, 2010

< <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/fuck-you-google/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴⁵Harriet, J. "Fuck you, Google." Published February 11, 2010

< <http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/2010/02/11/fuck-you-google/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴⁶The email can be read here: Harriet, J. "Scew You, Google." Published February 12, 2010

<<http://fugitivus.wordpress.com/2010/02/12/screw-you-google/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴⁷Jackson, Todd. "A new Buzz start-up experience based on your feedback." *Gmail blog*. Published February 13, 2010. <<http://gmailblog.blogspot.com/2010/02/new-buzz-start-up-experience-based-on.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

Supposedly, Buzz was not properly tested internally, before its launch⁴⁸. They swiftly changed the service by giving the users more options to use its features –instead of automating them. Eight days after the service was launched, Google executive Eric Schmidt suggested that those who complained about privacy invasions were subject to confusion and that nobody was harmed: “I would say that we did not understand how to communicate Google Buzz and its privacy”⁴⁹. This shows that by framing the issue differently, Google moved away from the fact that it had pushed default features and setting with the original intention to build a fully open distributed platform.

The implementation of Buzz and the resistance to its technical architecture exemplified a contemporary scene in which the particular ‘open’ architecture of a new medium became a contentious issue. Those individuals that were ‘rightfully upset’⁵⁰ articulated the issue in numerous ways. Most importantly, their voices were heard by Google, what resulted in drastic changes to the company’s initial goal, the technical architecture of Buzz, and its policy.

The example of Google Buzz shows, similar to Beacon, that the exercise of counterpower through critical discourse reprogrammed the goal and operating logic of the social networking site. It is remarkable that Google’s goal of ‘openness’ was not communicated on a great scale. Would there have been less of a backlash if their motive had been put forth in advance, through multiple instances of sending their message across several media networks?

This particular configuration applies to Facebook’s widely distributed new mission statement of ‘openness and connectedness’. In 2010, Facebook brought forth several new features and plug-ins that were introduced together with the release of the so-called Open Graph.

⁴⁸Fildes, Jonathan. "Google admits Buzz social network testing flaws." BBC News. published February 16, 2010. < <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8517613.stm>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁴⁹Wray, Richard. "Google boss says 'nobody was harmed' by Buzz debacle." Guardian.co.uk. Published February, 17 2010. < <http://www.guardian.co.uk/technology/2010/feb/17/google-buzz-schmidt/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵⁰EPIC."In re Google Buzz." < <http://epic.org/privacy/ftc/googlebuzz>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

2.5 Open Graph

During the F8 developers conference⁵¹ Zuckerberg announced the ‘Open Graph’, which is Facebook’s new development platform aimed at creating a ‘smarter, more social, more personalized, and more semantically aware’ Web. The Open Graph API allows websites outside of Facebook to use the data which they have collected about users to automatically personalize their experiences on their website. Through what Facebook calls ‘social plugins’ for partner websites, user activity on the Web is routed back to Facebook. Some examples of these plug-ins are the pervasive ‘like button’, an embeddable activity streams plug-in - which allows third-parties to show the Facebook users newsfeed on their website – and a recommendation plug-in. At the conference they announced the Open Graph protocol as well, which was described as: “a specification for a set of metatags which you can use to mark up your pages to tell us what type of real-world object your page represents.” It enables users, for example, to add a film to their favorite movies on their Facebook profile by ‘liking’ it on an IMDB page. Of course, this may have reminded many people of Beacon.

Again Zuckerberg presented his vision of the contemporary Web: “The Web is at a really important turning point right now,” Zuckerberg said. “Up until recently, the default on the Web has been that most things aren't social and most things don't use your real identity.”

Inherently to this switching process, Facebook turned interests and personal information into public ‘connections’ which are visible in ‘community pages’ in April⁵². Subsequently users lost the ability to control who can and cannot see their interests and personal information⁵³. When users would log onto Facebook, they would be asked to turn each ‘interest’ into a public ‘connection’⁵⁴. Correspondingly, being a ‘fan’ was turned into ‘liking’. Facebook also changed its privacy section yet again, and added a category called ‘Friends, Tags and Connections’. This ostensibly led to more confusion about the settings⁵⁵.

The criticism on Facebook’s way of introducing new features and confusing privacy controls grew rapidly in the month of May 2010. This resulted in a revolt on the 31st of May,

⁵¹McCarthyh, Caroline. "Facebook F8: One graph to rule them all." Cnet. Published April 21, 2010. < http://news.cnet.com/8301-13577_3-20003053-36.html> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵²McCarthyh, Caroline. "Facebook F8: One graph to rule them all." Cnet. Published April 21, 2010. < http://news.cnet.com/8301-13577_3-20003053-36.html> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵³Opsahl, Kurt. "Updated: Facebook Further Reduces Your Control Over Personal Information." Electronic Frontier Foundation. Published April 19th, 2010 < <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2010/04/facebook-further-reduces-control-over-personal-information>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵⁴Li, Alex. "Connecting to Everything You Care About." The Facebook Blog. Published April 19, 2010 < <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=382978412130>>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵⁵Kincaid, Jason. "Facebook Launches New Privacy Section That May Make Your Head Hurt." TechCrunch. Published April, 19 2010 < <http://techcrunch.com/2010/04/19/facebook-launches-new-privacy-section-that-may-make-your-head-hurt/>>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

which was declared as Quit Facebook Day, by system designer Matthew Milan and technologist Joseph Dee. Over 36000 Facebook users committed to deactivate their profiles on QuitFacebookDay.com⁵⁶. The campaigners argued that Facebook did not give their users fair choices to manage their data; the settings to control personal information were deemed too complex for the average user. Moreover, they drew attention to the importance of future of the Web as an 'open, safe and human place', and acknowledged that Facebook was causing hindrances to realize such a future⁵⁷. They also stated that Facebook did not respect their data and argued that they were an unethical business.

Another website that attracted a lot of attention in May was YourOpenbook.org⁵⁸ which controversially allows visitors to perform a query in the database of public status updates. It displays the 'wall' text from every user that, knowingly or unknowingly, has privacy settings which make their status updates visible to everyone. The parody and privacy advocacy website was built with the public Facebook API, by three website developers from San Francisco to raise awareness about the complexity of Facebook's privacy settings. Basically, the website brutally exemplified the 'privacy unawareness' that people might have.

Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life. Whether you want to or not.⁵⁹

Next to this edited Facebook slogan on the front-page, there was Zuckerberg quote which also attracted a lot of attention. "They trust me, dumb fucks"⁶⁰ was apparently part of an instant message conversation between Zuckerberg and his dorm room friends, which took place shortly after Facebook was launched. The instant message conversation was rapidly spread through the blogosphere. Zuckerberg did not respond immediately, but the website who first published the conversation received the following statement:

The privacy and security of our users' information is of paramount importance to us. We're not going to debate claims from anonymous sources or dated allegations that attempt to characterize Mark's and Facebook's views towards privacy. Everyone within the company understands our success is inextricably linked with people's trust in the company and the service we provide. We are grateful people continue to place their trust in us. We strive to earn that trust by trying to be open and direct about the

⁵⁶QuitFacebookDay < <http://www.quitfacebookday.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵⁷QuitFacebookDay< <http://www.quitfacebookday.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵⁸Youropenbook. < <http://www.youopenbook.org/>>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁵⁹< <http://www.youopenbook.org/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁶⁰Carlson, Nicholas. "Well, These New Zuckerberg IMs Won't Help Facebook's Privacy Problems." Business insider. Published May 13, 2010< <http://www.businessinsider.com/well-these-new-zuckerberg-ims-wont-help-facebooks-privacy-problems-2010-5>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

evolution of the service and sharing information on how the 400 million people on the service can use the available settings to control where their information appears.⁶¹

But how did Zuckerberg respond to this recent wave of criticism? He wrote a column⁶² for the Washington Post website, in which he addressed the privacy issues, and promised to simpler way for the users to control their information, easier privacy controls, and an option to turn off all third-party services. This time, Zuckerberg did not convincingly apologize, like in the Beacon case, but argued that Facebook had misconceived their users' needs.

The challenge is how a network like ours facilitates sharing and innovation, offers control and choice, and makes this experience easy for everyone. These are issues we think about all the time. Whenever we make a change, we try to apply the lessons we've learned along the way. The biggest message we have heard recently is that people want easier control over their information. Simply put, many of you thought our controls were too complex. Our intention was to give you lots of granular controls; but that may not have been what many of you wanted. We just missed the mark.⁶³

Zuckerberg also stated Facebook's principles to clear up uncertainties that users might have about the (mis)use of their information:

- You have control over how your information is shared.
- We do not share your personal information with people or services you don't want.
- We do not give advertisers access to your personal information.
- We do not and never will sell any of your information to anyone.
- We will always keep Facebook a free service for everyone.⁶⁴

However, one day earlier, Zuckerberg also responded more 'privately' in an e-mail to Robert Scoble, who got permission to reprint his email⁶⁵. The difference in phrases used to address the situation, compared to the Washington Post column, is remarkable: "We've made a bunch of mistakes." and "I want to make sure we get this stuff right this time."

Soon after the column was published Facebook rolled out new privacy settings and a privacy page which would help the users to understand how to use the new settings. However,

⁶¹Carlson, Nicholas. " Facebook Issues Statement On Latest Zuckerberg IM And Company Attitude Toward Privacy." Business insider. Published May 13, 2010 < <http://www.businessinsider.com/facebook-comments-on-zuckerbergs-damning-ims-2010-5>> (accessed June 21, 2010)..

⁶²Zuckerberg, Mark. "From Facebook, answering privacy concerns with new settings." The Washington Post. Published May 24, 2010. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/23/AR2010052303828.html>>. (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁶³Zuckerberg, Mark. "From Facebook, answering privacy concerns with new settings." The Washington Post. Published May 24, 2010. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/23/AR2010052303828.html>>. (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁶⁴Zuckerberg, Mark. "From Facebook, answering privacy concerns with new settings." The Washington Post. Published May 24, 2010. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/23/AR2010052303828.html>>. (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁶⁵Scoble, Robert. "When do you throw a CEO's privacy under the bus?." Published May 23, 2010. < <http://scobleizer.com/2010/05/23/when-do-you-throw-a-ceos-privacy-under-the-bus/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

these new settings have been criticized again. This is indicated by several quotes taken from Techneworld.com⁶⁶

Facebook made some positive changes today, but only because of political pressure from policymakers and privacy advocates on both sides of the Atlantic.

Unfortunately, Facebook still refuses to give its users control over the data it collects for its targeted advertising products.

The defaults should also be initially set for non-sharing, with the minimization of data collection at the core of Facebook's approach to privacy.

I guess Facebook will try to play up what good citizens they are by making controls simpler and hope that people don't realize they're being sold to advertisers.

Furthermore, Zuckerberg was critically interviewed at the D8 conference about the recent events related to OpenGraph and privacy settings⁶⁷. Visibly distressed, he addressed the privacy issues, and argued that the corporation was not intentionally trying to make all information open. He acknowledged the criticism about the complex privacy settings by framing it as 'feedback' and claimed that the corporation wants "(...) to make sure that people have control over the information that they share".

The interviewers posed the question: "Shouldn't people be able to opt-in to new features"? Zuckerberg responded that it would mean 'more friction' for the users, whereas the 'big push' of social plug-ins and instant personalization, with 'people at their core' would lead to a 'greater magnitude'. Zuckerberg asserted that more and more products and services are being built 'around people'. Regarding the old instant messages, he argued that they were just pranks. During the interview Zuckerberg was asked to take off his hoodie, which he did not do at first. A few minutes later, however, he did so. Followed by a joke from one of the interviewers who asked him if he was part of a cult, when an illuminati-like Facebook insignia with the mission statement "making the world – open and connected" printed on the inside of his hoodie was revealed⁶⁸. It was a remarkable performance.

