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Online Activism

and

The Emergence of the Virtual Public Sphere

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***Abstract:***The “Arab Spring” movement demonstrated the vast potential of the Internet as an instrument to promote social justice and discipline abusive authorities; however, the successful utilization of online activism in the Arab Spring has been implicated by paralyzing displays of violent confrontation. The goal of this paper is to reimagine the political space for public-protest in our post-digitalworld by critically analyzing the relationship between violent protests and the public. Through the case study and comparative analysis of the Arab Spring protests, the 1999 “Battle of Seattle”, the 2009 “Green Dam” incident, and the 2012 protest against SOPA/PIPA, this paper will offer a new paradigm for Web-based public-protest which operates more efficiently and less disruptively than traditional forms of street demonstration. The proliferation of this new model of online activism may facilitate the emergence of the *virtual public sphere*, which functions as a political space for the legitimate performance of public dissent.

**Introduction**

*For several weeks…demonstrations and strikes across Egypt by students, civil servants, merchants, peasants, workers, religious leaders; by Egyptian women; by Copts as well as Muslims became such a daily occurrence that normal life was brought to a halt. The uprising in the Egyptian countryside was more violent, involving attacks on…military installations, civilian facilities and personnel.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

This excerpt from an Egyptian news article recapitulated the violence and social unrest engendered by the popular uprisings in Egypt. What one may not expect, however, is the fact that those Egyptian protestors were demonstrating against the British colonial rule,[[2]](#footnote-2) and the time was 1919.

Marx once noted that history sometimes repeats itself, “first as tragedy, second as farce”.[[3]](#footnote-3) Fast-forward to the year 2011—a time when Egypt, once again, was possessed by the revolutionary spirit. Many viewed the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 as a poster child for a new kind of social activism—one that is mobilized by the use of the Internet and social media.[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet the prominent use of online activism did not displace the staggering similarities between the *Egyptian Revolution 2.0* and its 1919 counterpart—the same groups of protestors demonstrated in public against the same kind of oppressive regime, which resulted in the same sort of violence and social disruptions. Abusive governments must be duly dealt with, but it is both inefficient and counter-productive to use violent means to obtain social justice and discipline authorities. There is a peculiar anachronism at play in the Egyptian Revolution and the larger “Arab Spring” —that all the rapid advancements in the efficiency of human communication failed to bring about consummate improvements in the efficiency of public dissent.

The purpose of this paper is to reimagine the political space in our post-digitalworld within the context of social activism and public dissent. The Arab Spring movements demonstrated the vast potential of the Internet as an instrument to promote social justice and discipline abusive authorities; however, the successful utilization of online activism in the Arab Spring has been implicated by paralyzing displays of violent confrontation. In the light of the growing significance of Internet-mediated protests, this paper will argue for a widely-applicable alternative public dissent paradigm which functions efficiently and nonviolently. Following this brief introduction, Section II will contextualize current challenges of Internet-mediated protests in the light of the Arab Spring and the 1999 “Battle of Seattle”. Section III seeks to provide a theoretical account for the phenomenon of violent protests. This section will first provide a definition for the term public-protest in the context of this paper by drawing from Dewey’s notion of the self-conscious *public* and Habermas’s conception of the *public sphere*. Next, violent protest will be interpreted under the phenomena of the institutionalized public in Western democracies, and the absence of a legitimate public dissent space in many non-democratic states. Section IV will focus on the case study of the 2012 online protest against the SOPA/PIPA legislation in the U.S. and the 2009 *Green Dam incident* in China. Though played under disparate settings*,* these two cases of online public dissent are similar in terms of achieving breathtaking efficacy without relying on physical presence. Section V will seek to identify a new role of the Internet in the context of public dissent by juxtaposing the two instances of peaceful Internet-driven protests mentioned above with the Arab Spring and the Battle of Seattle. This comparative analysis will demonstrate the possibility for the online arena to function as an effective alternative to physical public space for staging public dissent. Section VI then considers the functioning of the virtual public space in light of Foucault’s “Panopticon” metaphor for social disciplining, and reimagines the virtual public sphere as a reciprocal system of unverifiable masses disciplining the authority. The essay will conclude by offering an optimistic view that the synoptic functioning of virtual public spheres will synthesize with the panoptic disciplining mechanism of modern institutions in creating a fluid and harmonized relationship between individuals and authorities.

**Online Activism and Collective Violence**

*December 17, 2010: Massive protests broke out in Tunisia following the self-immolation of a street vendor.*

*…28 days later: Tunisian government overthrown…*

*January 25, 2011: Anti-Mubarak protests erupted in Egypt…*

*…18 days later: Hosni Mubarak ousted…*

*January 27: Protests spread to Yemen…*

*…one month later: Yemeni government overthrown…*

*February 15: Protests erupted in Libya, followed by violent armed conflicts…*

*…six months later: Muammar Gaddafi captured, tortured, and killed…*

*March, 2011: Massive anti-Assad uprisings broke out in Syria…*

*…sixteen months later: Red Cross declares Syrian conflict a civil war…[[5]](#footnote-5)*

Though commonly known as the “Arab Spring”, the fusillade of cataclysmic events listed above can be metaphorically described as “social activism on steroids”—a volatile amalgamation of over-performance mixed with self-harm, marked by rapid dissemination of public anger, fervent display of resistance, exponential escalation in scale, and increasing tendency towards collective violence. Of course, the above descriptions on the so-called Arab Spring run the risk of over-generalization—after all, the ongoing Syrian civil war is very different from the Tunisian Revolution, and the Egyptian uprising is also dissimilar to the Libyan conflict. While it is erroneous to assume that all Arab Spring protests have sprung from the same mold, this essay will nonetheless highlight two common features shared by those recent uprisings in the Middle East. The first is the presence of large-scale physical confrontations, which frequently escalate into immitigable violence. The second touches the prominent use of social media in the Arab Spring, which played a role in both igniting and sustaining the movement.

With regard to the first commonality, although the degree of disruption that resulted from public confrontations has varied from country to country, no Arab Spring-states were left unscathed by the violent displays of public confrontation. The Tunisian revolution, despite being touted as the “success story” for the Arab Spring movement,[[6]](#footnote-6) nonetheless has resulted in over 300 deaths.[[7]](#footnote-7) The confrontations in Libya and Syria have proven to be much deadlier than the Tunisian revolution.[[8]](#footnote-8) In mid-2012, Hussein Ibish, Senior Fellow of the American Task Force on Palestine, published a study in *Foreign Policy* magazine provocatively titled, “Was the Arab Spring worth it?” The study highlighted the tragic human losses and social costs that resulted from the Arab Spring uprisings:[[9]](#footnote-9) up to 15,000 civilians were killed during the Syrian uprisings, more than 700,000 refugees fled Libya, the unemployment rate skyrocketed in Egypt, and the Yemeni economy is facing imminent collapse.[[10]](#footnote-10) In 2011 alone, those four countries have suffered more than $35 billion in losses of public finances, with over $20 billion in GDP evaporated.[[11]](#footnote-11) While the value of overthrowing abusive regimes may be priceless, the protestors and rebels of the Arab Spring have nonetheless paid high tolls for their revolutions. To be sure, it is not the intent of this paper to use these statistic figures to gainsay the merit of the spectacular uprisings that have transpired in the Middle East and North Africa. After all, history tells us that civil societies often result from violent revolutions, and perhaps history will also inform us that the Arab Spring has ultimately led to greater good. While it is difficult to foretell the long-term effect of those revolutions, in some sense, it can be said that the Arab Spring movement has been extremely successful—not only in the way that the movement was able to spread like wildfire across the region, but in how protesters were able to topple some of the longest lasting despotic regimes in modern history within a very short period. That being said, we should not ignore the problematic aspects of the Arab Spring, that the successes of these public protests are often accompanied by significant social disruptions and tempestuous confrontations. There are of course many factors potentially contributing to the violence in the Arab Spring uprisings—sectarian resentment, historical factors, government repression, and extremist elements, just to name a few. The causes of violence may also be disparate in different states and situations. But for the purpose of this article, we will focus on the structural root of violence—that the society and the political system are structured in a way that precludes peaceful means of public protest. Supposing that our modern civil society, as Freud observed, is constructed in such a way that manages and redirects the dangerous aggressive tendencies of individuals,[[12]](#footnote-12) it is reasonable to suspect that without functioning structures to manage and assuage public resentment, disgruntled individuals may run amok.