Now that many events of discursive reasoning by Facebook executives and contesting actors, related to (re)programming and switching events, have been described, *what can be concluded in respect to framing and agenda-setting? And how effective were the instances of reprogramming and blocking/disrupting the switches?*

⁶⁶Adhikari, Richard. "Facebook's New, New Privacy Settings: Same Old?." TechNewsWorld. Published May 26, 2010 < <http://www.techneworld.com/story/70080.html?wlc=1275153360&wlc=1275909954>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁶⁷Paczkowski, John. "D8 Video: Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg on Privacy." All Things Digital Published June 2, 2010 < <http://d8.allthingsd.com/20100602/d8-video-facebook-ceo-mark-zuckerberg-on-privacy/>>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁶⁸NYMag. "Mark Zuckerberg Reveals Facebook's Cultlike Insignia Hiding Inside His Hoodie." published June 5, 2010 < http://nymag.com/daily/intel/2010/06/mark_zuckerberg_reveals.html>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

2.6 Changing the Default = The New Default?

When comparing the three instances of exercising network-making power by Facebook it becomes evident that when the corporation implemented new features and/or new goals to the network - through (re)programming or switching (Castells, 2009) - the generated discourse always suggested benefits for its users, that eventually were not or scarcely realized. Facebook announced most changes to their users through press releases, public blog posts, or through Facebook itself.

The keywords that Facebook executives used to phrase new changes were repeatedly the same and framed the image of providing their users with ‘simple/easy’ and ‘greater control’ of sharing personal information. The corporation’s agenda setting stayed the same since 2007; every time the implementation of new features or settings led to criticism. Facebook supposedly saliently set the agenda to deal with contentious issues. Nevertheless, many disgruntled users and privacy advocates would argue that the settings to control personal information on Facebook have rather become more complex over time.

Most importantly, not all users have immediately comprehended these rigid changes; many of them might have been unaware that these took place at all. The messages constructed and images framed by Facebook, about changes of the service did not reach every Facebook user.

When Facebook made changes that raised many concerns, the executives did two things: they admitted errors and apologized in some way, claiming to have ‘learned’ from the situation. After three periods of contention about privacy issues, Facebook is still heavily criticized for the lack of decent means for users to control information.

As opposed to the cases of Beacon and Open Graph, it is interesting to acknowledge that Zuckerberg did not apologize in any way for the 2009 privacy policy change. Facebook raised awareness about their view in which making more personal information public is considered an evolved contemporary social norm. Shortly after this statement, Facebook projected the idea of a better Web, in which everything and everyone is more ‘open and connected’, that materialized in the Open Graph implementations. It is remarkable that Zuckerberg has literally said to push certain features that supposedly make the Web more ‘social’, another keyword that is often used when new features are announced. This results in a situation whereby users, possibly unaware, must abide by the ideology of ‘openness and connectedness’.

All of these instances of exercising network-making power (Castells, 2009) have been largely beneficial to Facebook, whereas the executives repeatedly emphasized new benefits for their users in public statements, instead of their own. In these three cases, discourse framed the image of Facebook's changing goals in a repeating pattern: first make beneficial promises to its users by announcing a new feature or change of settings, subsequently enact an immediate process of reprogramming or/and switching, take the time to let the interested users, bloggers and journalists acknowledge the changes, before finally apologizing for the rigid steps that were taken.

Through this pattern of discourse Facebook manages to push its ideology by changing defaults features and settings of the medium. The default settings to control your information have changed many times. Thus, it could be argued that the word 'default' has lost its meaning and essence; it requires a lot of time and energy to constantly review the settings, whenever Facebook makes changes and adopt a new meaning of 'default'.

Facebook uses discursive reasoning not only to announce new features and subsequently apologize, but also to push its ideology of 'openness and connectedness' to justify their reprogramming and switching of the network. Moreover, to use Entman's terms (1991), the technical vocabulary (mistakes) turns into moral justification (conscious acting) over time, whereby more 'openness and connectedness' has become the new default.

The processes of (re)programming and switching, however, have been resisted against as well by actors who exercised counterpower (Castells, 2009). The critical discourse in relation to the implementation of Beacon and Buzz can be considered effective in the sense that both services turned into opt-in features. Although it took some time, disrupting the switches also led to the shutdown of the Beacon program.

Yet, the critical discourse over the changed privacy settings in 2009, did not lead to reprogramming Facebook in terms of its goals or operating logic. Instead, it resulted in a response through which the corporation justified their actions, by presenting a new mission statement that promoted a new image of Facebook. To introduce new features and settings with such a loud statement is very different from the tacit and intrusive implementations of Google Buzz and Beacon. One could argue that Facebook discursively framed new programs similar to Buzz and Beacon, in order to avoid criticism. After all, the Open Graph and its features can be regarded as yet another pushed targeted advertisement system.

In 2010 Facebook default settings received another makeover, leading to critical discourse which raised awareness about the push of new defaults and complex privacy controls. This critique embodied in a controversial application and a planned revolt.

Quitfacebookday led to just a few thousand critical users leaving the social networking site, which possibly makes it easier for the corporation to push new features and/or settings in the future. Nonetheless, the revolt attracted a lot of attention and enabled critical users to express themselves.

Through the corporation's discursive reasoning and by changing the settings to control personal information again, an image was constructed according to which the settings to control personal information would finally be easy to manage. Although many people argue that it still is hard to control your information on Facebook, the corporation promoted the image that users now have proper control. At the same time, Facebook pushes new defaults and new features to every user, even if they are unaware of the consequences.

Thus far, counterpower (Castells, 2009) exercised by contesting social actors ultimately does not stop the corporation's ongoing exercise of network-making power (Ibidem). Critical discourse, manifested in online protest groups, petition websites, class-action law suits, blog posts, or news articles can have its effects and lead to drawbacks. However, through discourse, Facebook continuously justifies new and potentially troublesome changes to their platform. One could argue that Facebook is not vulnerable to brand-centered attacks (Baringhorst et al. 2009), because it manages to discursively maintain the image of trust and credibility.

Profit-making, power-making, and culture-making can be presupposed as ulterior goals assigned to Facebook's socio-technical network. The image that is currently distributed through the mission statement depicts Facebook with the goal to make the world more open and connected, which supposedly would lead to more empathy. Arguably, the instances of corporate communication related to acts of reprogramming or switching, delineate an effective Machiavellian communication strategy to become a more powerful actor in the network society. This view is shared by Chris Jay Hoofnagle, director of the Berkeley Center for Law & Technology's information privacy programs, who criticizes Facebook for several instances of deceptive PR communication⁶⁹.

It is very difficult to measure how many users are aware of Facebook's striking decisions in governing the platform. This depends on several factors including the level of engagement with the medium, concern over how to manage the flows of personal information, a view regarding privacy -if they have one- and the time of registration. Given that Facebook

⁶⁹ Hoofnagle, J. Chris. "How to Win Friends and Manipulate People." Huffington Post. Published June 2, 2010
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/chris-jay-hoofnagle/how-to-win-friends-and-ma_b_598572.html> (accessed June 21, 2010).

imposed many changes to the software over time, it is hard to keep track. Thus, the specific moment that someone registered for the service either reduces or increases the chance of knowing about certain changes. For instance, it is likely for people who join Facebook right now to be unaware of the Beacon debacle and its implications. However, users with the need for situational awareness easily stumble upon old blog posts, news articles, press releases, Facebook groups and Wikipedia articles. Still, it requires a lot of effort and theoretical knowledge to go through all of it and recognize the highly influential recurring pattern of discursive framing and agenda-setting. These are mechanisms that can be used by SNSs corporations to indirectly or evasively control their platforms and the distribution of user generated content. This leads to greater revenues, more user-generated content and more power. The discursive framing of SNS corporations and contesting actors can be distributed and articulated through various media. Ultimately, these processes determine how far a corporation can go with “pushing the envelope” with new features and settings, depending on the framing of the image, its reach and the understanding of the implications. Aware or unaware, most users abide by the continuous alterations of SNSs software. How does protocol (Galloway and Thacker, 2007) figure into this?

3 Protocol vs. Counterprotocol

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how protocological control and counterprotocological resistance are exercised, in order to better understand the implications of protocol on Facebook users. First, two instances of exercised protocological control will be analyzed: News Feed changes (2009), Open Graph API (2010). Subsequently, the counterprotocological practice of ‘likejacking’ (2010) will be discussed. Finally, several tactical media projects, applications, and hacks will be examined: the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine/Seppukoo (2009), Reclaim my privacy (2010), Userscripts (2007-2010), and Givememydata (2010). The goal is to reveal how the distributed control logic of protocol is exercised and how it can be resisted.

Moreover, with techno-cultural conditions in mind, the following questions will be addressed: How does protocological control affect the users? Can the hacking through exploits be conceived as an effective type of resistance to the control, embedded in the protocols of the SNS’s software? How is discourse implicated in counterprotocological practices?

3.2 News Feed

The ‘News Feed’, one of Facebook’s most prominent features, presents a stream of status updates and activities from the user’s contacts. When first introduced in 2006, the ‘News Feed’ and ‘Mini Feed’ caused a lot of tension. Initially, these two feeds were available to the user as two separate features: the News Feed aggregated user activities and shared information, whereas the Mini Feed displayed the activities from one single user. Many users protested⁷⁰ against the feed system through Facebook groups and petitions, followed by apologies⁷¹ and new ‘privacy controls’⁷² to make up for it, following the pattern of discursive programming identified in the former chapter. Nonetheless, from a protocological point

⁷⁰Samantha, Tracy. "Inside the Backlash Against Facebook." Time. Published September 06, 2006 < <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1532225,00.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷¹Zuckerberg, Mark. "An Open Letter from Mark Zuckerberg." The Facebook Blog. Published September, 8, 2006< <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=2208562130>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷²Facebook Press release. "Facebook Launches Additional Privacy Controls for News Feed and Mini-Feed." Published September 8, 2006< <http://www.facebook.com/press/releases.php?p=643>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

standpoint it is interesting to examine the instances in which the technological architecture of the News Feed changed. Facebook modified this 'lifestream' feature several times by assembling various protocols in particular ways.

In 2008, users were first able to import activity streams from their accounts with other services⁷³. The number of services you could update your profile with increased the same year⁷⁴. This syndication represented a shift from sharing single activities with third-party applications built with Facebook's API users started importing feeds from outside of Facebook.

One year later, the News Feed was rigidly restructured due to a redesign of the platform⁷⁵. In March, the corporation jumped on the Twitter bandwagon of 'real-time' and added a tab to view 'highlights', the updates that were most interacted with by commenting, liking them etc. In October this section was turned into the News Feed itself, while the added Live Feed tab would provide users with the possibility to view the latest real-time updates; functioning like the original feature. This somewhat confusing implementation surprised many users that were accustomed to a chronologically updated News Feed. Besides, in December the corporation removed the privacy controls to pre-select which activities were automatically shared on the user's page and through the feeds⁷⁶. Over a million users joined protest groups to bring back the 'normal' Facebook⁷⁷. But there was no way back as the new user interface logic has endured ever since.

This case demonstrates that protocological control (Galloway and Thacker, 2007) is exercised to modify the operating logic of features that facilitate the connection of users and the addition of third party content. As users become aware of the user interface changes, they will acknowledge what these modifications mean for the control over sharing and distributing their information. That is, evaluating how the SNS software has changed their control by translating the changes to possible actions carried out by themselves or the software. Blog posts, videos or even unofficial guides can help users to grasp the consequences of software changes. Discourses around rigid changes help users to reconsider their agency in

⁷³Wang, H. Harry. "A new way to share with friends." The Facebook Blog. Published April 15, 2010 <<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=13245367130>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷⁴Deng, X. Peter. "Update Your Profile From More Websites." The Facebook Blog. Published May 23, 2008<<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=17720842130>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷⁵Yung, Raylene. "New Views for Your Home Page." The Facebook Blog. Published October 23, 2009<<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=162536657130>>, (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷⁶O'Neill, Nick. "Facebook Kills Off News Feed Story Settings?." All Facebook. Published December 10th, 2009<<http://www.allfacebook.com/2009/12/facebook-kills-off-news-feed-story-settings/#more-910>>, (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁷⁷AFP. "Facebook users protest home page changes." The Sydney Morning Herald. Published October 27, 2009 <<http://www.smh.com.au/digital-life/digital-life-news/facebook-users-protest-home-page-changes-20091027-hijm.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

protocological assemblages. However, many users might choose to comprehend the changes by just using the software, rather than searching for the exact implications.