Turning to the second shared element among the Arab Spring protests, while the press has given considerable attention to the use of online social media among the protestors, there are disagreements amidst pundits and analysts on the significance of online activism on the protests in the Middle East.[[13]](#footnote-13) In early 2011, the Project on Information Technology & Political Islam (ITPI) based in University of Washington published an empirical study on the role of social media during the Arab Spring.[[14]](#footnote-14) The ITPI study finds that social media not only “played a central role in shaping political debates in the Arab Spring”[[15]](#footnote-15) and “a spike in online revolutionary conversations” would often lead to major protests on the ground,[[16]](#footnote-16) but also that new media played an important role in spreading the revolutionary spirit across international borders.[[17]](#footnote-17) A similar study conducted by the Dubai School of Government in May 2011 also largely resonated with the conclusions made by the ITPI report.[[18]](#footnote-18) However, others questioned the above findings, and instead view the role of Internet-use on the Arab revolutions as merely peripheral.[[19]](#footnote-19) “There have been a lot of bold statements about the uprising in Egypt and Tunisia: that they couldn't have happened without the internet. I think that is an exaggeration,” said Hisham Matar, a renowned Libyan writer,[[20]](#footnote-20) “the people who have access and know how to use it are the elite. The Egyptian uprising didn't happen on Facebook or Twitter because it couldn't have happened without the working classes, and they don't have access to those things.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Though speaking in the tone of a “cyber-skeptic”, Matar nonetheless acknowledged the important role of the Internet in providing an alternative arena for the protestors to engage in discussions: “in Tunisia and Egypt, I think Facebook and Twitter have created a political discourse that is bypassing the old regime.”[[22]](#footnote-22) Mr. Matar raised a very crucial point with regard to the functioning of the online sphere as a viable discursive public space for an otherwise disempowered public. He rightfully pointed out that frequently, authoritarian regimes seek to control public opinion by restricting public discourse, that “political dictatorships take possession not just of money and belongings but of narrative.”[[23]](#footnote-23) Yet “narratives” in themselves are not public discourse, per se, without publicity.[[24]](#footnote-24) In the context of Matar’s comment, the “possession of narrative” is in fact referring to government’s total control over *means of publicity*[[25]](#footnote-25)—often done through heavy-handed censorship and prohibition of public assembly. Some traditional means of publicity include public assembly, various forms of publications, as well as printing and broadcasting press. The notion of the online sphere functioning as a public discursive space will be examined more closely in the subsequent sections. For now, it is safe to conclude that while debates still persist over the precise role the new media has played in the Arab Spring, there is general consensus that the “digital revolution” is fundamentally inked to the Arab revolutions. In some sense, the advent of the Arab Spring also transformed the larger discussion on the relationship between social activism and the Internet. This transformation was succinctly summarized by Sheldon Himelfarb, Director of the Center of Innovation at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) during a 2011 conference on the role of social media in conflict hosted by the USIP:

A year ago, the big social media debate was between the polar opposites of cyber-utopian and cyber-skeptic… Now the debate has shifted, giving way—thanks to events in the Middle East—to a general acknowledgment of social media’s organizing power and a more nuanced discussion around the characteristics of this organizing power: enabler or accelerator.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The revolutions that took place in the Middle East demonstrated the vast potential for the Internet as an instrument to promote social justice and discipline abusive authorities. On the other hand, even the most optimistic *cyber-utopian* should not overlook the devastating effects of violence and social disruptions. In the context of the Arab Spring, it is apparent that physical confrontations and virtual activism seem to engender each other—large street protests are often organized and fueled by the use of social media, and the events on the ground in turn galvanize online activism.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The Arab Spring is not the first prominent case of violent internet-assisted protests. The 1999 Seattle WTO protests, also known as “The Battle of Seattle”, can be seen as an incipient example of this unique form of public dissent—a riotous amalgamation of street and online activism. “It was billed as a chance for Seattle to shine around the world and rake in more than $11 million in tourist dollars,”[[28]](#footnote-28) The Seattle Times reported, reflecting back on the optimism the city vested in hosting the WTO Ministerial Conference of 1999. It was meant to be Seattle’s coming-out party, a showcase for the high-tech capital as a site where international delegates would converge and marshal the global trade order. “Instead, here is what is left as participants and protesters to the World Trade Organization leave behind…: Broken glass and boarded-up buildings. Burning eyes and scratchy throats. More than $12 million in lost holiday sales. Threats of lawsuits to recover the money…”[[29]](#footnote-29) The setting of the 1999 Battle of Seattle differs from the Arab Spring on many levels—the former took place in a flourishing high-tech metropolis on the U.S. West Coast known for its coffee shops, indie music scene, and amicable, tolerant attitudes; the latter sprung up in one of the most restive regions in the world, plagued by abusive governments, sectarian tension, and social instability. Even though they occurred under disparate socio-political milieux, the two events nonetheless share the motif of violence and internet-use.

While the bulk of the street protests only lasted four days, from November 30 to December 4,[[30]](#footnote-30) mobilization for the anti-WTO protests have begun months ahead.[[31]](#footnote-31) Much of the preparatory works were conducted via the internet, with the help of hundreds of national and international groups and organization.[[32]](#footnote-32) For example, the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, a Minneapolis-based NGO, created the website WTOWatch.org as a major online platform for organizing protestors. Independent Media Center, an anti-corporate international journalist collective, created Indymedia.org as an online news platform for providing grassroots coverage of the protests in Seattle.[[33]](#footnote-33) London-based NGO Friends of the Earth International distributed an online petition calling for action against the planned WTO negotiations in Seattle. The online petition was signed by more than 1500 activist groups. On November 30, 1999, months of online mobilization eventually culminated into a grand spectacle of approximately 50,000 protestors on the streets of downtown Seattle. [[34]](#footnote-34) The sheer size of the participating crowd dwarfed all previous anti-globalization protests.[[35]](#footnote-35) “Seattle battle showed Internet's populist power”, reads the front-page headline from The Toronto Star, published two weeks after the disquietude in Seattle: “dozens of Web sites—featuring everything from personal stories of police brutality to chat rooms, photographs and even video—have sprung up on the Internet from around the world.”[[36]](#footnote-36) [[37]](#footnote-37) The newspaper’s exclamation on the Internet’s new-found potential for social activism was echoed by many scholars. Mattheu Eagleton-Pierce referred to the Battle of Seattle as “an important watershed for Internet-mediated activism.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples also commented that “Seattle…witnessed the enactment of forms of activism adapted to a wired society.”[[39]](#footnote-39) Setting the “cyber-optimism” aside, the 1999 Seattle protests were also haunted by the specter of violence. “*Anarchists*”, used in this case by the media to refer to those fractious demonstrators at Seattle, has evolved into a *nom de guerre* for future reoccurring protests against international institutions. “We weren't ready for the depth of anti-WTO sentiment that was being expressed”, said Norm Stamper, the former Seattle Police Chief, “we weren't ready for the very large numbers of individuals, representing a minority of all protesters, who were bent on destruction or violence.[[40]](#footnote-40)” Analogous to the multiplicity of the Arab Spring movement, the Battle of Seattle was also far from being a monolithic event. Amongst different groups of peaceful demonstrators, bands of masked rioters dressed in black ran amok, trashing whatever they saw as material representations of oppressive global capitalism.[[41]](#footnote-41) Shops were looted, windows were smashed, and private properties were vandalized.[[42]](#footnote-42) Lines of police officers equipped with full riot gear and gas masks were deployed against the black-clad anarchists. The placid Seattle downtown soon devolved into a warzone, where the riot police used pepper spray, tear gas, rubber bullets, and percussion grenades to disperse the recalcitrant demonstrators.

In light of the Battle of Seattle and the Arab Spring movements, the prominent use of the Internet in both cases signaled the ascendance of online activism as a crucial component for social activism in the *post-digital* age. But this new-found optimism of Internet as a protest facilitator does not assuage concerns over violence and social disruptions. In the context of the Arab Spring and the WTO protests, it is apparent that physical confrontations and virtual activism seem to engender each other—large street protests are often organized and fueled by the use of social media, and the events on the ground in turn galvanize online activism.[[43]](#footnote-43) But online activism and violent confrontations should not be natural corollaries. While we may view street protests and online activism as two forms of the same activity—the act of public dissent— they differ in physical presence. In terms of physicality, the two forms of protests are diametrically opposed—the violent confrontations on the streets marked by the physical and determinable presence of exposed individuals within a confined locus is contrasted with the non-violent and geographically unrestricted discussions on the Web marked by virtual and indeterminable presence of anonymous users. It is the synthesis of these two antithetical forms of public dissent that gives rise to the key contradiction of those Internet-mediated uprisings–that the increased efficiency and publicity brought by the use of new media is implicated by the counter-productivity of violent confrontations on the street. Given the unfortunate tendency for public demonstrations to degenerate into collective violence, a question central to this exigency of destructive social activism has to do with the substitutability of physicalactivism: under what circumstances would non-violent virtual activism obviate the need for street protests? Two recent cases of online activism—the 2012 protests against the proposed SOPA and PIPA legislations in the United States and the 2009 Green Dam protests in China—have demonstrated a new modality in which protesters would induce social change and discipline institutional behavior without relying on means of physical resistance.

**A Pragmatic Approach for the Study of Online Social Movement Rhetoric**

Before delving into the more detailed discussion concerning online social movement rhetoric, a case must be made for the theoretical approach of this paper. Why study the rhetoric of social movement? The simple answer is because social movements, in large parts, ARE rhetorical.

Many social scientists outside the discipline of rhetorical studies have given recognition to the rhetorical dimensions of social movements. Charles Tilly, perhaps one of the most prominent social movement scholars in the late 20th century, has broken down the generalized collective phenomenon into a number of discursive and symbolic performances:

“Social movements combine: (1) Sustained campaigns of claim making; (2) an array of public performances including marches, rallies, demonstrations, creation of specialized associations, public meetings, public meetings, public statements, petitions, letter writing, and lobbying; (3) repeated public displays of worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment by such means as wearing colors, marching in disciplined ranks, sporting badges that advertise the cause, displaying signs, chanting slogans, and picketing public buildings. They draw on (4) the organizations, networks, traditions, and solidarities that sustain these activities.[[44]](#footnote-44)”

Social movements are goal-oriented. They consist of individuals coming together, engaging in discussions, debates, and designing, mobilizing, and employing various devices to promote, resist, or undo socio-political change. Those activities identified by Tilly—marching, demonstrating, letter-writing, lobbying, picketing, chanting and so on, function as persuasive devices utilized by the protestors to advance their collective cause. In Aristotle’s own words: “rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Merely identifying the relevant rhetorical devices for OSM, however, is not enough. More important than knowing what those modes of persuasion *are* is to understand how they *work*. The capacity for the protestors to achieve their goal, to a great extent, depends on the protestors’ ability to employ their persuasive devices effectively and efficiently. In this sense, disruptive riots can be seen both as an undesirable and inefficient form of coercive rhetoric.