3.3 Open Graph API

The recently introduced Open Graph API and associated social plug-ins encourage third-parties to generate more traffic from and to Facebook. Since 2006, developers have been able to use Facebook's API to let users connect their account to third-party applications. Its recent changes, however, enable anyone to implement Facebook features on their website. Several examples of 'social plugins' have already been mentioned in the former chapter: the ubiquitous 'like' button, the embeddable activity streams plug-in and a recommendation plug-in. In addition, some websites support 'instant personalization'. In this process, partner services utilize Facebook user data to give them a personalized experience. For instance, the music service Pandora starts immediately playing the music you 'like' when you enter their website. Many users may be unaware that they are automatically opted-in this feature.

Nowadays the 'like' button is nearly everywhere. By clicking on the 'like' button, users share their activity with a link to the site on the News Feed. In addition, it is possible that it leads to the creation of a 'connection', a page that is forever connected to your profile, even after you have deleted it⁷⁸. Whether this occurs, depends on the use of the Open Graph API by another person; the user might be unaware of this. Furthermore, blogger Didier Durand has shown that when people are logged into Facebook and simultaneously browse the Web, Facebook's cookies track every website that has implemented a 'like' button or another social plug-in, even when one does not click on them⁷⁹. Moreover, if a user is logged out of Facebook and visits websites with social plug-ins you will be tracked anonymously⁸⁰. Then, when the users logs into Facebook again these previous marks will be reconnected back to the user-id. Thus, it can be argued that the new 'social' plug-ins have great implications on the

⁷⁸Opsahl, Kurt. "Six Things You Need to Know About Facebook Connections."Electronic Frontier Frontation. Published May 4, 2010 < <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2010/05/things-you-need-know-about-facebook>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁷⁹Durand,Didier. "Social plug-ins and Like Button: Facebook gets personal user identity for each page impression on 3rd party site and the publisher itself does not." Published May 2, 2010 < <http://media-tech.blogspot.com/2010/05/social-plug-ins-and-like-button-insane.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁸⁰Durand,Didier. "Social plug-ins and Like Button: Facebook gets personal user identity for each page impression on 3rd party site and the publisher itself does not." Published May 2, 2010 < <http://media-tech.blogspot.com/2010/05/social-plug-ins-and-like-button-insane.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

users' privacy. Which have been addressed by privacy advocates in an open letter to Zuckerberg⁸¹.

In this case, it is not the assemblage of protocols -visible to the user on the Facebook website- which imposes a new operating logic onto the user interface, but rather a protocological assemblage which is distributed throughout the Web. When users are logged in and browse the Web, there is a chance that they run into API implementations that communicate with their accounts. Now that Facebook has flipped the switch, the user interface transcends the Facebook home page. It is at these instances of re-channeling (Langlois et. al., 2009) that the distributed management style of protocol (Galloway & Thacker, 2007) becomes very apparent.

3.4 Likejacking

Over 100,000 websites have implemented Facebook's social plug-ins⁸², such as NGOs and other online services who expect to benefit from these new ways of generating traffic. Despite the latest privacy backlash, Facebook's count of unique visitors continues to grow rapidly⁸³. From a protocological perspective it is interesting to acknowledge that social media have become sites of malicious protocological practices. Ironically, while the 'like' button is spread across the Web, users are increasingly struck by so-called 'clickjacking' worms which make them like things. This has been dubbed 'Likejacking' by software security researchers⁸⁴. Users read their News Feed and click on what their friends have liked. They reach a blank page which says: 'Click here to continue'. Scammers have placed an invisible button beneath the mouse cursor so that if they click anywhere on the website, their status is updated without permission. Subsequently, their contacts read that they have liked something and it starts all over again. According to Graham Cluley from the anti-virus research company Sophos, the goal of the scammers behind this likejacking worm is to generate revenue, as the link leads to a website which is part of an advertising network. Cluley argues that the clickjacking attacks

⁸¹Kincaid, Jason. "Advocacy Groups Poke More Holes In Facebook Privacy, Facebook Responds." TechCrunch. Published June 16, 2010 < <http://techcrunch.com/2010/06/16/advocacy-groups-poke-more-holes-in-facebook-privacy-facebook-responds/> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸²Osofsky, Justin. "After f8: Personalized Social Plugins Now on 100,000+ Sites". May 11th, 2010. The Facebook Blog. Published April 19, 2010 < <http://developers.facebook.com/blog/post/382> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸³Schonfeld, Erick. "Privacy, Schmivacy: Facebook Is Attracting Near-Record Numbers Of New Visitors." TechCrunch. Published June 7, 2010 < <http://techcrunch.com/2010/06/07/privacy-facebook-visitors/> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸⁴Cluley, Graham. "Facebook users clickjacked by the 101 Hottest Women in the World." Sophos. Published June 14th, 2010 < <http://www.sophos.com/blogs/gc/g/2010/06/14/facebook-users-clickjacked-101-hottest-women-world> > (accessed June 21, 2010).

on Facebook exemplify the exploitable weakness of the platform⁸⁵. This could lead to more malware or phishing attacks in the future, putting the users at risk. Indeed, the emergent like-culture on the Web is not exploit-proof.

This example shows that the Application Programming Interface can be maliciously abused. Likejacking is a clear instance of a counterprotocological (Galloway and Thacker, 2007) practice, which uses the 'like' button code to achieve hypertrophy. This has many implications for the users, Facebook and anyone who likes the 'like' button. Users will have to be more careful when they browse through their News Feed. Facebook needs to create a more secure environment, while scammers will continue to reinvent ways to exploit security flaws. Likejacking can be conceived as critical protocological intervention, albeit one that does not create desired benefits for the users who abide by the ongoing reconfiguration of protocological assemblages. In turn, are there any tactical media projects or applications that do so?

3.5 Web 2.0 Suicide Machine/ Seppukoo

In November 2009, 'Unfriend' was announced as word of the year by the New Oxford American Dictionary⁸⁶. One month later, the Dutch equivalent ('Ontvrienden') was chosen in the Netherlands⁸⁷. These were also the months that two online art projects were launched, allowing users to commit 'virtual suicide' on social networking sites.

Seppukoo⁸⁸, developed by Italian imaginary art-group Les Liens Invisibles⁸⁹ started assisting users in November. Derived from 'Seppuku', Japanese for a ritual form of suicide, Seppukoo (Figure 1) let Facebook users deactivate their account to leave their virtual life and -identity behind. First, users logged in with their Facebook credentials. Thereafter they could create a 'memorial' page and write their last words. Subsequently their Facebook contacts would be notified of their deactivation. Seppukoo users received a score based on reactions and other users who deactivated their profile through the platform. The Seppukoo ranking

⁸⁵Cluley, Graham. "95% say Facebook needs to do more to fight clickjacking worms, poll reveals." Sophos. Published June 15th, 2010 < <http://www.sophos.com/blogs/gc/g/2010/06/15/95-facebook-fight-clickjacking-worms-poll-reveals/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸⁶OUPblog. "Oxford Word of the Year 2009: Unfriend." Published November 16, 2009 < <http://blog.oup.com/2009/11/unfriend/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸⁷Trouw. "Ontvrienden' woord van het jaar." Published December 17, 2009 < http://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/nederland/article2942152.ece/_Ontvrienden__woord_van_het_jaar.html> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸⁸Seppukoo < www.seppukoo.com/> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁸⁹Les Liens Invisibles < <http://www.lesliensinvisibles.org/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

concept was meant to criticize the viral marketing mechanism deployed by corporate media to make profit by connecting people online. In turn, this mechanism was utilized to transform individual ‘suicide’ into a ‘social’ experience. Another critique of the artists, central to the artwork, emphasizes the increasingly confusing distinctions between the real and the virtual due to the overflowing second, online and offline identities. Moreover, they point to the exploitation in online social networks: “Beyond all those questions only a fact remains: that our privacy, our profiles, our identities, our relationships, they are all - fake and/or real - entirely exploited for a sole purpose: to be sold as a product(..)”⁹⁰. In December the project stopped facilitating the automated deactivation process due to a cease and desist letter from Facebook. The corporation also blocked any Seppukoo attempt to deactivate one’s profile and does not display the amount of users who are part of the Seppukoo ‘pandemic’.



Figure 1 Seppukoo⁹¹

⁹⁰Seppukoo. “Viral Suicide Goes Pandemic.” Published November 25th, 2009. < <http://blog.seppukoo.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁹¹Saddington, John. “One Way to Commit Suicide on Facebook: Seppukoo

” Published December 12, 2009 < <http://churchcrunch.com/one-way-to-commit-suicide-on-facebook-seppukoo/>> (accessed August 10, 2010)

A few days after Seppukoo started ‘playing dead’, the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine⁹² was launched. This art project was founded by members of the Rotterdam-based artist collective WORM⁹³ (Walter Langelaar, Gordan Savicic and Danja Vasiliev) and developed at the Moddr⁹⁴ media lab. Similar to Seppukoo, the website assists social media users in committing ‘virtual suicide’, but in an entirely different way. After the users log in with their social networking account credentials and leave a testimony (if they want to), they can observe how their data is automatically removed in a scripted process. The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine permanently removes the data from the users account, whereas Seppukoo would make it possible for the users to retrieve their data by reactivating their Facebook account. The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine removes every friend, every group, every wall post etc. Thus, it undoes every online connection from the user’s profile and allows users to watch this process. In addition to Facebook accounts, it also allows automated deletion for user accounts on other SNSs like Twitter, Myspace and LinkedIN. As opposed to Seppukoo, the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine currently still active. However, it only runs on a small web server, which facilitates only one ‘suicide’ at a time; users hardly can get ‘spot’.

The artists did not intend their work as an activist project. It should be regarded work of art. There were no reasons, nor means to scale up its operations. Nonetheless, there is an open-source version in the making which will probably be distributed in the near future⁹⁵. This will allow others to work on the scripts to keep it compatible with social networking sites. Over four thousand users have used the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine (Figure 2).

The artists take their critique on social media a bit further than *Les Liens Invisible*: “This machine lets you delete all your energy sucking social-networking profiles, kill your fake virtual friends, and completely do away with your Web2.0 alterego”⁹⁶. Remarkably, the founders have also have received a cease and desist letter⁹⁷ from Facebook in January which is similar to the letter⁹⁸ *Les Liens Invisibles* received. The artists have been threatened with legal action if they would not cease their actions immediately. The letter contains accusations of violating the terms of use through scraping, commercial abuse of the user data, privacy

⁹²Web 2.0 Suicide Machine < <http://suicidemachine.org/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁹³WORM < <http://www.wormweb.nl/>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁹⁴Moddr < <http://moddr.net/>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁹⁵McNamara, Paul. "Facebook pushing 'Suicide Machine' into an open-source afterlife." *Networkworld*. Published 10 March, 2010 < <http://www.networkworld.com/community/node/58389>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁹⁶“Moddr_ Web 2.0 Suicide Machine Now Online!” < <http://moddr.net/web20-suicide-machine-now-online/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

⁹⁷Web 2.0 Suicide Machine, cease and desist letter from Facebook:

< http://suicidemachine.org/download/Web_2.0_Suicide_Machine.pdf> (accessed June 21, 2010)

⁹⁸Seppukoo, cease and desist letter from Facebook: < http://www.seppukoo.com/docs/seppukoo_cease_desist.pdf> (accessed June 21, 2010).

infringement, phishing etc. Both parties have argued that these accusations are false, and decided to fight the legal battle⁹⁹. At the present, it is really quiet around these cases. According to Walter Langelaar, the legal battle even is part of the entire performance (2010).



Figure 2 The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine¹⁰⁰

Both of these projects can be seen as counterprotocological resistance (Galloway and Thacker, 2007), as they implemented protocol in such a manner that users could automatically deactivate their profile automatically by just using their login credentials. It would take more time and energy to do the same thing manually. Moreover, it could be argued that the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine is more effective than Seppukoo as it removes as much data from the profile as possible. Still, it is questionable if deactivating a user's account or removing their data really affects the corporation's data accumulation. They might hold on to back-ups forever. One could argue that these two art projects have particular immanent ideologies which oppose the logic of social networking sites. With the possible return of Seppukoo and open-source Web 2.0 Suicide Machines the 'get back to your real life' meme might just awake from its coma. More information about the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine can be found in my interview with Walter Langelaar (Appendix A).