Aristotle’ specifically defined rhetoric as “the counterpart of dialectics”—an art an orator’s ability to utilize the “available means of persuasion” in a deliberative situation. [[46]](#footnote-46) From this preposition, Aristotle categorized rhetoric into several genres (*deliberative, forensic,* and *epideictic*) and devices (*ethos,* *pathos,* and *logos*), and taxonomically investigated these well-defined elements. Traditionally, many rhetorical scholars have adopted the Aristotelian approach, where the study of public discourse mostly falls within the study of “great orators” and speeches through predetermined genres and devices. [[47]](#footnote-47) Rigid divisions of knowledge do function well for the maintenance of order and hierarchy through the systematic organization of knowledge and practices. However, fixed disciplinary barriers may petrify and become disjointed with the functional reality. While “persuasion”, in a broad sense, is a universal feature of human language,[[48]](#footnote-48) the modes of persuasion and their functioning may vary in different historical and social contexts. Consider Mohammed Bouazizi—a disgruntled Tunisian street vendor whom, by setting himself on fire, sparked the 2010 Tunisian Revolution.[[49]](#footnote-49) Neither was Bouaziz a “great orator”, nor did he make any “speech”; nonetheless, his self-immolation was arguably the single most important rhetorical act in initiating the Arab Spring movements. Furthermore, the rhetorical effect of Bouazizi’s symbolic act was intrinsically linked with the use of new information technology, as his family members and friends used social media to share his story with the larger public and the international media.[[50]](#footnote-50) The example of Bouazizi demonstrates that rhetorical analysis must go beyond orator and orality in order to take other relevant forms of symbolic performances and performers into consideration. As Kenneth Burke observed, rhetoric encompasses all “symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.”[[51]](#footnote-51) This expansive understanding of rhetoric does not imply that theoretical frameworks from the past are irrelevant for studying of present-day rhetorical phenomena. A “theory” can be seen as an amalgamation of different ideas with varying functional “expiration dates”. Depending on the subject of inquiry, certain concepts from Aristotle’s *Rhetorica* may still be relevant, whereas other scholarly concepts from only a few years ago may no longer be applicable. As information technology and social movement are rapidly evolving social variables, it is advisable pragmatically and eclectically to apply theoretical approaches that are still functional within the context of the present-day online social movement.

**From the “Rhetoric of the Streets” to the “Rhetoric of the Screen”**

Leland Griffin is widely credited to have pioneered the rhetoric scholarship on social movements.[[52]](#footnote-52) In his 1952 essay, “The Rhetoric of Historic Movements”, he challenged public address scholars to move beyond the “great orator” tradition of public address and to embrace more diverse sets of rhetorical phenomena.[[53]](#footnote-53) Griffin called for a more “acute appreciation of the significance of the historically insignificant speaker”.[[54]](#footnote-54) Though it marked a major shift from the so-called “neo-Aristotelian” framework, Griffin’s 1952 essay was focused on historical movements, and did not provide adequate consideration for the confrontational rhetoric of the streets that are marked by public marches, sit-ins, and riots.[[55]](#footnote-55)

The advent of confrontational social movements in 1960s and 70s’—marked by civil rights struggles, anti-war demonstrations, identity fights, and campus activism—have elicited a major reorientation in social movement rhetoric (SMR) scholarship.[[56]](#footnote-56) Many public address scholars during this era, such as Franklyn Haiman, Robert Scott, and Donald Smith, have defended the rhetorical nature of street activism, as well as voiced concerns over the confrontational tactics associated with the rhetoric of the streets.[[57]](#footnote-57) In their 1969 article, “The Rhetoric of Confrontation”, Scott and Smith noted the tension between the confrontational and the Aristotelian rhetorics—as the latter presupposes the goods of order, decorum, civility, and reason, whereas the former tends to invite physical violence.[[58]](#footnote-58) This tension between civil persuasion and confrontational coercion remains as a challenge central to the Arab Spring movements.

Aside from definitional issues, the problem of texuality is also central to the study of rhetoric. Persuasion is context-bound, and the play of context is found both within and outside of a given body of text or meanings. SMR scholars traditionally tend to focus on the textual analysis of individual texts and speeches related to a given movement (also known as the *hermeneutic* approach),[[59]](#footnote-59) whereas social scientists often seek to explain the social phenomenon through the interpretation (or *verstehen*) of various social, political, cultural, and religious elements. Looking at the case of Bouazizi again, while the self-immolation of the Tunisian street vendor can be identified as a rhetorical act, its persuasive effect was articulated through the use of social media. Rhetorical self-sacrifice is not an idiosyncrasy for the post-digital age, but its function may differ depending on the social and temporal context. When studying a rhetorical phenomenon, *hermeneutics* and *verstehen* should be natural corollaries. Since the end of 1960s, SMR theorists began to merge the gap between social sciences and rhetorical studies. Herbert Simons has adopted the structural-functionalist approach and sought to analyze a generalized social movement rhetorical pattern under the assumption that “any movement must fulfill the same functional requirements as more formal collectives.”[[60]](#footnote-60) Ralph Smith and Russel Windes also articulated the rhetorical function of social movement within the context of the existing socio-political order. They categorized social movement into “innovation movement” and “establishment-conflict movement”. While both types of movement seek to produce social change, the conflict model calls for the overthrow of existing social-political order and establishments, whereas the innovation model seeks to obtain their objective by persuading the existing system to improve, modify or self-correct.[[61]](#footnote-61) Based on Smith and Windes’ narrative, the emergence of innovational movements not only signified a new rhetorical paradigm for social movements, but also amounted to advancement in the technique of inducing social progress.

With the emergence of the so-called “new social movement” theory in the 1980s, the rhetorical scholarship has embraced critical flexibility and opened its disciplinary door to a wide range of discourse challenging institutions and dominant norms.[[62]](#footnote-62) Nonetheless, historical movements and rhetoric of the streets remain the primary focus for the SMR scholars. The 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle, also known as the “Battle of Seattle” marked a shift in both the focus and locus of social movements. DeLuca and Peeples critically analyzed the rhetoric of the “public screen” through Habermas’ concept of the public sphere. In contrast to the public sphere’s privileging of rationality, consensus, and civility, DeLuca and Peeples argued that the public discourse articulated through the use of new media tend to highlight “dissemination…distraction, and dissent.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Given the unfortunate tendency for public demonstrations to degenerate into collective violence, a question central to this exigency of destructive physical protests has to do with coercion and persuasion: under what circumstances would non-violent virtual activism obviate the need for gatherings on the streets?

**Violence, Persuasion, and the Exercise of Power**

Prior to his work on the new media driven protests, DeLuca offered a provocative observation concerning the rhetoric of the streets. He contends that the physical presence of human bodies at public sites signifies a direct response against the authority’s ability to act with legitimacy.[[64]](#footnote-64) DeLuca and Peeples have also opined that the deployment of symbolic violence can be seen as a rhetorical tactic for manipulating public opinion under the omnipresent gaze of cell phone cameras. They added, “the anarchists’ symbolic violence justified intense media coverage of the police violence because media framing often portrayed the police violence as a response to the anarchists.” DeLuca and Peeples’ interpretation of the “body rhetoric” and the “rhetorical violence” suggests that the physical presence of protestors alone is enough to count as being rhetorical, even when physical demonstrations devolve into physical violence. Such a claim raises the question on whether coercive means can be considered modes of persuasion.

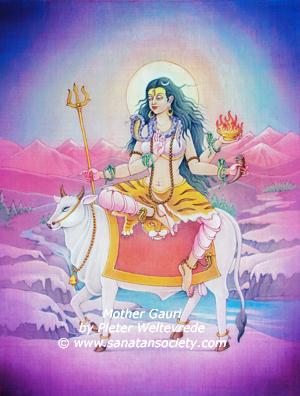
DeLuca and Peeples’ interpretations on the tactical use of violent for the purpose of influencing institutional behavior bears resemblance to the Clausewitz’ aphorism on the tactical deployment of war. As an early adherer of Hegelian historical dialecticism, Carl von Clausewitz wrote in his 1827 essay *War and Politics* (Krieg und Politik) that “War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse”. Clausewitz argues that the deployment of violence should be viewed as a legitimate use of power. Like all form of power, War is a dialectical play between the weak and the strong, where act of violence is use tactically in order to reach a state of equilibrium over competing interests.[[65]](#footnote-65)

A *fatal* (figurative and literally) flaw of Clausewitz’s theory is his confusion on the very Hegelian aspect “power”. Rather than being a mere continuation of political power play, the act violence is in fact the antithesis of power—a state where all forms of power collapses into a singularity of violent coercion. For instance, during the Cold War, the so-called “Mutually Assured Destruction”[[66]](#footnote-66) policy adhered by U.S. and the U.S.S.R. can be understood as the final limit in the exercise of power. In this case, each party still has two choices: the use or the nonuse of nuclear weapons. Once all forms of diplomacy have failed and the use of nuclear weapon is triggered, there is no power to speak of past that point. Where is the exercise of power when there is no one left to persuade?