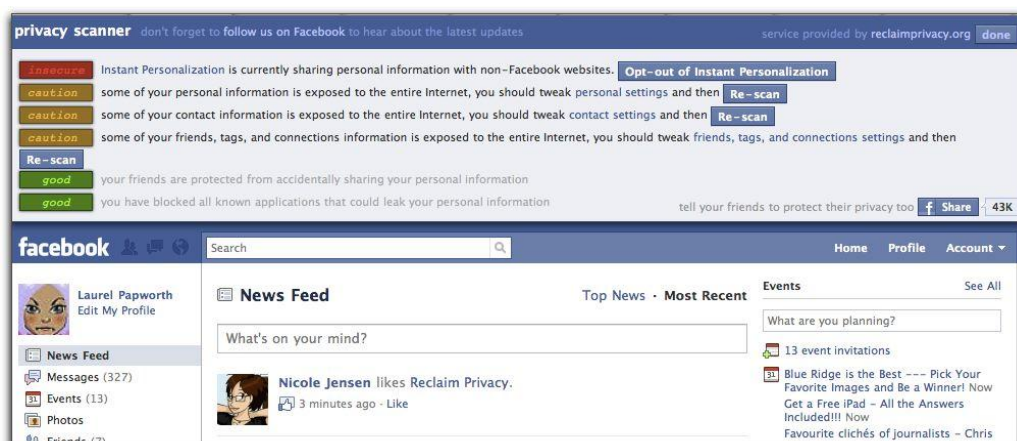
⁹⁹ Even though both parties managed to get lawyers on the case, as of yet, there are no decisive outcomes.

¹⁰⁰ Vroman, Gerrit. "Web 2.0 Suicide Machine" Published January 8, 2010 < <http://vromant.wordpress.com/tag/facebook/> > (accessed August 10, 2010).

3.6 Reclaim My Privacy

Despite the latest ‘simplified’ privacy controls, Facebook users might still find the privacy settings very complex. In May 2010 ReclaimPrivacy.org¹⁰¹ made an easy Facebook privacy scanner tool available: logged-in Facebook users go to the ReclaimPrivacy website, drag a bookmarklet to their browser, open Facebook in their browser and click on the bookmarklet. Subsequently, the tool starts scanning the key areas where information can be shared publicly. It checks the users’ sharing settings for photos, personal information, posts, contact information, friends, tags, connections, applications and the instant personalization feature. Then, it rates the level of exposure in these areas with ‘secure’, ‘caution’ or ‘insecure’. Users can decide which settings they want to change by clicking on links to immediately change the level of sharing and then rescan to see if everything is as secure as they want it to be. The website presents the tool as ‘independent’ and ‘open’. To keep the scanner up-to-date with Facebook privacy controls, programmers can contribute code to the project on the Github¹⁰² coding platform. Furthermore, translators are encouraged to make multilingual versions. In the month of its release, this counterprotocological tool received a lot of attention from news sites, blogs and Twitter users (Pizzimenti, 2010). Most importantly, the tool simplified the user’s control of the complex privacy settings. The tool’s creator does not know precisely how many users have used his tool. However, his guess, based on web site traffic, is that 400,000 Facebook users have applied it, which is a relatively small amount of users. More information about this tool can be found in my interview with creator Matt Pizzimenti (Appendix B).

Figure 3 Reclaim my privacy bookmarklet in action¹⁰³



¹⁰¹Reclaimprivacy < <http://reclaimprivacy.org>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁰²Github < <http://github.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁰³Papworth, Laurel. “Facebook: Reclaim Privacy Security and Safety” Published May 18, 2010. <<http://laurelpapworth.com/facebook-reclaim-privacy-security-and-safety/>> (Accessed August 10, 2010). (Image used with permission)

3.7 Userscripts

The Firefox Internet browser extension Greasemonkey lets user install ‘userscripts’ to modify the displayed websites on-the-fly. These are available for free on Userscripts.org, a large community of programmers and hackers who share, review, discuss and rate userscripts. The forum is a place to “ (...) discuss Greasemonkey, JavaScript, and other ways of remixing the web and making it your own¹⁰⁴”. Applying userscripts can be considered as a tactical media approach to modify online experiences. This activity can also be referred to as hacking, as it utilizes exploits to create new possibilities in software through tactical implementations or intensifications of protocol (Galloway & Thacker, 2007). Many userscripts have been programmed to add features or modify user interfaces on proprietary software services such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Google Buzz etc. People who install userscripts do not edit source code on the servers of these services, as they only add scripts for their local browser to process. However, the Userscripts.org website warns to use the scripts at one’s own risk, for it may be violating the terms of service of these websites. Nonetheless, this approach can be an effective resistance to some constraining interface and feature rules imposed by social software. I will now describe three userscripts that demonstrate this.

The ‘UnFuck Facebook’ userscript changes Facebook’s regular user interface layout (figure 4) and automatically blocks applications that normally would be displayed¹⁰⁵. It even removes the advertisements and allows users to customize the layout and feature settings. It adds new options to the user interface that normally are not offered by Facebook (figure 5). The userscript was created shortly after Facebook implemented its API platform and has been updated many times to keep the script compatible with the social networking sites. More information about the userscript can be found in my interview with its creator Michael Medley (Appendix C).

Another userscript removes all ‘like’ buttons displayed on any website¹⁰⁶. This does not affect the tracking activities from Facebook, as the cookies are still saved. However, it is a step forward into resisting the growing ‘like’-culture which many commercial entities eagerly participate in.

The third example is the ‘Unfriend Finder’ which has been installed over 4,000,000 times. It is a quite controversial userscript, as it notifies users when one of their friends

¹⁰⁴Userscripts Forums: < <http://userscripts.org/forums>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁰⁵Unfuck Facebook: Userscript < <http://userscripts.org/scripts/show/11992z>> (accessed June 21, 2010)..

¹⁰⁶Remove Facebook Like buttons: Userscript < <http://userscripts.org/scripts/show/76037>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

‘unfriends’ them or deactivate their account¹⁰⁷. It allows users to see which person has been removed from your friends list, while the software usually only notifies the user of pending friend requests. It adds an ‘unfriend’ feature to the top-right corner and left sidebar (figure 5).

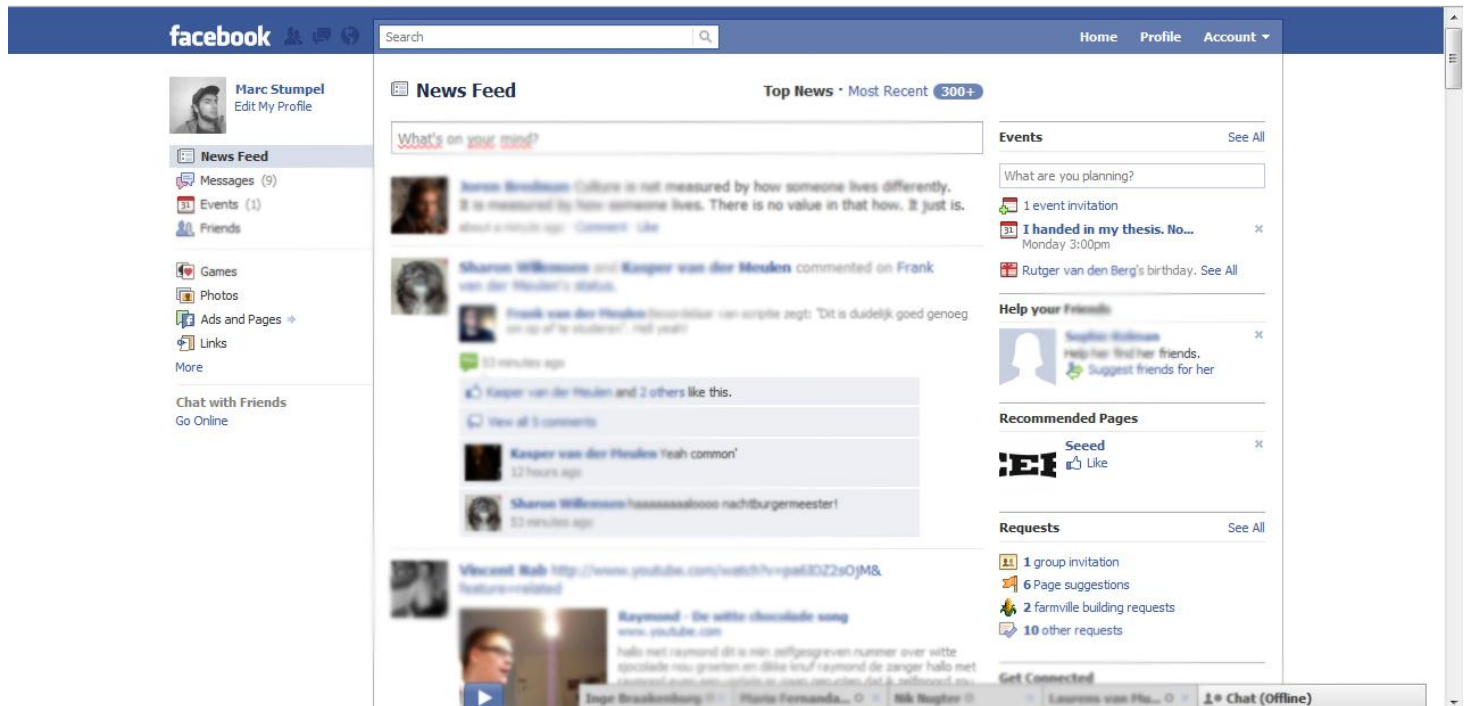


Figure 4 Facebook screenshot without applying userscripts



Figure 5 Facebook screenshot with Unfuck Facebook and Unfriends userscript applied.

¹⁰⁷Unfriend Finder: Userscript < <http://userscripts.org/scripts/show/58852>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

These are just three of the 50,000 userscripts are downloadable from Userscripts.org. One downfall of running these userscripts is that they can be unstable due to their ‘work in progress’ character. However, by applying browser hacks users can impose new rules, moving beyond the freedom that is allowed and regulated by a social media corporation. Therefore, I would like to argue that Facebook users can break out of the so-called digital lock-in (Neervens, 2009) by removing software constraints in the user interface. Moreover, the Unfriend Finder userscript illustrates how new features can be added to the SNS user interface by accumulating and processing data from the internal face (Galloway, 2010).

Critical social media users are experimenting with free and open-source software to do away with constraints in proprietary software. Arguably, this can be viewed as a strategic media¹⁰⁸ approach, in the sense that they are no ephemeral hit-and-run practices, but rather capable of being sustained. Websites are modified through the processing of the Internet browser by continuously running the userscripts. The Unfuck Facebook userscript even prompts the users on Facebook to update to newer versions, while being on Facebook (Medley, 2010, Appendix C).

However, the majority of Facebook users are unaware that they can easily modify the technical architecture of social software. It is very unlikely that they will be mobilized in large numbers.

3.8 Givememydata

Users are experimenting with Javascript hacks, but there are also applications that use Facebook’s API to give them the users new opportunities. Givememydata¹⁰⁹ retrieves and exports Facebook user data since May 2010. The website states that the application is meant to give users agency over their data, to make them able to manipulate their information as they see fit.”This could include making artwork, archiving and deleting your account, or circumventing the interface Facebook provides.”¹¹⁰ Givememydata allows the users to export their data (personal information, status updates, links to photos etc.) in various text formats, including CSV and XML. The developer, Owen Munday, Assistant Professor in Florida State University’s art department has stated that it is “making *hackers* out of regular users.”

¹⁰⁸ Zer-Aviv, Mushon. “Interface as a Conflict of Ideologies.” Published, March 23, 2010.

<<http://www.mushon.com/2010/03/23/interface-as-a-conflict-of-ideologies/#more-183>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹⁰⁹ GiveMeMyData< <http://givememydata.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹¹⁰ GiveMeMyData< <http://givememydata.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

(emphasis added)¹¹¹

Ironically, the developer uses Facebook's terms of service to support his vision embodied in the application: "You own all of the content and information you post on Facebook, and you can control how it is shared through your privacy and application settings.