Foucault has duly criticized the functional absurdity on the Clausewitz’s conception of power. During one of his lectures at Collège de France in 1975, Foucault noted that “…Clausewitz’s aphorism…means that the final decision can come only from war, or in other words a trial by strength in which weapons are the final judges. It means that the last battle would put an end to politics… that the last battle would at last—and I mean ‘at last’—suspend the exercise of power as continuous warfare”.[[67]](#footnote-67) For Foucault, power relation requires some form of agency and *free* choice on the part of the subjects, even if the agency is inherently confined within a narrow parameter:

“Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free.  By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized.  Where the determining factors saturate the whole, there is no relationship of power; slavery is not a power relationship when man is in chains.”[[68]](#footnote-68)

The pair of Hindu iconographies above depicts two representations (or *Shaktis*) of the Devine Mother Devi. As Devi is the supreme motherly being who embodies all active energies and power, the two embodiments of the Divine Mother can be understood as two manifestations on the projection of power.[[69]](#footnote-69)



The iconography on right is Mother Gauri—the benevolent goddess of power, who maintained good order of things. She is auspicious, brilliant, and protests those things that are good and desirable while eliminate those which are found obnoxious. She is commonly depicted riding on a bull, which signifies her connection with a civil and productive society. Her benign nature persuades people to behave in a way that promotes the common good and the care of the others. Gauri projects power unto the people so that individual may have the energy and motivation to live a productive and happy life.[[70]](#footnote-70)

The painting on the left depicts Kali Ma—the ferocious goodness of violence and change.[[71]](#footnote-71) Kali is the terrible form of Devi whom commonly depicted wearing a human skull necklace and a girdle made with severed human limbs.[[72]](#footnote-72) She is commonly depicted with six arms, holding a severed head, a plate of blood, a serpent, and various weapons.[[73]](#footnote-73) Kali represents the antithesis of Mother Gauri—a state of the complete absence of power. As the function of *power* is to maintain the good order of things and to provide positive motivation, tumult and violence will arrive when Mother Gauri no longer projects her power. At this point, Mother Gauri will be transformed into the rapacious Kali. Filled with the erotic desire to destroy, Kali will decapitate those defenders of the old order and annihilate the ossified structures, so that a new order may be achieved for the return of Mother Gauri. The transition from Mother Gauri to Kali can be understood as the fall of a civil society and the dissolution of power relations. The failure of power relations would displace the social responsibilities towards the others, which in turn lead to chaos and destruction. Therefore, violence is not a form of power—they are the physical manifestations of the failure of power.

A more contemporary metaphor on the tension between power and violence can be found in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest,* a novel which narrates the disciplinary mechanism of a fictionalized modern psychiatric institution in Oregon*.[[74]](#footnote-74)* In a broad sense, we may say that the exercise of power is to influence human behavior through meaningful symbolic exchanges between the parties.[[75]](#footnote-75)

In the novel, the power over mental patients’ behavior is exercised in two different forms. For those “chronic” patients suffering from *severe* mental “defects” that are unresponsive to communication, their behavior is enforced through physical restraint and the exercise violence (shock “therapy” and lobotomy). On the other hand, for those “acute” patients suffering from *minor* psychological disorders and are relatively communicable, the behavior is managed through non-physical means. Most of the acute patients are staying in the hospital on a voluntary basis, and yet their behavior is smoothly and effectively managed by Nurse Ratched’s[[76]](#footnote-76) measured voice and her unwavering gaze.[[77]](#footnote-77) Nurse Ratched’s power, therefore, is exercised through her quotidian symbolic exchanges with her patients, so that the patients are *persuaded* to remain in the hospital and willingly partake in the treatment regimen. Nurse Ratched only opted to expand the use physical punishments to the acute patients when they could no longer be persuaded.

The exercise of power must be persuasive in nature. The metaphors presented above highlight the fact that physical coercion, rather than being a mode of power, is the *effect* resulting from the complete exhaustion of means of power and persuasion. The lobotomized patients in *Cuckoo’s Nest* are no more persuaded than those enslaved Africans in the American South—both groups of individuals did not act otherwise simply because of physical impossibility.

Achieving one’s ends through the physical violation of the others is antithetical to the idea of human as symbol-exchanging animals. Borrowing from Emmanuel Levinas’ ethical inquiry on human transaction, it can be said that symbolic exchange between individuals can only occur within the space between two interactional limits. The first limit is a state of total unity—a state where the self and the other are in a state of oneness that no division exists between the “I” and the “You”. The second limit is complete schism—a condition when the other is radically divided from the self that any form of symbolic exchange is impossible.[[78]](#footnote-78) In a power relation, the first limit is the ideal (and unattainable) goal for exercise of power, and the second limit is where persuasion ends and coercion remains. There is no meaningful symbolic interaction beyond these two limits. The play power, therefore, is a symbolic play of difference[[79]](#footnote-79) when division and the communication are both present. As social animals, our default position for conflict resolution is through communication—this is the reason human languages were created in the first place. The act of violence, therefore, should be seen as the consequence of different parties’ failure to engage in meaningful discussion.

While “persuasion”, in a broad sense, is a universal feature of human language,[[80]](#footnote-80) the modes of persuasion and their functioning may vary in different historical and social contexts. To put simply, persuasion is norm, and the techniques of persuasion exercised by the authority must be compatible with the norms on the ground. In *Cuckoo’s Nest,* prior to the introduction of the main character, the norms among the acute patients remained relatively static. Nurse Ratched may retain her role as *Mother Gauri* as long as her acute patients remain responsive to her power apparatus. However, with the introduction of the main character Randle McMurphy,[[81]](#footnote-81) the radically different but charismatic new patient managed to drastically alter the norms of the entire actuate patient body. Mr. McMurphy was the Enlightenment Philosopher of the psychiatric ward—he disenchanted the goddess-like mystique of Nurse Ratched and fostered a culture of incredulity among the acute patients. Mr. McMurphy has lifted the veil of ignorance among the acute patients. More and more patients began to rethink those mundane hospital norms in the past as arbitrary orders. Consequently, the acute patients would demand the head nurse to explain why they’re required to take certain medications and participate in those lengthy “counseling sessions”. And those *enlightened* patients would no longer take “because this is good for you” as a satisfactory answer.

At first, the acute patients protested peacefully. They tried to persuade Nurse Ratchet to provide adequate explanations of their treatment plans and to give more freedom to those more *able-minded* patients. However, Nurse Ratched refused to amend her ways and listen to the patients’ demands. Instead, she stubbornly adheres to her outdated persuasive techniques that no longer function. The power structure of the psychiatric ward has always been unidirectional: the hospital staff give recommendations to the patients, and the patients fully trust and obey the *good advice* from the authority. Nurse Ratched, too, is a hostage under the hospital’s disciplinary norm—she simply cannot imagine having a reciprocal power relation with her patients. Unable to perform her *Mother Gauri* role, Nurse Ratchet resorted to the only alternative she knew—by turning on her *Kali* side and threatening the protesting patients with shock therapy or even lobotomy. The consequence of the acute patients’ *enlightenmen*t and Nurse Ratchet’s intransigence is catastrophic—both the hospital staff and its disgruntled patients resorted to coercive tactics against each other. By the end of the novel, no effective exercise of power remained in the psychiatric ward—only violence and cynicism remained.

Hence, an abusive regime is one that’s unable to change, and a fractious crowd is a populace that’s resistant to discipline. When the exercise of power by the authority over the individuals no longer reflects the functional social reality, the individuals would demand social and political change in accordant with their new norms. At this point, if the dominant authority refuses to change, it will lose its legitimacy, and the options for peaceful persuasion may for quickly fleet away for both sides. Violent revolution would peruse when all forms of popular persuasion collapse into a totalistic expression of physical coercion.

**The Disjuncture of the Public Sphere**

*Civilization, therefore, obtains mastery over the individual’s dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it, like a garrison in a conquered city.*

*—Sigmund Freud[[82]](#footnote-82)*

*The belief in political fixity, of the sanctity of some form of state consecrated by the efforts of our fathers and hallowed by tradition, is one of the stumbling-blocks in the way of orderly and directed change; it is an invitation to revolt and revolution*.

—*John Dewey*[[83]](#footnote-83)

The subject of inquiry for this section is the phenomenon of violent protest. Before delving into the cause of violence*,* however, a proper account must be given to the concept of “public-protest”*.* The use of the word “protest” implies a multitude of concurrent meanings. Protest may be entirely private in nature, for example, when a disgruntled child *protests* against the curfew set by her parents. Alternatively, protest may take place entirely outside of the private sphere, such as when the U.S. government *protests* against the currency practices of China. But these kinds of protests are outside of the scope of our discussion. The reason this paper uses the hyphenated term “public-protest” is two reflect the semiotic relationship between the two words—that the “public” is a signifier that signifies the act of “protest”.

The kind of protest we are dealing with here is neither confined within nor precluded from the private sphere of individuals—it is a specific form of collective action where private individuals come together in *public* and act against the authority. The “public”, in this sense, functions as the locus where protests are performed.