"¹¹² Givememydata has been developed to let users exercise ownership rights over their information¹¹³. The application is public-beta, meaning that the developer is still working to improve it. Currently, it is not yet possible for users to automatically import the data they exported back onto their Facebook accounts¹¹⁴. This would be a powerful feature to restore deleted data or to bring user accounts back to 'life' in the case of a Web 2.0 'suicide'.

This counterprotocological application enables Facebook users to export their data and regain a sense of ownership of their personal information they have produced with their Facebook accounts over time. Contrary to userscripts this Facebook application uses platform's API and does not violate the terms of use.

3.9 Protocological Assemblages as Techno-cultural Compositions

In this chapter several cases of exercising protocological and counterprotocol in Facebook have been examined. The News Feed and Open Graph cases have demonstrated the distributed control logic of protocol, exercised by Facebook. In both cases, there is a possibility for the users to understand the implications of these sudden changes.

Discursive processes, such as blog posts, can help users understand how agency over their information has been reallocated by the software. This process of translation does not always occur, as the users might simply fail to receive the message, due to either unwittingness or disinterest.

Protocological control is an effective form of corporate domination, considering the fact that these changes have major implications on the control logic of the user interface the user engages in. In example, the users might be unaware that their information and identity is re-channelled (Langlois et. al., 2009) by clicking the 'like' button, or even visiting a website with 'social' Facebook plug-ins. Unknowingly, they might be sharing more personal

¹¹¹Richmond, Riva. "Facebook App Brings Back Data." The New York Times. Published May 1, 2010 < <http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/01/facebook-app-brings-back-data/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹¹²Facebook Terms < <http://www.facebook.com/terms.php>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹¹³Richmond, Riva. "Facebook App Brings Back Data." The New York Times. Published May 1, 2010 < <http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/01/facebook-app-brings-back-data/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹¹⁴Richmond, Riva. "Facebook App Brings Back Data." The New York Times. Published May 1, 2010 < <http://gadgetwise.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/01/facebook-app-brings-back-data/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

information than they think, which consequently leads to Facebook selling more advertisements.

The likejacking worm illustrated the potentially malicious abuse of Application Programming Interfaces. It is a critical counterprotocological practice that does not create any benefits for Facebook or the users. It is a perpetual, viral, and revenue-generating process that troubles the SNS corporation, which has recently launched its 'social' plug-ins.

Although the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine is still very busy, and Seppukoo is currently inactive, these projects demonstrated how protocological control can be articulated in legal processes. Also, they are remarkable for their particular immanent ideologies, which oppose the social networking logic 'as we know it'.

The Reclaimmyprivacy tool, the Givememydata application, and userscripts are counterprotocological adaptations which reveal that the technical architecture, user interface and internal face of Facebook are neither immutable, nor totally controlled by the corporation.

Facebook is a complex network that is repeatedly reconfigured through different protocological assemblages. The above cases have demonstrated that social media can be regarded as networked compositions of techno-cultural dynamics: technical, cultural, discursive, legal, ideological, and economical processes. Moreover, they support the assertion by Langlois et. al., that protocological assemblages are authorized by techno-cultural dynamics, while at the same time enacting specific articulations of them (2009). Thus, it could be argued that techno-cultural conditions affect control on both corporate and user levels.

Although counterprotocological practices hardly affect the ongoing exercise of protocological control by SNS corporations, they certainly remove social software constraints for a relatively small group of users. Thus, not every user is digitally 'locked-in' (Neervens, 2009) by the software; tactical media projects could be considered as an effective means of resistance, albeit operating on a small-scale, reflexive to hierarchical decisions made in programming the software. Moreover, the implementation of userscripts¹¹⁵ enables users to add new features and new rules to the user interface in social networking sites that are capable of being sustained. In turn, we will now examine the exploitation of user-generated content in Facebook.

¹¹⁵ Lieuallen, Anthony et. al. Add-ons voor Firefox. Published April 8, 2009 <<https://addons.mozilla.org/nl/firefox/addon/748>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

4 Exploitation vs. Agnostic Exploration?

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will look at how the notion of ‘exploitation’ applies to user-generated content on Facebook. The goal is to identify various modes of money making, which resonate in commercial business strategies. Social media platforms can exploit the production of immaterial user labour by selling and placing targeted advertisements. But as I argued above, the rights which are described in the terms of service are also relevant to discuss, as it can represent a means to generate more money. Firstly, I will analyze how rent extraction takes place. Subsequently, the continuous alterations of the terms of use will be discussed. Finally, the possibilities to resist cognitive capitalism will be examined through an overview of alternative open-source social software.

4.2 Rent

Rent is the other side of the commons — once it was over the common land, today over the network commons. (Pasquinelli, 2009: 8)

Facebook Incorporated is the owner of a social media platform with millions of users who perpetually produce and consume data. The corporation facilitates immaterial user labour and generates money from the accumulation and displaying of user-generated data. Facebook sells advertising banners, which generate their revenue stream. The users are able to remove the displayed advertisements, but will be asked what their motivation is. In this way, banner preferences are saved to generate more ‘targeted’ and ‘personalized’ advertisements. Anyone is able to buy advertising space, create an ad on Facebook and choose a specific target group. Advertisers can pay per click or impression to increase the traffic to their site. Just by facilitating the user-generated content, selling, and displaying advertisements, Facebook can continuously extract rent from the commodity value and workforce.

Without any costs, the Open Graph social plug-ins can be implemented on any website, which could be seen as objects that likely generate traffic to Facebook. More traffic equates more ‘impressions’ to sell to advertisers. User generated content is exploited by

Facebook in the sense that the users create, maintain, and expand their data bodies¹¹⁶ dynamically. The mass of the users' data bodies attracts advertisers to place advertisements on the platform. The social plug-ins enable users to re-channel (Langlois et al., 2009) their identity and expand their data body, for instance, by staying logged into Facebook and clicking on a 'like' button elsewhere on the Web. Thus, the Open Graph API and associated plug-ins create a new infrastructure for Facebook to generate more user data, traffic, and ultimately revenue. In turn, I will now discuss the changing nature of Facebook's terms of use.

4.3 Terms of Abuse and De-mock-ractic Open Governance

The terms of use, also referred to as the terms of service, constitute the alleged legal contract between the user and service provider. Most often users have to accept them at the point of registration or installation. Users can be unaware of the changes in these terms, let alone of what their actual contents are. The description by EFF, who created an archive¹¹⁷ of changing policies from online services, emphasizes their importance:

“Using a TOS, online service providers can dictate their legal relationship with users through private contracts, rather than rely on the law as written. In the unregulated and unpredictable world of the Internet, such arrangements often provide the necessary ground rules for how various online services should be used.”¹¹⁸

As these terms describe the rights and the responsibilities for the users and service provider, they can potentially problematize data ownership. For instance, in 2009 Facebook claimed eternal ownership of the data which their users produce, by changing their terms of service¹¹⁹. The corporation removed a few lines which granted the corporation to perpetually hold onto user data and (re)use it for any purpose without the users consent, even if the users deleted their account¹²⁰.

After blogger Chris Walter from the Consumerist¹²¹ noticed and blogged about the change

¹¹⁶Data body is a term coined by Steve Kurtz, founding member of the Critical Art Ensemble, to describe one's 'body of a personal data' that is constructed by means of connecting databases. Critical Art Ensemble – 'Utopian Promises – Net Realities' <<http://www.well.com/user/hlr/texts/utopiancrit.html>> (accessed July 2, 2010).

¹¹⁷EFF: TOSBack <<http://www.tosback.org/timeline.php>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹¹⁸EFF: Terms Of (Ab)Use <<http://www.eff.org/issues/terms-of-abuse>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹¹⁹Raphael, R.J. "Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint." PCWorld. Published February 17, 2009 <http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html?tk=rel_news> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹²⁰Raphael, R.J. "Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint." PCWorld. Published February 17, 2009 <http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html?tk=rel_news> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹²¹The Consumerist <<http://consumerist.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

in the terms of use, many contesting actors protested against this change. 38.000 users joined a Facebook group, EPIC filed a complaint with the FTC and many bloggers wrote about the issue¹²². Compared to the terms of service from other online services like Twitter, Myspace, and Youtube, reserving perpetual intellectual property rights over deleted user data is atypical for Facebook¹²³. Zuckerberg addressed the concerns in a blog post with the typical discursive framing: "Our philosophy is that people own their information and control who they share it with."¹²⁴

We're at an interesting point in the development of the open online world where these issues are being worked out. It's difficult terrain to navigate and we're going to make some missteps, but as the leading service for sharing information we take these issues and our responsibility to help resolve them very seriously.¹²⁵

One day later, Zuckerberg announced¹²⁶ that they would go back to the previous terms of use. Moreover, they made a rather interesting move. They created two Facebook groups called: 'Facebook Bill of Rights and Responsibilities' and 'Facebook Principles'. Users supposedly could help 'craft' the new terms by giving their vote, asking questions, commenting or making requests.

Our terms aren't just a document that protect our rights; it's the governing document for how the service is used by everyone across the world. Given its importance, we need to make sure the terms reflect the principles and values of the people using the service.¹²⁷

If at least 30 percent of active Facebook users who logged into Facebook in the past 30 days participated in commenting in so-called 'virtual Town Hall meetings', to cast their 'vote' before a certain date, the result would be binding¹²⁸. In addition, Facebook proposed a 'user council' consisting of users with who had the most insightful and constructive comments on

¹²²Raphael,R.J."Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint." PCWorld. Published February 17, 2009
<http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html?tk=rel_news> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹²³Raphael,R.J."Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint." PCWorld. Published February 17, 2009
<http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html?tk=rel_news> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹²⁴Zuckerberg, Mark. "On Facebook, People Own and Control Their Information." The Facebook Blog. Published February 16, 2009<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=54434097130> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹²⁵Zuckerberg, Mark. "On Facebook, People Own and Control Their Information." The Facebook Blog. Published February 16, 2009<http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=54434097130> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹²⁶Facebook group: Facebook Bill of Rights and Responsibilities
<<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=69048030774>> (accessed June 21, 2010)..

¹²⁷Facebook group: Facebook Bill of Rights and Responsibilities
<<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=69048030774>> (accessed June 21, 2010)..

¹²⁸Raphael,J.R."Facebook Opens the Polls for Privacy Policy Vote." PCWorld. Published April 17, 2009<http://www.pcworld.com/article/163322/facebook_opens_the_polls_for_privacy_policy_vote.html?loomia_ow=t0:s0:a38:g26:r1:c0.097805:b22071290:z0> (accessed June 21, 2010).

the policy drafts”¹²⁹. Facebook’s proposed model of ‘open governance’ was heavily criticized as ‘bogus democracy’ and ‘de-mock-racy’¹³⁰, because it was an unrealistic to get enough participants. Facebook might have received some feedback from users, but did not actually refer to any user influence when the terms of use were updated. Ever since, the terms are referred to as ‘Statements of Rights and Responsibilities’¹³¹.

In the meantime, the Bill of Rights group has been abandoned and cluttered with spam. Also, the Facebook’s Principles group no longer exists. Will Facebook’s model of ‘open governance’ return with the ongoing privacy uproars and privacy policy which already exceeds the amount of words from the US constitution¹³²?

The point is that Facebook can change its terms of service anytime if it wants to. Contrary to the former terms¹³³, the current terms state that the corporations has to ‘notify’ the users of every change on the ‘Facebook site governance’ page, which allows the users to comment on new proposals for the privacy policy or Statements of Rights and Responsibilities. One could argue that this page brings users closer to understanding how the site, and how their data is governed¹³⁴. However, over 1.5 million users ‘like’ and follow this page, which is merely 3 percent of all users. Furthermore, commenting on these documents does not visibly affect how Facebook and its users are governed.

SNS policies are important in the context of exploitation of user generated content as the changes in these documents can affect how user data is (re)used and distributed throughout on the Web. What Facebook refers to as ‘site governance’ actually encompasses the ongoing decision-making process that affects the rules and conditions in which 500 million data bodies are maintained, expanded and dynamically exploited. Facebook is not just a passive rent extractor. The corporation recurrently adds new features and establishes new partnerships to extract more rent by rechanneling user data bodies. For instance, through a

¹²⁹ Raphael, J.R. "Facebook Opens the Polls for Privacy Policy Vote." PCWorld. Published April 17, 2009 <http://www.pcworld.com/article/163322/facebook_opens_the_polls_for_privacy_policy_vote.html?loomia_ow=t0:s0:a38:g26:r1:c0.097805:b22071290:z0> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹³⁰ Oshiro, Dana Oshiro. "De-Mock-cracy In Action: Facebook’s Open Governance." ReadWriteWeb. Published August 11, 2009 <http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/de-mock-cracy_in_action_facebooks_open_governance.php> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹³¹ Raphael, J.R. "Facebook Opens the Polls for Privacy Policy Vote." PCWorld. Published April 17, 2009 <http://www.pcworld.com/article/163322/facebook_opens_the_polls_for_privacy_policy_vote.html?loomia_ow=t0:s0:a38:g26:r1:c0.097805:b22071290:z0> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹³² Gates, Guilbert. "Facebook Privacy: A Bewildering Tangle of Options." The New York Times. Published May 12, 2010 <<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2010/05/12/business/facebook-privacy.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹³³ Raphael, JR. "Facebook Privacy Change Sparks Federal Complaint." PCWorld. Published February 17, 2009. <http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html?tk=rel_news> (accessed June 21, 2010)

<http://www.pcworld.com/article/159703/facebook_privacy_change_sparks_federal_complaint.html> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹³⁴ Facebook page: Site governance: <<http://www.facebook.com/fbsitegovernance?v=wall#!/fbsitegovernance?v=wall>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

partnership with Microsoft, users are enabled to use Facebook on Xbox360 consoles¹³⁵. I would like to end this paragraph with an open question: How many registered Facebook users are aware of the changing nature of Facebook's terms of service they agreed to? Now that several strategies to exploit user-generated content have been unveiled, the potential of resistance will be discussed.

4.4 Resisting Exploitation?

In retrospect, contesting actors can engage in discursive reprogramming to try to change Facebook's operating logic. As with Beacon, this can have a reactionary effect on the conditions in which the exploitation of user-generated content takes place. However, Facebook can subtly change the operating logic anytime, by changing its policies. Counterpower is no effective resistance against (new forms of) exploitation of user-generated content, as it does not keep the corporation from exercising network-making power to make more profit. Perhaps then, users can resist exploitation through counterprotocological practices.

Tactical media can be used to block the advertisements on Facebook, for instance, by installing and running the Unfuck Facebook userscript. However, it only hides the advertisements, which are still loaded by the software, but hidden by the browser (Medley, 2010). Therefore it does not effectively disrupt the exploitation process. Although the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine potentially helps many users remove their user generated content and deactivate their accounts, currently there is not enough server capacity to process a 'mass suicide'¹³⁶. Obviously, the easiest way to stop cooperating in Facebook's rent extraction trajectory is to stop using the service. A relatively small amount of users deactivated their account on Quitfacebookday.

The campaigners argued that Facebook did not give their users fair choices to manage their data, because the settings were too complex for the average user¹³⁷. The ability to manage personal data is relevant concerning the exploitation of user-generated content, as the selling of advertisements correlates with the amount of rechanneled user data; users that do not know how to do this are likely to share more data to be exploited. It is crucial to be aware

¹³⁵Microsoft Xbox 360 Facebook partner website <<http://www.xbox.com/en-us/live/features/facebook.htm>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹³⁶Web 2.0 Suicide Machine <<http://suicidemachine.org/>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹³⁷<<http://www.quitfacebookday.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

of the discrepancy between the users who are unwitting or careless of how their data is exploited, those that are critical about it, and those who support it. As I previously stated, many commercial parties perpetually use Facebook as a marketing tool to improve their own traffic and revenues; marketers develop 'social media strategies' to sell brands. They should not be conflated with critical users, as they are fundamental to Facebook's advertising system. However, due to the growing criticism of Facebook, the development of alternative open-source social networking software has begun.

4.5 Diaspora

Many developers are currently challenging themselves conceptually and technically to build interoperable open-source alternative social networking services. Among them are four New York University students who are dedicated to build the first privacy aware, personally controlled, do-it-all, distributed, decentralized open-source social network over the summer of 2010.

'Diaspora'¹³⁸ should ultimately allow users to run their own personal web server called a 'seed' or 'node', to securely store and still share their data among friends by directly connecting their computers to each other, without connecting or transferring their data to a central server, as is the case with Facebook. The users of Diaspora would be in full control of their social graph, because their data is strongly encrypted by default. They can choose exactly what they share with whom, avoiding dubious rechanneling of their data. Diaspora has even been called the 'Anti-Facebook'¹³⁹.

The free software, open-source under the AGPL¹⁴⁰, will supposedly enable users to aggregate profile data from 'most major services', ironically including Facebook. It will allow connected seeds to privately share any information, content or media. However, people who are interested in using Diaspora and are not technically inclined to install a personal web server on their computer will have to wait to until the developers have created a paid turn-key hosting service, similar to what Wordpress offers¹⁴¹. They have planned to do this after they have released their open-source code in September. Tech-savvy Internet users will likely be the early adopters of this new technology. To fund the development, the Diaspora team

¹³⁸QuitFacebookday <<http://www.quitfacebookday.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹³⁹Perez, Sarah. "Diaspora Project: Building the Anti-Facebook." ReadWriteWeb. Published May 5, 2010 <http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/diaspora_project_building_the_anti-facebook.php> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹⁴⁰Wikipedia: AGPL <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affero_General_Public_License> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹⁴¹Diaspora <<http://www.joindiaspora.com/project.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

collected nearly \$200.000 in just a few weeks on the crowd funding website Kickstarter¹⁴², while their initial goal was to collect \$10.000.

The future users of Diaspora will create and interact in a distributed network in which each seed connects to another. By circumventing one central hub all ‘social networking data’ has to pass through, users will not have to abide to the reprogramming and protocological control of major commercial corporations, instead using social networking software on their own terms. It is at this critical juncture that Diaspora users will be able to exercise protocological control, rather than a SNS corporation. While Diaspora will function as a distributed network, the software is meant to decentralize the ‘social web’¹⁴³. Namely, it will enable social media users to scrape and copy their data from other social media services to their personal web server. These are a few quotes from the team which reflect their intentions and ideology:

We believe that privacy and connectedness do not have to be mutually exclusive. With Diaspora, we are reclaiming our data, securing our social connections, and making it easy to share on your own terms.¹⁴⁴

Decentralizing lets us reconstruct our “social graphs” so that they belong to us. Our real social lives do not have central managers, and our virtual lives do not need them.¹⁴⁵

Our goal is for everyone to have full control over their data and to empower people in to become responsible, secure, and social Internet dwellers. We believe offering this service will be helpful to non-technical users who are also worried about their data and privacy online.¹⁴⁶

We think it can change the way people communicate and empower individuals to permanently take control of their online identities.¹⁴⁷

The developers describe the content and software that will be produced and shared with their open-source core as ‘agnostic’¹⁴⁸, implying that the software may be used for any purpose. This content- and service-agnosticism can have radical implications on the file sharing debate;

¹⁴²Kickstarter <<http://www.kickstarter.com/>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁴³Kickstarter Diaspora project page <<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/196017994/diaspora-the-personally-controlled-do-it-all-distr?pos=1>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁴⁴Kickstarter Diaspora project page <<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/196017994/diaspora-the-personally-controlled-do-it-all-distr/posts/14069>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁴⁵Kickstarter Diaspora project page <<http://www.joindiaspora.com/2010/04/21/a-little-more-about-the-project.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁴⁶Kickstarter Diaspora project page <<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/196017994/diaspora-the-personally-controlled-do-it-all-distr?ref=users>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁴⁷Kickstarter Diaspora project page <<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/196017994/diaspora-the-personally-controlled-do-it-all-distr?pos=1>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

¹⁴⁸Diaspora <<http://www.joindiaspora.com/faq.html>> (accessed June 21, 2010).

users can share anything in spite of the attributed IP rights. Furthermore, as a hybrid of immaterial and material space, Diaspora seems to comply to with Pasquinelli's model of the autonomous commons, except that there is no 'common stock'. Crucially, however, the software has the potential to effectively resist the parasitic rent extraction of immaterial surplus, enacted by large social media corporations. In a recent lecture, Pasquinelli connects the rent extraction of cognitive capitalism with neofeudalism:

Neofeudalism is the polarised scenario where few landlords owns the whole infrastructure of communication (hardware layer, protocol layer, meta-data layer, social network layer) and face a multitude of cognitive workers forced to 'creativity'. In the middle, indeed, the crisis, the shrinking of the middle class of the digital age.¹⁴⁹

According to Pasquinelli, it is the cognitive middle class whose value production is currently exploited in by hegemonic platforms. Furthermore, he shows skepticism towards a new technical and political composition to challenge neofeudalism. Pasquinelli does not believe that 'free culture' and the 'gift economy' could change "(..) the dominant production, extraction and accumulation of value"¹⁵⁰.

From this perspective, Diaspora could be critiqued as a reformist project, which tries to change the dominant ways in which the value of user generated content in social networks is produced, accumulated and extracted. In spite of the possibility that many tech-savvy and the less technically inclined might use Diaspora as an alternative to Facebook, rent extraction through large corporate social media will continue to exist in great forms. In addition, it would be naive to consider distributed social networks as 'conflict-free' spaces.

However, it should be taken into account that Diaspora is not the only project with the goal to decentralize social networking through open-source software. For instance, GNUsocial¹⁵¹ and OneSocialWeb¹⁵² are also committed to facilitation of distributed social networks, in which the users run a web server to accumulate their data, with maximum control over their data flows. Alternatives to large corporately controlled social networks are definitely one the rise.

In his book *The Cultural Logic of Computation*, software-designer and Professor of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics David Golumbia poses the question "(..) whether

¹⁴⁹Pasquinelli, Matteo. 'on Liquid Democracies' Transmediale. Video published February 7, 2010. <<http://www.transmediale.de/en/mediaarchive>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹⁵⁰Pasquinelli, Matteo. 'on Liquid Democracies' Transmediale. Video published February 7, 2010. <<http://www.transmediale.de/en/mediaarchive>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

¹⁵¹GNUsocial < <http://www.gnu.org/software/social/>> (accessed July 21, 2010)

¹⁵²OneSocialWeb < <http://onesocialweb.org/>> (accessed July 21, 2010)

shape, function and ubiquity of the computing network is something that should be brought under democratic control in a way that is not today “ (Golumbia, 2009: p. 25). Referring to Galloway, Golumbia insists not only to resist through protocol but also against it (Ibidem: p. 26). In doing so, he encourages resistance against the computing power of institutions, implying a radical change in the decision-making-process concerning how technologies change, adapt and function in society (Ibidem). In this envisioned system, citizens have governmental powers over computer technologies, instead of institutions that reinforce hierarchical decision-making (Ibidem).

Although the tools to build distributed networks may currently not be in “(..) the hands of the widespread citizenry (..)”(Ibidem), alternative network architectures for social networking possibly mark a critical juncture of changing power relations in realm of social media. It potentially empowers users to give shape to their own social network, decide themselves how it functions, and it enables them to centrally store their ubiquitously spread data. This change in social network software might instigate a resistance to the computational power of Facebook and other large social media corporations. That is, a radical change in the decision-making processes concerning function and adaptation of social network technologies. Even though, it might be too early to make such a claim, the potential of decentralized and distributed social networks should be ignored. In turn, how is this alternative social network architecture implicated in the concept of organized networks (Lovink and Rossiter, 2005, 2010)?

As mentioned in the first chapter, organized networks are conceptualized as new institutional forms situated in digital media, that function as strategic sites of collaboration and knowledge production between formal relationships (Lovink: 2009: pp. 243-244). As opposed to social networking sites in which users are passive and perpetually exploited, they can be considered as social networks of strong ties with strategic purposes (Lovink, 2005).