John Dewey offered a provocative yet succinct articulation of the political implications of private human behavior in his book *The Public and its Problems*. Humans, Dewey argues, being social animals, tend to associate with one another and form collectives bound by common interest. Each form of the collective has its own particular functions and values, and those values would in turn influence the behavior of its associated members, resulting in collective actions or performances.[[84]](#footnote-84) While association and collective action are universal traits, associated actions produce various consequences. These consequences may serve the common good, or become the *bête noire* of the society.[[85]](#footnote-85) The public, therefore, is a product of growing social awareness when individuals are becoming increasingly conscious over the indirect consequences of other associative actions. This growing social awareness mirrors Weber’s idea on the *disenchantment of the world*, [[86]](#footnote-86) which can be seen as a corollary to the advent of modern sociopolitical order that originated in Western Europe. Thus arise various purposes, plans, measures and means, to secure consequences which are liked and eliminate those which are found obnoxious.[[87]](#footnote-87) The public, therefore, functions through its relative transparency, and consequences from various collective actions are visible to members of the public. Under this premise, the government can be seen as the material manifestation of the need to manage various aggregate human activities over a determinable geographical extent—the state.[[88]](#footnote-88)

While the governance apparatus is a product of the public, it is still a form of collective consisting of individual officials. The proper functioning of the government, like any collective, relies on government’s ability to shape the behavior of its officials in accordance with its values.[[89]](#footnote-89) Without proper means of discipline its officials, the government may become corrupt and arbitrary.[[90]](#footnote-90) However, the process of discipline is both an internal and an external process. Under a transparent public, undesirable behaviors from authorities are especially visible to individuals, as their actions tend to have a serious impact on a large population. The public, in this case, functions as a structure for the disciplining of authorities—a principle referred to by Habermas as “public supervision”*.[[91]](#footnote-91)* Social activism, therefore, can be seen as one form of disciplinary instrument of the public, allowing private individuals to supervise the behavior of the authority. In this context, demonstration and protest are the organized behaviors serving proper functioning of social activism.

The functioning of the public as a generalized discipline apparatus depends on many preconditions. From the discussion above, we may identify three vital functions of the public: (1) manage human activities; (2) provide social transparency, and (3) discipline authorities. Jürgen Habermas’s *magma opus*, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, presented an in-depth analysis on the operation of the public sphere. First, the need to manage human activities is triggered by the movement towards global capitalism, which engendered modern government and non-government institutions to manage human transactions over large areas.[[92]](#footnote-92) Second, social transparency is predicated upon open access to public sphere for all. Private individuals must have the ability to engage in rational-critical debate and form public opinions through unrestricted access to means of publicity.[[93]](#footnote-93) Third, authorities are disciplined through democratic framework (voter accountability)[[94]](#footnote-94) and the principle of publicity (government actions open to the public).[[95]](#footnote-95)

The smooth execution of public functions above is the sustenance of a civil society.[[96]](#footnote-96) As the public sphere is organized around our market-based economic order[[97]](#footnote-97), its underlying goal is to promote economic functionality.[[98]](#footnote-98) Power, therefore, is exercised in a fashion that promotes economic production, and power exercised through coercive physical force is both economically inefficient and perhaps ethically problematic[[99]](#footnote-99) Harking back to the question on the substitutability of physicalactivism from the previous section, there is a similar problem with regard to the exercise of power within the context of the public sphere: to what extend would non-violent non-physical exercise of power obviate the need for physical coercion? The way which power is exercised in the context of the public sphere is analogous with Foucault’s narrative on the evolution of state power, where the inefficient method of using coercive violence by the state is being replaced with more efficient, nonviolent means of exercising *biopower*.[[100]](#footnote-100) This is done through the transaction of knowledge, where organized values are internalized and normalized within individuals in order to shape their behavior.[[101]](#footnote-101) A functioning public sphere, therefore, is the structural manifestation of a stable society, where social discipline is exercised both in the form of civil governance and civil resistance. Likewise, if the public sphere is absent or dysfunctional, it is likely to observe a tendency for the authority and/or its dissidents to resort to physical coercion.

The *public* by Dewey’s account is a state of social awareness; the *public sphere* of Habermas, however, is an intricate sociopolitical construct that operates on many preconditions. Moving from the *public* to the *public sphere* is not a natural process—it involves much trial and error, as well as intricate institutional construction. Frequently, the government system may become disjointed with social reality, creating a structural disjunction that can lead to instability. In the past, the principle of publicity was not necessarily a virtue for governance. In fact, Machiavelli advocated the practice of secrecy for the state so that the sovereign may secure its domination over the “immature people”.[[102]](#footnote-102) The practice of secrecy was not particularly problematic during the 16th century Europe, as the general population was relatively unaware of and unconcerned about transactions taking place outside of their immediate community. However, in the present time, the “immature” people from Machiavelli’s time are increasingly difficult to find. With improvements in communication technology, proliferation of knowledge, and the increase in literacy world-wide, public awareness is present in nearly all modern states. In many cases, it is simply impossible for the government to hide behind the veil of secrecy anymore. When a government authority refuses to adhere to the principle of publicity despite having a socially aware public, the resulting situation can be highly destabilizing. The Arab Spring exposed this problem associated with those government systems that do not allow legitimate displays of public dissent in that it precludes effective communication between private individuals and authorities, prevents rational critical public debate, and sequesters the ruling class from the masses. When the government authority is unaware of their citizens’ grievances, or unable to provide proper relief, the tension between the government and individuals intensifies. Without an alternative means to peacefully manage public resentment and to mediate the tension between authority and individuals, the lack of legal means of public dissent fosters a zero-sum relationship between the authority and the disgruntled citizens in that the government must suppress their dissent, or the dissidents have to overcome the authority.

It is not only in authoritarian states where public dissent is becoming problematic; even in those Western democratic states where freedom of speech, press, and public assembly are generally protected by law, the functionality of their public-protest is nonetheless facing challenges. While the symbolic performance protesting in public is still possible in those countries, street protests are becoming less effective as a social disciplinary mechanism.

If the smooth functioning of disciplinary power in the public sphere is achieved through the transaction and normalization of knowledge, the power of peaceful protest relies on the ability to shape public opinion.[[103]](#footnote-103) But in recent decades, for many Western democratic states (especially the U.S.), the ability for the general public to influence public opinion is becomingly increasingly difficult. Instead of overt censorship, the government authority began to master the technique of outsource the management of publicity to non-government and private institutions. Consequently, the ability to formulate public opinion has devolved into a prerogative of the special interest groups, political think tanks, and the corporate media. The Western public sphere, therefore, has ossified. The socially-aware transparent public is being obscured by the veil of artificially shaped public opinions. This trend on the institutionalization of publicity-making will lead to the reverse functioning of the principle of publicity: that “publicity” will become a tool to discipline private individuals rather than the authority.[[104]](#footnote-104) Habermas feared that the institutionalized public will lead to a society that feeds on manufactured sensationalism.[[105]](#footnote-105) When the all-inclusive public is compartmentalized into cabals of specialists who function non-publically, and when the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical—the result is political apathy.[[106]](#footnote-106)

The proliferation of political apathy does not necessarily lead to the elimination of public-protest; rather, “protest” simply becomes an empty signifier. Street demonstrations still occur on a regular basis in first-world countries, they no longer function as a public vehicle. When public-protests no longer serve to promote social change and provide public supervision, people would instead participate in these hollowed-out activities for their aesthetic values. The act of protesting and demonstrating are no longer techniques of discipline; rather, these performances alone became the *raison d' étre* for social activism. We can see such shift in the function of public dissent in those “obligatory” protests that accompany every WTO and G-20 Summit, as well from those perennial sign-holding crowds on the National Mall in Washington DC. The act of violent street protest in the West, therefore, is becoming an “end” rather than a “mean” to achieve certain end-goals. It can be said that those window-smashing, graffiti-painting, and shop-looting “anarchist” crowds are simply performing a series of stylized protest-like actions that reflect their aesthetic values.

An optimal public embodies the harmonization of institutions and individuals.[[107]](#footnote-107) The problems of institutionalization and absence of a functional political space for public-protest can be collectively understood as the phenomenon of structural disjunction, where the act of social dissent no longer functions in harmony with our market-based political-economic structure. In the context of the Arab Spring uprisings and the 1999 Battle of Seattle, the phenomenon of violent protest should be understood as a part of a larger problem—the inability for the public sphere to function property. In both cases, the absence of functional means of civil persuasion has forced the protestors to resort to physical coercions. In the next section, we shall examine two cases of social activism that demonstrate a much less violent, anonymous, non-physical, and yet efficient technique of public dissent.

**Protests Against the SOPA/PIPA and the Green Dam**

“Imagine a World Without Free Knowledge.” On midnight of January 18th, 2012, the largest open-source online encyclopedia website, Wikipedia, was replaced with a solid black page, overlaid with the above message in glowing white, and the following:

*“For over a decade, we have spent millions of hours building the largest encyclopedia in human history. Right now, the U.S. Congress is considering legislation that could fatally damage the free and open Internet. For 24 hours, to raise awareness, we are blacking out Wikipedia.”[[108]](#footnote-108)*

The temporary Wikipedia homepage also featured a link to an informational page on potential effects of the two proposed laws in U.S. Congress—the “Stop Online Piracy Act” (SOPA) and the “Protect Intellectual Property Act” (PIPA). Additionally, a search tool was provided on the altered homepage to aid Wikipedia users in contacting their respective congressperson to voice concerns over the proposed Internet regulation laws. According to a press release from Wikimedia Foundation, the owner of Wikipedia, 162 million people visited the Wikipedia blackout landing page, and more than 8 million U.S. users contacted Congress via Wikipedia to protest against the proposed legislation.[[109]](#footnote-109)

SOPA and PIPA are aimed at providing U.S. government and copyright holders the additional tools to fight online trafficking of copyrighted intellectual property and counterfeit goods.[[110]](#footnote-110) Those two bills are supported by many entertainment and media corporations, most notably the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).[[111]](#footnote-111) The supporters of the bills argue that the main purpose behind SOPA and PIPA is to” promote prosperity, creativity, entrepreneurship, and innovation by combating the theft of U.S. property”, and “prevent online threats to economic creativity and theft of intellectual property.”[[112]](#footnote-112) Opponents of the proposed bills raised concerns over the potential limitation on freedom of speech, and the potential disruptions on the proper function of the Internet.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Wikipedia was not the only area of the online community that sprang to action in protest of the SOPA and PIPA bills—many other major English language websites readily joined the cause. Other notable participants of the January 18th blackout include online classified advertisement website Craigslist, entertainment website Newgrounds, user-based social news website Reddit, and microblogging platform Tumblr.[[114]](#footnote-114) Some other websites of note did not “black out” entirely, but participated in the January 18th online protest via other means. Popular search engine Google blacked out their homepage logo for US visitors on that day. The Mozilla Foundation added links about the SOPA and PIPA on the default start page of their widely-used Firefox web browser.[[115]](#footnote-115) Leading photo sharing website Flickr also created a new function on their website to allow users to black-out their uploaded photos to raise awareness regarding SOPA and PIPA.

There are two notable externalities with regard to the anti-SOPA/PIPA events that took place on January 18th: the relative absence of physical protest, and the efficiency of the online activism. The efficaciousness of the web-based protests is demonstrated by their scale, coordination, speed, and impact—one-third of the bills’ original sponsors in the Senate withdrew their support of the controversial legislation within few hours after the protest formally began. By the following day, twelve additional Senators announced that they would no longer vote in favor of the measure.[[116]](#footnote-116) Due to the sudden shift in support for SOPA and PIPA in congress, voting was indefinitely postponed.[[117]](#footnote-117) The implied scale and ubiquity of the so-called “Internet community” would also have residual disciplinary effects, in the way that one is more likely to assume that any similar legislation attempt in the future may be subject to the constant and vigilant surveillance of the invested online community. More importantly, the event that took place on January 18th, 2012 was not merely a showdown between the socially-aware *netizens* and the special interest-driven government officials, it was also an elegant display of a hyper-efficient popular uprising possessing enormous impact without physical presence. Small-scale street demonstrations against the proposed cyber-regulations did appear in New York and San Francisco, but by no means were these gatherings comparable to the online spectacle. The role those physical crowd-gatherings have played in the eventual success of the anti-SOPA/PIPA effort was, at most, peripheral.[[118]](#footnote-118) In this case, the online sphere functioned as a public space where anti-institutional dissent was staged. This new form of entirely "virtual" protest greatly contrasts with the Arab Spring rebellions and the Battle of Seattle, where the internet and social media functioned only as mediums of communication, and that the internet communication was used primarily to mobilize and galvanize physical demonstrations on the ground. [[119]](#footnote-119)

Put simply, the economy of the January 18th online protest was astonishing in terms of its short duration, heavy participation, and immense impact. The degree to which those two controversial pieces of legislation were placed under the microscope of public opinion, magnified, and spread across the netscape at viral speed invited an avalanche of reactions from the netizens to exert their disciplinary power on the legislators without the use of traditional, physical coercion or massive crowd gathering (seen, for example, at the perennially violent protests during G-20 Summits and WTO meetings). This signaled a new modality in which protesters would discipline institutional behavior: a more efficient, high-impact, short duration, minimally (if at all) violent, and yet ever-watching omnipresent form of protest.

Seemingly a novel phenomenon, the "online spectacle" protests against SOPA and PIPA are not the only example of this new kind of internet based protest that is both hyper-efficient and lacking in physical form. Another extraordinary event, but perhaps lesser known in the western world, took place in China two and a half years prior to the January 18th protests.

In May 19th, 2009, the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), a regulatory body that manages all “national public communications networks” in China, put forth a new government mandate requiring all new personal computers sold in China to have a “content filter” software known as “Green Dam Youth Escort” pre-installed.[[120]](#footnote-120) The announcement itself was discreet and low-profile, presented as a one-page memo posted on an obscure corner of MIIT’s official website. Much to the surprise of the MIIT, news on the government mandate proliferated virally over the Chinese netscape almost immediately after the announcement. Popular Chinese-language online forums and micro-blogging sites were abuzz with discussion about the so-called “content control” software. Rumors and conspiracy theories about the Green Dam quickly emerged. Netizens suspected the “true” purpose of the Green Dam software was to allow government to monitor individual internet users’ browsing history, or even grant government access to personal hard drives.[[121]](#footnote-121) Even celebrity internet pundits and popular bloggers were not immune to the controversy surrounding Green Dam, as many prominent cyber-voices also began to viciously criticize the latest government censorship effort. Within a few days, the viral online discussions began to seep into the realm of mainstream press, and the cataclysmic online reaction against the Green Dam mandate soon evolved into full-blown media coverage as many well-known Chinese scholars and legal experts stepped up to question the legal and ethical merits of the censorship mandate. The Chinese government was caught off-guard by the public outcry—never had they witnessed Web-based dissent of such scope and intensity, and the technocratic IT ministry found itself in the awkward position of facing unprecedented public scrutiny.[[122]](#footnote-122) The MIIT initially responded by softening the requirement of the mandate, and reassured the public that for private computers, the pre-installation of Green Dam will be voluntary. Nonetheless, the Ministry’s compromising gesture failed to quell the online protests. Six weeks after the initial Green Dam announcement, MIIT released a statement indicating that the release date of the content-control software would be “postponed indefinitely”.[[123]](#footnote-123) Two months later, MIIT scrapped the controversial censorship mandate in its entirety, and the Green Dam project collapsed due to the cut-off of state funding.[[124]](#footnote-124)

The irony of the Green Dam incident lies in the fact that while the MIIT was trying to force surveillance and its management power onto the internet users, the government agency instead found itself unwittingly being subject to surveillance by wary Chinese netizens. As the rights of free speech and public assembly are restricted in China, the Internet became a viable alternative discursive space for Chinese citizens to conduct anonymous public discussions and organically form public opinions. The Green Dam incident was a rare example of an “efficient” internet-based protest that took place in a non-democratic nation. In China’s case, the power flow of surveillance and discipline between individuals and the institution was reversed, and internet users matched their own collective disciplinary gaze against the disciplinary power of the state. Analogous to the PIPA/SOPA protest, the online activism against Green Dam was also extraordinary in the way that the internet community was able to put forth a grand spectacle of popular dissent without disruptive physical coercion. The traditional form of crowd-gathering public protest is absent in both incidences, and yet the authorities are quickly persuaded to abide the demands of the protestors. Gone are the rock-throwing angry student protesters facing columns of tanks in Tiananmen Square; in their stead, a much less violent, anonymous, non-physical, and yet efficient form of public dissent can be seen.

**The Public Functions of Virtuality and Anonymity**

When comparing the anti-SOPA/Green Dam protests with the demonstrations from the Arab Spring and the Battle of Seattle, the difference in efficiency between these two pairs of events is readily visible. The kind of protests seen in Seattle and the Middle East are predominantly staged in public places—they are confrontational, coercive, and achieved variable outcomes. Conversely, the organized efforts against the SOPA/PIPA and the Green Dam are non-physical, persuasive, efficient, entirely peaceful, and concluded with highly desirable outcomes for the protesters. The Internet and the social media have been credited as major facilitators for all four events mentioned above; however, in the case of the **S**OPA/Green Dam protests, the online space functioned as the hosting place for the virtual and protests; whereas for the Arab Spring and the Battle of Seattle, digital communication mainly served to mobilize physical protests by helping protesters to communicate more efficiently.

The disparity between the two pairs of movements suggests a functional bifurcation on the role of Internet in social movements. On one hand, online communication may simply aid and abet the traditional form of crowd-gathering public displays; alternatively, the Internet itself may serve as the virtual public arena for the entire movement by hosting open public discussions and symbolic virtual demonstrations. If the goal of social movement is to promote social change and manage institutional behavior, it can be said that protests articulated through the rhetoric of the Web is more efficient, less violent, and less socially disruptive when compared to the traditional forms of street protest in achieving the ends. This entirely virtual form of collective anti-authority actions exemplified by the Green Dam and SOPA/PIPA protests not only signified a new rhetorical paradigm for social movements, but also amounted to advancement in the technique of inducing social progress.

The previous sections have provided that the rhetorical function of public opinion is to shape the social order and induce socio-political change, and discipline institutional behavior. As the persuasive function of public opinion largely overlaps with the goal of social movements, it is imperative for the protestors to have unrestricted access to the public sphere in order to effectively utilize their persuasive performances. The public sphere, therefore, can be understood as the discursive space where public opinions are formed and shaped. When the public sphere becomes less accessible to the general public, it is more difficult for social movements to function rhetorically by shaping the public opinion. The ineffectiveness of persuasive means would inevitably invite the use of coercive tactics by the protestors in order to physically reach their goals and/or express their frustration.

The 2012 protests against the proposed SOPA and PIPA legislations in the United States and the 2009 Green Dam protests in China have demonstrated a new modality in which protesters would induce social change and discipline institutional behavior without relying on means of physical resistance. In those non-democratic states that lack the legitimate public space to express dissent opinions (China), physical protests are feared by the ruling authority. In this case, virtual and anonymous online discussion mechanism not only provides an alternative discursive space for the protestors to influence public opinion, the virtuality in itself also have persuasive effect. We have already discussed the structural tendency for public demonstrations to transform into violent uprisings when the right of public assembly is restricted. Knowing the destabilizing potential of physical protests, the onset of online dissent may prompt authority to take action before those grievances from online forums and microblogs spill over to the physical space and evolve into crowds on the streets. Likewise, the protestors living in those authoritarian states are also fully aware of the pitfalls of exposing themselves in public. The anonymity of the online discussions would provide a safer and more desirable venue for the protestors to perform their rhetorical functions. Virtually articulated dissenting rhetoric would protect the authority from the violent physical uprisings. Likewise, anonymously performed protests would protect the demonstrators from violent physical repressions. Therefore, under an authoritarian political setting, virtuality and anonymity may together facilitate the reversal of the zero-sum relationship between the authority and the protestors by placing the two parties under a shared security interest. The safety of both the ruling authority and the protestors can be ensured, as long as the protestors would privilege virtual over physical dissent, and the authority would keep the online sphere relatively open and be responsive to the virtually-formed public opinions.