The open-source distributed social networking software may very well contribute to the construction of ‘organized networks’ to facilitate “(..) horizontal, mobile, distributed and decentralized modes of relation” (Lovink and Rossiter, 2010), and “(..) sharing, a culture of openness and project-based forms of activity” (Ibidem). Similar to organized networks, distributed social networks undermine command and control logic, whereas they are products of command and control logic as well. They go beyond the intervention of tactical media projects, and thus, can also be referred to as strategic media.

Lovink argues that the organized networks will emerge as *modus operandi* when tactical media cranks up its operations (Lovink, 2009: p. 231). In my view, this corresponds

with the current situation, in which distributed social networks strategically enable new modes of governance and social network organization. Furthermore, according to Lovink and Rossiter, organized networks should be concerned with their sustainability, accountability and scalability (Lovink and Rossiter, 2010). These are important matters in considering the distributed social network architecture as potential foundation to organized networks. Even though open-source social networking software is currently being developed, it is not too early to consider the political implications of this space in construction.

Conclusion

5.1 Facebook: Control and Resistance

This thesis examined several cases in which Facebook has met with resistance in its attempt to exercise control. The corporation made many immediate changes to the platform, supported by a recurrent pattern of discursive framing and agenda setting. However, various actors resisted the instrument of discursive control by contesting the pushed software features and settings.

Their critical discourse manifested in Facebook protest groups, petition websites, a class-action law suit, blog posts, online news articles, and controversial websites¹⁵³. By these means of resistance contesting actors raised awareness about privacy- and information control issues. Moreover, Facebook reconfigured and even retracted certain features and settings several times, as a result of these expressions. Nevertheless, resistance to discursive control is only reactionary; the (re)programming and switching (Castells, 2009) enacted by Facebook cannot be preemptively resisted.

By means of tactical- and strategic media projects, and initiatives that utilize exploits, users can implement protocol (Galloway and Thacker, 2007) to regain a sense of agency: add to- or remove features from the interface, simplify complexities, and export their data. One could argue that certain hierarchical decisions in programming the software are reflexively resisted. As an instrument of control, however, protocol is not resisted, but rather transposed by a relatively small amount of users in order to remove particular software constraints and to add new features and rules. Still, users must deal with the intermittent reconfigurations of Facebook's protocological assemblages.

The exercise of discursive and protocological control enables Facebook to construct, maintain, and expand a technical infrastructure in which user data is progressively generated and re-channeled (Langlois et.al., 2009). Although there are currently no means for users to effectively resist the exploitation of user-generated content, promising alternatives are on the rise. Taking all of the above into account, how should we conceive of the politics of social media?

¹⁵³For instance, YourOpenBook.org and Quitfacebookday.com.

5.2 The Politics of Social Media

The politics of social media comprises not only the decision-making, but also methods of applying policies to digital social environments. Corporately controlled social networking sites implement policies through their terms of service to describe a set of the rights and responsibilities, rules and regulations. Given the innovative, changing nature of these platforms and their software, policies are often subject to change.

Regarding Facebook, it is remarkable that the corporation has proposed a model of ‘open governance’ in which the users supposedly could influence the corporation’s policies, through ‘virtual town halls’ and ‘user councils’. Even if this model would have been properly introduced and maintained, it is not possible that a few users could represent and defend the values of the diverse multitude of users. In addition, users of social networking sites rarely read the policies they agree to. Policies are important, but there is more to it.

This thesis has aimed to provide a framework for thinking about an emerging political field, in which discursive processes and (counter)protocological implementations should be regarded as essential political factors in governing the user activities and conditions on large social networking sites.

I would like to argue that trying to reach rational consensus with hegemonic platforms like Facebook, e.g. over privacy default settings, or to challenge them by evoking a political ‘rupture’, as Pasquinelli calls for¹⁵⁴, is not the right way to envision democracy in the politics of social media. In turn, I will discuss the work of several authors in order to critically theorize democracy.

In *The Democratic Paradox*, political philosopher Chantal Mouffe argues against the deliberative model of democracy as proposed by Jürgen Habermas (2000). This approach postulates that rational consensus can be reached through discursive engagement in a public sphere in which power is eliminated, and nobody is excluded (Ibidem: pp. 98-99) According to Mouffe the perspective is problematic because it neglects the dimension of antagonism (Ibidem: 91). This view is shared by politics theorist Jodi Dean, who opposes a theorization of the Web as a public sphere (2003).

According to Dean, the notion of the public sphere, traditionally a site and subject of liberal democratic practices, should be uncoupled from democratic theories under conditions of global technoculture (Dean, 2003: p. 111). She maintains that the Web cannot function as a

¹⁵⁴Pasquinelli, Matteo. ‘on Liquid Democracies’ Transmediale. Video published February 7, 2010. <<http://www.transmediale.de/en/mediaarchive>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

vehicle for rational discourse, based on the norms of inclusivity, equality, transparency and rationality (Ibidem: p. 108). Her assertion, that the Web is a site of conflict and antagonism, deems these norms as inapplicable (Ibidem: p. 105).

In support of these perspectives, I maintain that is an ineffective endeavor to theorize the consensus-based form of democracy when it comes to the politics of social media. Simply put, it is not a procedural type of politics, in which the plurality of values of millions of users can be equally and adequately represented. Besides, the politics of the public sphere are based on the idea that power is always hidden and secret (Ibidem: p. 110), whereas this thesis has exemplified that the exercise of power by a hegemonic platform is perfectly visible.

In politics, it is crucial to be aware of ‘the political’ as Mouffe puts it. That is, understanding that potential antagonism takes many forms of conflict in society, which can never be completely eradicated (Mouffe, 2002: p. 59). In her view, the plurality of discourses, practices, interests, and demands should not be impeded, but instead be incorporated in the very process of democracy through the expression of disagreements, in other words, by replacing antagonism with agonism.

As opposed to antagonistic conflicts that are reconciled through consensus between ‘enemies’, Mouffe’s democratic model of ‘agonistic pluralism’ proposes struggles between ‘adversaries’ (Mouffe, 2002: pp. 8-9). In such a democracy, adversaries do not try to eliminate each other’s passions, but rather ‘(..) mobilize those passions towards the promotion of democratic designs’(Mouffe in Deeds, 2007: p. 42).

By applying this model to the antagonism in the realm of social media, the developers of open-source social networking software could be thought of as the agonistic ‘adversaries’ of large, corporately controlled social networks. They express their disagreements with Facebook, on privacy control, and data ownership and exploitation, not by attacking them, but instead by moving their goals and passions to alternative spaces. Although Diaspora has been referred to as ‘Anti-Facebook’, which signifies rivalry, Mark Zuckerberg made a donation to support them¹⁵⁵.

Another theoretical model of democracy to consider is Dean’s ‘neodemocracy’.

¹⁵⁵Singel, Ryan."Mark Zuckerberg: I Donated to Open Source, Facebook Competitor." Wired. Published May 28, 2010 <<http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2010/05/zuckerberg-interview/>> (accessed June 21, 2010)

In ‘Why the Net is not a Public Sphere’ Dean draws upon the Actor-Network Theory¹⁵⁶-inspired work of Web epistemologist Richard Rogers and political philosopher Noortje Marres, who identify ‘issue-networks’ on the Web to reveal spaces of contestation and antagonism (Dean, 2003: p. 107). The formation of issue-networks occurs when people group around an issue, even if they have different notions or definitions of the issue. Issue-networks are neither actors nor a public, but “flows of communication and contestation that turn matters into issues” (Ibidem).

Dean argues that by following the issues, rather than the actors, ‘neodemocracies’ can be mapped, which are more or less democratic configurations through contestation and conflict (Dean, 2003: p. 108). Moreover, the goal of a ‘neodemocracy’ is contestation, by recognizing fissures and antagonism (Dean, 2003: pp. 108-111).

When we apply this model to the politics of social media, the manifestations of critical discourse contesting the decisions-making of corporately controlled social networks, in fact, give shape to neodemocratic issue-networks. In this thesis several instances of contestation of a hegemonic platform have been discussed. Several times this ‘publicizing’¹⁵⁷ of issues did not lead to any change. Correspondingly, Dean argues that democracy is not something which can be achieved when aiming directly at it: “Democracy (..) may well be a secondary quality that emerges as an effect or a result of other practices” (Dean, 2003: p. 111). This corresponds with idea that the politics of social media does not follow standard procedures with anticipative outcomes. To borrow from Marres (2005: p. 106), it is a ‘politics-in-the-making’, instead of a ‘politics-made’.

Furthermore, to effectively employ the democratic potential of networked communication, neodemocratic politics prioritizes decisive action over transparency (Dean, 2003: p. 110). From this viewpoint, open-source social networking software has great neodemocratic potential, since many important decisions in governing social networking activities will be made by the user himself.

The notions of agonistic pluralism and neodemocracy help to acknowledge the importance of antagonism and contestation in social networking sites. However, this thesis revealed more than just manifestations of critical discourse. How to consider counterprotocological practices in terms of political philosophy?

¹⁵⁶ Actor-Network Theory is a distinctive approach to social theory and research, concerned with the agency of nonhumans, has been developed in the field of Science and Technology Studies, put forth by Bruno Latour and others. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Actor-network_theory> (accessed August 14, 2010).

¹⁵⁷ With publicizing, I refer to the notion of a ‘public’, which is used by Rogers and Marres to broadly define all the groups and entities that make claims on particular issues (Marres, 2005: p. 106).

Users of social networking sites who implement new features and rules take matters into their own hands. Although they are dependent on the basics of the proprietary software, they engage in a mode of self-government. Further research can be directed towards a delineation of this political autonomy. In such an attempt a cross-platform comparative analysis might reveal different extents to which self-government of the users is possible.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview (phone). Walter Langelaar, Moddr-lab August 11, 2010

Can you shortly tell something about yourself? How are you involved in the project?

We're a media lab based in Rotterdam. We are part of the artist collective called WORM. The media lab itself is quite small and consists of three people, including me, Danja Vasiliev and Gordan Savicic.

In my thesis, I'm describing both Seppukoo and the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine. I've noticed that the graphic design of Seppukoo was done by Parcodiyellowstone, an italian design duo based in Rotterdam. The Web2.0 suicide machine was launched shortly after Seppukoo ceased their facilitation of virtual suicides. How are these two projects exactly related?

Essentially they are really not related at all. The designer we mostly work with is Buro Duplex. He is also based in Rotterdam, but this is purely coincidental. I have actually never heard of Parcodiyellowstone. In conceiving the projects there has been no connection whatsoever. You could say they are theoretically linked, perhaps. We did not know about their existence, until after we launched the Suicide Machine. We have been working on this project since January 2009. We have never seen it before, until people started attending us to the fact that they are somewhat similar. We were completely oblivious about Seppukoo.

At first the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine was intended an art project. However, it became very popular for its function to instantly commit virtual suicide. In my thesis I'm referring to the web 2.0 Suicide Machine as a tactical media project. What is your opinion about art as activism? Can it be an effective form?

The Suicide Machine still is an art project, essentially. A large part of the media attention that it created through its popularity, was in a kind of parody style and mostly it was all created by ourselves. We have done interviews with the really large media, like the Time magazine and the LA times. This was a nice opportunity to manipulate the media somewhat. Basically, we have been playing with this since the launch. The latest example is that we have put up a fake South Park episode, which also shows the Suicide Machine in the episode. We have also made it ourselves. In terms of the question about art as activism, since the launch and every

media appearance, we have stated that we are not activists, we are artist. This project is not intended as an activist strategy. Activism is fine, but it is not us. It is not what we do.

I am writing about resistance to protocolological control and to the exploitation of user-generated content. Would you agree with my argument that the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine is more effective than Seppukoo, because it really removes as much data from the profile as possible, and does not give the users a chance to re-activate their profile?

Yeah. We agree on this. When people started to attend us to the Seppukoo, we immediately had the shared opinion that it is much more some kind of activist performance. It clearly is a vehicle to post an idea. I think they have the similar intend in mind. We both support projects that come from an artistic background, but we always try to make the technology functional, which is a very big part of our practice. We basically supervene existing technology and give it a new meaning. In that sense we are actually quite proud that the Suicide Machine is a functional piece of software. Indeed, we were not so impressed by the opportunity to revive your profile after you have committed Seppukoo. We have always believed that this was a quite silly point in the project. It diminishes the meaning of it.

It is questionable if deactivating a user's account or removing the data affects the corporation's data accumulation practices. They can still hold backups, for instance.

What is your opinion about this?

Our strategy and what we believe that happens on these servers, is that by deleting as much as possible of the user-generated content, the backups at some point will flush out. Maybe a company as big as Facebook will always retain all backups ever made, but usually in web based system, at some point the backup system also refreshes itself. Things just disappear. It is a very questionable thing. Of course, we are not sure how Facebook really handles these things, because obviously they are really secretive about these things. The core of the project was to show and to raise awareness in a sort of humorous way, about the fact that is really difficult to delete this kind of stuff, and that is quite difficult to commit suicide online. We like the visual part. When you commit suicide you can see your profile being deleted, one by one. For some people's profiles this could take over 12 hours.

You send a live stream to the user, but you did not record this right?

No, we only made a recording of the WORM suicide, when Facebook demanded that it would delete its own Facebook account. We took a screen cast of the whole suicide, in which about

2000 friends are removed. At the moment we are putting this out on a full HD Blu Ray DVD. So were making a movie out of this. It basically consists of around 8 hours of Facebook friend being 'killed'. As an addition joke we are going to send it out to film festivals all over the world.

Both creators of the Seppukoo and the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine project received the same cease-and-desist letter. Les liens invisible is fighting back with an attorney. Why aren't you?

We are actually doing this. So the question is flawed. We even posted a reply of our attorney on our website. We have got a second cease-and-desist letter to which our lawyer again replied, and we also made another movie which is on our Vimeo account. This legal battle with Facebook was part of the whole performace, again something we have played with. We took the allegations very seriously, but after the first letter we went public and asked for support. Because of this, through the Electronic Frontier Foundation we even we got in contact with two really good lawyers, who wanted to handle our case for free. We went with one of these lawyers, and that was really helpful.

So you are still in this legal process, then?

Not really at the moment. Around the project it is a bit more quiet, we are a bit more quiet, and so is Facebook. The most interesting thing to see in recent messages is that Facebook is now working on its delete button. The initial cease-and-desist letter has a paragraph which states that Facebook would not have had a problem with our project if we made it through their platform. If we would have made it as a Facebook application it might have been 'okay'. What Facebook does not like is that it's a third party application that injects our software into their platform. They actually suggested that we make it on Facebook itself. Then there would be less legal trouble, perhaps. This is what they suggested in their letter. It is a really crazy situation.

The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine seems currently offline, but I've read that an open-source version will probably be distributed in the near future. Why are you doing this?

The suicide machine is technically still online, but it is still so busy that it is almost impossible to get a spot, since the first weeks actually. The open source version is being worked on for a while already. We are still finishing the commenting on the code, so that the users also know where to change things. It is important that when we release the code, that it

also sustains itself. We are doing this because we still very strongly believe in this project, even though it partly was a parody and intended to be humorous somehow. Maintaining the scripts that infiltrate Myspace, Twitter, Facebook and Linked In pages is too much work for only three people to work on. It is mostly one person-Gordan Savicic-who is doing this. These Web services keep changing their API. If they put the login form on a different place on their page, our script doesn't work anymore and need an update. That is why want to give the code to a community, or to give it away for free. Then there can be a much larger user and developer base that can maintain this project. It's a community effort.

Due to its popularity, there could be way more virtual suicides if there was more server capacity. What were the reasons you did not scale up your operations?

This goes back to the core of the project. We are only three artists. We made this just because we really believed in this project and had a lot of fun with it. We got numerous business proposals of Web based companies who see money in business strategies with this project, but we have always maintained that we don't want to turn this into a profit thing. It is an art project which we don't want to create a company out of. This would be much more work for us. The Suicide Machine runs on our own web server, which is a very modest machine. It is not some super backbone server.

The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine started as a project, not only to commit virtual suicide, but also for people to get back to their real lives. Do you believe in a balance between online and offline communication?

Judging from the thousands of reaction that we got from people, I think everybody is looking for this balance. In most contemporary societies and in dealing with these technologies, again, everybody is trying to find a balance for stuff like this. We have had so many reactions from people that were really glad to finally get rid of some profile, and indeed they started doing stuff that they forgot about. We do not think social networking is evil. It is not like that at all. These are just modern ways of communicating. It was mostly a critique on all these silly Facebook applications which are essentially made to keep you on the page. People have to keep in mind that, most of these large companies are not necessarily social networks. They are companies which somehow try to make profit from you being on their page. One of the recent reactions was really strange. A guy sent us an email with a movie attached and it basically was an echo taken in a hospital. This guy was thanking us. He claimed that he would not have made the baby if was still on Facebook. We have had insane reactions, which add to art

project. The Suicide Machine is now part of many art exhibitions. We exhibit related comments, funny quotes, pictures, and movies. There are people on YouTube who uploaded screen casts of their own 'suicides'.

Have you acknowledge the development of Diaspora and open-source, decentralized and distributed social networks? If so, do you plan to use it?

I think all of us have looked into open-source. I don't think I have really heard of this. I think there are many different efforts like this. Simply put, I think that it is completely useless to make a network, just for the sake of making a network. What is the network for? What is the content? Why do you need this network? There are so many ways to communicate these days. Even though, we as artists in the media lab pretty much exclusive work with open-source technology, it is not sure that distributed networks, which are open-source, are necessarily better. Because they are open-source, it makes them much more vulnerable to attacks, and if you are talking about privacy, this is a really important factor. If anyone can look at the source code, it means that every good hacker can get to the data. I am putting it very simplistically. I think there is probably quite a big problem there somehow. Why waste so much energy on creating yet another network, instead of just making sense on things for a change. If people just focus more on what they are actually saying, they might not need yet another way to communicate. That is how we stand in this. It is not like we think that social networking sites like Facebook are 'evil'. People themselves also have to take their own responsibility in preserving their private data, and making sure that it stays in the right places somehow. If your are worried about these things you should not sign up. The responsibility is not just with these companies.

I have heard you are going to write a book about the Web 2.0 Suicide Machine. What is your intention in doing so?

A book sounds a bit heavy. It will basically be a publication which will hopefully somehow conclude most of the things that I now also talked about. We hope to include pretty much everything that went on around this project. We basically explain what the project is. We get a couple of well-reputed media theoreticians to write essays on the impact of the work, how it was received in the media and of all these things. We will include as much of the documentation as we have and add a USB stick or DVD to it. We hope we can make the publication some kind of conclusive to the project, because obviously I think the message has been somehow received, and we think it was quite successful.

Appendix B: Email-interview. Matt Pizzimenti from 'ReclaimPrivacy.org' July 28, 2010

Do you have an indication of the amount of Facebook users who have used the Reclaim my privacy tool? What about the traffic to your website?

I would guess that about 400K or more people have used it, based on overall traffic. I don't use any analytics tracking (in the spirit of privacy), so I don't actually know exact numbers.

In the month of its release, Reclaimprivacy.org got a lot of attention from news sites, blogs and Twitter users. Have you constantly been contacted by the press or did you also promote your website in a particular way? Did Reclaimprivacy.org get enough attention (for you to be satisfied)?

I felt that it got plenty of attention, and much of it was unexpected. I released it on HackerNews the Friday before it blew up on Lifehacker, and since that point did not do much besides have a Facebook page and Twitter account for updates. All the press came to us from that point on.

To keep the scanner up-to-date with Facebook privacy controls, programmers can contribute code to the project on the Github coding platform. How many people contributed to this tool code-wise? How important are the translations?

Translations are important since Facebook is a global company. People running this scanner should know what it is doing, so I hope that the translations will help that. To that end, free time has been really short lately and the tool has not been updated in a long time. A few people are contributing code on Github and hopefully compatibility with the new settings is in the near future.

On the Github page, I've read that there is a 'lack-of-time' to keep the tool compatible with the latest Facebook privacy settings. One of the problems with privacy on Facebook is that the default settings keep changing over time, with many users unaware. Do you expect to update the tool in the near future or does this also depend on community contributions?

It depends on community contributors, partially because it can take quite a bit of time for just one or two people to stay on top of things.

You've received many donations for your tool. Why did you remove the donation box?

Mainly because we received plenty of donations to run the current tool for a while, and I felt that it is not right to accept donations for a tool that has not yet been updated for Facebook's new settings. Once we are compatible with the new settings again, I will post up the donation box again.

According to the website, you're mission is to promote privacy awareness. Would you argue that this mission is fulfilled? Have you ever heard about the Beacon settlement, in which Facebook supposedly would invest \$6 million to establish a foundation to promote privacy, safety and security?

I have heard about that settlement, but unfortunately I do not know much about the details. I assume that Facebook takes privacy concerns seriously, but regardless of that the users need to take their own privacy seriously and not rely on Facebook to set their settings for them.

Our website/tool does a small part in raising awareness of managing your own privacy, and hopefully there are others that encourage the same.

Your tool simplified settings that were experienced as 'complex'. Over the past few years (post-Beacon) Facebook repeatedly have promised to improve privacy controls to make it easier to control user information. Instead it has become more difficult over time. What is your opinion about the possibility that Facebook generates more money with *more* data that's being made publicly available without consent of the users?

I'm sure that the more public data Facebook has, the better their revenue from advertising and other partners. The choice of whether to make their money indirectly from advertisers vs. directly from users is their choice. Personally, I wish they would charge a small fee for an optional "premium" service, but maybe they have determined that advertising and partner revenue will be higher.

In the near future social networking through decentralized and distributed open source social networks, such as Diaspora, might give the users maximum control over their privacy by default encryption. Do you support this idea?

I do support this idea, with the main advantage being that it continues to increase competition.

The distributed nature of networks like Diaspora will also have some technical advantages for privacy, but ultimately once your data is shared beyond your personal Diaspora "node" you will no longer have control over it.

Appendix C: Email-interview. Michael Medley from 'UnFuck Facebook July 23, 2010

If through this javascript hack there are no advertisements to show, does it (in any way) influence the money Facebook generates through selling ads? In other words, does it block the ad? Or is it just hidden?

The ads are hidden with CSS(not Javascript) rules that my script injects into the page. Therefore the ads are still downloaded so I believe there is no loss of revenue for Facebook. I'd be happy answer any other question you have about my script.

The majority of Facebook users are unaware that they can easily modify the technical architecture of social software with userscripts, with 'Unfuck Facebook' for example. This allows them to get rid of some software constraints. Would you argue that userscripts get enough attention from ('mainstream') media? Or is more of a community thing?

I don't think they get enough attention, but I've had several tech blogs write about my script. User scripting does have a very strong community.

Recently, I've noticed that the running userscript prompts me to update anytime there is a newer version. Do you plan to keep updating the userscript to keep it compatible with Facebook?

I've been keeping it compatible with the many changes of Facebook over the last three years and I plan on continuing to update my script into the foreseeable future.

What is your opinion about userscripts violating Facebook's (or any corporation) terms of use? Have you ever been contacted by Facebook?

I guess it depends on how they are interpreted to be violating Facebook's TOS. I don't think any site can allow you access to it but forbid you to use a user script. The script can only be considered violating the site TOS if the user would be considered violating the TOS if they did the same thing manually (e.g. spamming, data harvesting, etc). I've never been contacted by Facebook.

What has exactly driven you to create this userscript?

Facebook released its Application Platform in the spring of '07 and I became frustrated with how the refined social network I had become accustomed to using seemed to be flooded with pointless application spam.

Do you know Diaspora (or GNUsocial etc.)? Do you plan to use it?

Nope and I don't plan on using it.

Appendix D: Search key words.

Clickjacking
Decentralized Social Networks
Diaspora
Diaspora +control
EPIC
EPIC +buzz
Facebook +Beacon
Facebook +Instant personalization
Facebook +issues
Facebook +Like Button
Facebook +Open Graph
Facebook +privacy
Facebook +Privacy policy 2009
Google Buzz Privacy
Give me my data
GNUsocial
Lifehacker +Facebook
Likejacking
Open source social networking sites
Reclaim my privacy
Seppukoo
Tactical Media
Strategic Media
Userscripts +Facebook
Web 2.0 Ideology
Web 2.0 Suicide Machine

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