In those Western style democratic states, we are seeing the ossification institutionalization of public sphere where physical protest have become more of a ceremonial performancethat no longer function as an effective mean to incite change and discipline institutions. Democracy requires critical publicity through public deliberation and rational-critical debate.[[125]](#footnote-125) With the emergence of corporate media, partisan think tanks, and institutionalized public-relations machines, non-critical institutions begin to dominate the discursive space that shapes the public opinion, thus undermining the critical rationality of the public sphere. When the public spheres in the West became less democratic and inaccessible to the general public, the production of public opinion in democratic systems would function merely as an “advanced” censorship apparatus. The SOPA/PIPA case study suggests that the online sphere may function as an effective discursive space that bypasses the institutionalized public sphere and reconnects private individuals with the public. While public places no longer serve the rhetorical function of influencing public opinions through physical protests, the online sphere may provide an effective virtual public space that serves the traditional rhetorical functions of the streets and public squares.

Therefore, it can be said that the rhetorical function of vituality and anonymity in both democratic and authoritarian environments is to establish (or re-establish) the discursive function and the persuasive power of the public sphere. The emergence of the virtual public establishes new channels for rational-critical discussions and symbolic exchanges between private individuals and the authority. We can be hopeful that the advancement in public communication technology may to bring about consummate improvements in the rhetorical efficiency of social movements, thus mitigating the need for coercive tactics. This paper delineated an optimistic outlook for the phenomenon of internet-based virtual protest. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the SOPA/PIPA protest and the Green Dam incident were both targeting specifically at Internet-related legislations. The general applicability of the innovative movement model provided by the SOPA/PIPA and Green Dam case is yet to be seen. Furthermore, the successful functioning of the virtual public sphere relies on the widespread and relatively unrestricted internet access, as well as the maintenance of Internet-based discourse’s critical-rationality. The rhetorical function of the virtual public sphere will can be easily undermined by government censorship and the institutionalization of online discursive space. We should keep in mind that this virtual paradigm of innovative movement is only at its infancy, and the future developments of the internet-based social movement will remain fluid and unpredictable.

1. “Egyptian Revolution of 1919”, *Egypt.com News*, 22 March 2009, <http://news.egypt.com/en/200903225663/spot-light/spot-light/egyptian-revolution-of-1919.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ellis Goldberg, “Peasants in Revolt - Egypt 1919” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*  
   Vol. 24, No. 2 (May, 1992), 261-280. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Slavoj Žižek, *First As Tragedy, Then as Farce* (New York: Verso, 2009), 1-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Wael Ghonim, interviewed by Terry Gross, *on* *Fresh Air at WHYY,* Feb. 09 2012. Transcript available at: <http://www.npr.org/2012/02/09/146636605/wael-ghonim-creating-a-revolution-2-0-in-egypt> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Garry Blight, Sheila Pulham and Paul Torpey, “Arab spring: an interactive timeline of Middle East protests,” *The Guardian,* 5 January 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/interactive/2011/mar/22/middle-east-protest-interactive-timeline> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Tunisia: The Arab Spring's success story?.” *Aljazeera,* Last Modified: 08 Jan 2012 12:08. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/thecafe/2012/01/20121510056532832.html>. *See also,* Daphne Mccurdy, “Tunisia's Surprise Success Story—And What He Means for the New Democracy”, *The Atlantic,* 21 October 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/10/tunisias-surprise-success-story-and-what-he-means-for-the-new-democracy/247588/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Jessica Rettig, “Death Toll of Arab Spring.” *U.S. News and World Report*, accessed November 20, 2012. <http://www.usnews.com/news/slideshows/death-toll-of-arab-spring>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid. The report shows that as many as 30,000 have died during the Libyan civil war (estimation by the Libyan interim government), whereas the Tunisian revolution has caused roughly 300 deaths (according to an UN official). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Hussein Ibish, “Was the Arab Spring worth it?” *Foreign Policy* 194, (Jul/Aug 2012): 92-93. *See also,* note 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents.* (New York: W. W. Norton,1962), 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Sheldon Himelfarb, “Social Media in the Middle East,” *United States Institute of Peace*, April 11 2011, <http://www.usip.org/publications/social-media-in-the-middle-east> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Philip Howard, Aiden Duffy, Deen Freelon, Muzammil Hussain, Will Mari, and Marwa Mazaid, “Opening Closed Regimes,” *Project on Information Technology & Political Islanm,* January 2011, <http://dl.dropbox.com/u/12947477/publications/2011_Howard-Duffy-Freelon-Hussain-Mari-Mazaid_pITPI.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid., 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Racha Mourtada and Fadi Salem, “Civil Movements: The Impact of Facebook and Twitter,” *Arab Social Media Report,* vol.1, no.2 (2011): 24 <http://www.dsg.ae/en/ASMR2/Images/report.pdf> The report provides “empirical evidence suggesting that the growth of social media in the region and the shift in usage trends have played a critical role in mobilization, empowerment, shaping opinions, and influencing change. A critical mass of young and active social media users in the Arab world exists today. This is coupled with a continued shift of usage trends from social into political nature across the region.” [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Jessica Rettig, “Death Toll of Arab Spring”. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Anita Singh, “Ways With Words: role of Twitter and Facebook in Arab Spring uprising 'overstated', says Hisham Matar,” *The Telegraph,* 11 July 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/ways-with-words/8629294/Ways-With-Words-role-of-Twitter-and-Facebook-in-Arab-Spring-uprising-overstated-says-Hisham-Matar.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* trans. Thomas Burger(Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 2. Habermas used the term publicity to denote the common meaning of the public, that is, publicity both as a function of public opinion and as a mean to produce public opinion. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid., 54. Habermas made reference to the practice of “secret state” in opposition to the principle of publicity in order for an absolute monarchy to maintain its sovereignty. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rettig, “Death Toll of Arab Spring”. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Hussein Ibish, “Was the Arab Spring worth it?”. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Michele M. Flores (12/05/1999). "WTO: A TURNING POINT -- SEATTLE LEFT LESS NAIVE AS IT COUNTS COSTS, BOTH PHYSICAL AND PSYCHO LOGICAL". *The Seattle times (*0745-9696),  p. A.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples “From Public Sphere to Public Screen:

    Democracy, Activism, and the “Violence” of Seattle,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* Vol. 19, No. 2, June 2002: 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, “The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests.” *Peace Review* (Palo Alto, Calif.) 13, no. (3 September 01, 2001): 331 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid. at 331: “All these groups campaigned against a range of social, economic and environmental injustices or helped co-ordinate actions with hundreds of smaller activist

    organizations” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. “About Indymedia”, International Media Center, accessed 20 September 2012 <http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Several estimates on the scale of the Nov. 30th protests exist, from 40,000 (*See* note 24) to over 100,000 protestors (*See* James Petras, “Battle of Seattle*”, Economic and Political Weekly*, ISSN 0012-9976, 12/1999, Volume 34, Issue 50, p. 3477) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Matthew Eagleton-Pierce, “The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests”. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Stuart Laidlaw (12/20/1999). "Seattle battle showed Internet's populist power ; Web brought together WTO protesters, now tells their stories minus media filter". Toronto star (0319-0781), p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Philip Howard, et al., “Opening Closed Regimes,” at 331-332. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 331. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Eagleton-Pierce, “The Internet and the Seattle WTO Protests”, at 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Jim Lehrer, “Online News Hour: Seattle Aftermath,” *PBS,* January 18, 2000. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/jan-june00/seattle_1-18.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. David Olson, “The Battles in Seattle”, *Politics & Society*, Volume 28, Issue 3, (2000):309. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Hussein Ibish, “Was the Arab Spring worth it?”. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Charles Tilly, *Contentious Politics,* (Boulder, Co., Paradigm, 2007): 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Aristotle, *Rhetorics,* translated by W. Rhys Roberts, (Boston, MA: The Internet Classics Archive, 1994—007): Book I, Part 2. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/rhetoric.1.i.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., at Part 1, Part 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Stephen E. Lucas, “The Renaissance of American Public Address: Text and Context in Rhetorical Criticism”. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Volume 74, Issue 2, 1988, pp. 241 – 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action.* (Columbia, Sc.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989) at 18: Fisher made reference to Kenneth Burke’s broad definition of rhetoric as an attribute of all symbolic expression and action. For Burke, rhetoric is intrinsic to human language because “wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric, and wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Rania Abouzeid, “Bouazizi: The Man Who Set Himself and Tunisia on Fire” *TIME Magazine (online),* Jan. 21, 2011, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2044723,00.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Yasmine Ryan, “How Tunisia’s revolution began”, *AlJazeera,* Last Modified: 26 Jan 2011 14:39. <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2011/01/2011126121815985483.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Rosa Eberly, Kirt Wilson, and Andrea Lunsford, Introduction to *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies,* ed. Andrea Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly (USA: SAGE Publications, 2009), xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Stephen Browne and Charles Morris III, *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest,* (State College, Pa.: Strata Publishing, 2006): p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Leland Griffin, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements”, in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest”,* ed. Stephen Browne and Charles Morris III. (State College, Pa.: Strata, 2006): 9-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid., at 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Robert Cox and Christina Foust, “Social Movement Rhetoric”, in *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies,* ed. Andrea Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly (USA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 606-607. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Ibid., 606-608. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Robert Scott and Donald Smith, “The Rhetoric of Confrontation”, in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest”,* ed. Stephen Browne and Charles Morris III. (State College, Pa.: Strata, 2006), 28-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Robert Cox and Christina Foust, “Social Movement Rhetoric”, at 608-609. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Hebert Simons, “Requirements, Problems, and Strategies: a Theory of Persuasion for Social Movements”, in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest”,* ed. Stephen Browne and Charles Morris III. (State College, Pa.: Strata, 2006), 35-43. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ralph Smith and Russel Windes, “The Innovational Movement: a Rhetorical Theory”, in *Readings on the Rhetoric of Social Protest”,* ed. Stephen Browne and Charles Morris III. (State College, Pa.: Strata, 2006), 82-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Cox and Foust, “Social Movement Rhetoric”, at 611-612. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. DeLuca and Peeples “From Public Sphere to Public Screen”, at 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cox and Foust, “Social Movement Rhetoric”, at 614-616. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Carl Von Clausewitz, “War and Politics” from *Selections from On War*, edited by Joseph Ingham Greene, (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover, 2003): 103-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Mutually Assured Destruction refers to the reciprocal nuclear deterrent policy between the U.S. and the Soviet Union from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. Both Superpowers would have enough nuclear arsenals to completely annihilate each other many times over for the purpose of deterring the other side from the use of force. The nuclear weapons are stored under a “hair-trigger” condition—that is—once an enemy attack has been confirmed, all active nuclear arsenal would automatically be launched to the enemy territory. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended,* ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, (New York: Picador, 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Michel Foucault, “The Subject and Power”, *Critical Inquiry,* Vol.8 Issue 4, 1982: 777-795, at 790. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Madhu Bazaz Wangu, *Images of Indian Goddesses: Myths, Meanings and Models,* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2003), 64-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid. *See also,*

    Adi Shankaracharya, “Ten Verses on Gauri”, *Stutimandal,* Mar. 24, 2006, <http://www.stutimandal.com/gif_adi/gauri_dashakam.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. David Kinsley, *Tantric Vision,* (Delhi, India: University of California Press), 67-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Ibid., 69-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,* (US: Viking Press & Signet Books, 1962). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. This is a rephrasing of Kenneth Burke’s notion of the rhetoric in the language of power. *See,* Robert Cox and Christina Foust, “Social Movement Rhetoric”, in *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies,* ed. Andrea Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly (USA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 606-607. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Nurse Ratched is the Head Nurse of the psychiatric hospital. She is responsible for the management and disciplining of the ward’s patients. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Steven Mailloux also offered a similar analysis on the exercise of power in the psychiatric hospital from *Cuckoo’s Nest* in his book *Rhetorical Power,* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), at 134-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than being or beyond essence,* Trans. Lingis Alphonso. (Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991) [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Jacques Derrida, "Interview with Julia Kristeva" in “Positions” (The University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 28–30.

    The “symbolic play of difference” closely mirrors Jacques Derrida’s concept of *Différance*—that human communication is the product of a constant state of uncertainty. Derrida stated that “*Différance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other. This spacing is the simultaneously active and passive… production of the intervals, without which the full terms would not signify, would not function.” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Walter Fisher, *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action.* (Columbia, Sc.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989) at 18:

    Fisher made reference to Kenneth Burke’s broad definition of rhetoric as an attribute of all symbolic expression and action. For Burke, rhetoric is intrinsic to human language because “wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric, and wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion.” [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. In the novel, Randle McMurphy feigned his mental condition in order to avoid a possible lengthy jail sentence. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents,* trans. James Strachey, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1962), 70-71 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. John Dewey*, The public & its problems,* (New York : H. Holt, 1927): 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid., 1-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Dewey*, The public & its problems*, at 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischoff, (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1963): 173-175 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Ibid., 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Ibid., 95-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979): 231-259. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Dewey*, The public & its problems*, at, at 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* trans. Thomas Burger(Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 297 [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Ibid., 5-27, 57-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Ibid., at 2 and 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Ibid., 79, 102-117. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ibid., 14-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ibid., 1-27 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended”,* trans. David Macey,(New York: Picador, 2003): 1-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid, 239-263. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* trans. Thomas Burger(Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), at 52.

     “The apologetic literature defending the secrets of the state thematized the means by which the prince could maintain the *jura imperii,* his sovereignty—that is to say, brought up just those *arcana imperii*, that entire catalogue of secret practices first inaugurated by Machiavelli that were to secure domination over the immature people. The principle of publicity was later held up in opposition to the practice of secrets of state.” [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See note 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* 79-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Ibid, 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity,* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press: 1989): 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. "A screenshot of the English Wikipedia landing page, symbolically its only page during the blackout on January 18 2012." *Wikimedia Commons*. Wikimedia Foundation, 2012. Web. 26 April 2012. http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a1/History\_Wikipedia\_English\_SOPA\_2012\_Blackout2.jpg [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. "Press Releases: Wikipedia blackout supports free and open internet." *Wikimedia Foundation*. Wikimedia Foundation, 2012. Web. 27 April 2012. http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/Press\_releases/Wikipedia\_blackout\_supports\_free\_and\_open\_internet [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. “Stop Online Piracy Act.” *Library of Congress*. Library of Congress, 2011. 10. 26 April 2012. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c112:H.R.3261:> See also, “PROTECT IP Act.” *Library of Congress*. Library of Congress, 2011. 5. 12 April 2012. <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?c112:1:./temp/~c112EnteA4::> [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Sam Purewal, "The Case for SOPA Legislation." . PCWorld, 2011. Web. 27 April 2012. <http://www.pcworld.com/article/246461/the_case_for_sopa_legislation.html>; see also, James Rainey, "Wikipedia to go offline to protest anti-piracy legislation." . Los Angeles Times, 2012. Web. 27 April 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. See note 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Larry Magrid, "What are SOPA and PIPA and why all the fuss?." *Forbes*. Forbes, 2012. Web. 28 May 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/larrymagid/2012/01/18/what-are-sopa-and-pipa-and-why-all-the-fuss/> [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
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115. Dara Kerr, "Mozilla reaches 40 million people in anti-sopa campaign ." . CNet, 2012. Web. 27 April 2012. <http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-57362433-93/mozilla-reaches-40-million-people-in-anti-sopa-campaign/> [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Andy Greenberg, "Amidst SOPA Blackout, Senate Copyright Bill Loses Key Supporters." *Forbes*. Forbes, 2012. Web. 26 April 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/andygreenberg/2012/01/18/amidst-sopa-blackout-senate-copyright-bill-loses-a-key-supporter/>; see also, Paul Tassi, "Internet blackout causes 18 senators to flee from pipa." . Forbes, 2012. Web. 1 May 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2012/01/19/internet-blackout-causes-18-senators-to-flee-from-pipa/> [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation,* at 67:

     “But that protest grew out of a much wider grass-roots movement — a collective flexing of Internet muscle that started in some of the less mainstream parts of the Web, like the social news site Reddit and the blogging service Tumblr, and in e-mail chains and countless message boards… … It is no coincidence that these social sites were among those that, according to critics of the legislation in question, the Stop Online Piracy Act, and the Protect Intellectual Property Act had the most to lose if it passed. And by design they were able to take the message about the threat and make it go viral.” [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Stepanova, Ekaterina. "The Role of Information Communication Technologies in the “Arab Spring”." *PONARS Eurasia*. (2011): <http://www.gwu.edu/~ieresgwu/assets/docs/ponars/pepm_159.pdf>. See also,

     Leland Griffin, “The Rhetoric of Historical Movements”, at 3:

     “…our evidence suggests that online conversations played an integral part in the revolutions that toppled governments in Egypt and Tunisia. We find that conversations about liberty, democracy, and revolution on blogs and on Twitter often immediately preceded mass protests. In Tunisia, for example, 20 percent of blogs were evaluating Ben Ali.’s leadership on the day he resigned from office (January 14), up from just 5 percent the month before. Subsequently, the primary topic for Tunisian blogs was ’revolution’ until a public rally of at least 100,000 people took place and eventually forced the old regime’s remaining leaders to relinquish power.” [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. *“*关于计算机预装绿色上网过滤软件的通知 (Announcement on the pre-installed green Internet-filter software for computers*”, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology*, 2009. Web. <http://www.miit.gov.cn/n11293472/n11293832/n12843926/n13917087/14042014.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
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122. Michael Bristow, "China defends screening software." *BBC,* 2009. Web. 21 April 2012. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8091044.stm> [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. "China postpones mandatory installation of controversial filtering software ." .*Xinhua News Agency*, 2009. Web. 20 Apr 2012. <http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-06/30/content_11628335.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Li Bing, and Liu Yinghui, "工信部绿坝软件北京项目组缺乏经费遭遣散 (MIIT's Green Dam Project Team in Beijing Dismissed Due to Lack of Funding)." *Beijing Times*, 13 July 2010. Web. 24 Apr. 2012. <http://epaper.jinghua.cn/html/2010-07/13/content_567823.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Kirt H. Wilson, Rosa A. Eberly, “The Common Goods of Public Discourse” in *The SAGE Handbook of Rhetorical Studies,* ed. Andrea Lunsford, Kirt Wilson, and Rosa Eberly (USA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 424. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)