

Cyber-protest and civil society: the Internet and action repertoires in social movements

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Introduction

A notable feature of recent public engagement with the Internet is its use by a wide range of activists and groups in social and political protest. The Internet is not only said to greatly facilitate mobilisation and participation in traditional forms of protest, such as national street demonstrations, but also to give these protests a more transnational character by effectively and rapidly diffusing communication and mobilisation efforts. The uprising of the Zapatista movement in 1994 is a case in point (see among many others: Cleaver 1998; Schulz 1998; Ronfeldt and Arquilla 1998; Martinez-Torres 2001; Cere 2003; Olesen 2004). Started as a local rebellion – a struggle for more rights and greater autonomy for the indigenous people of Chiapas in the rainforest of southern Mexico – their cause rapidly gained momentum thanks to a vast growing, global network of support that successfully linked the Zapatista rebellion with many other local and international struggles against neoliberal globalisation. The Internet was decisive to the global diffusion of protest and solidarity.

Another frequently used example of how the Internet shapes social movement tactics and actions is the anti-WTO mobilisations in Seattle in late 1999 (e.g. Eagleton-Pierce 2001; Smith 2001; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004; Juris 2005). By means of the open network of the Internet, a diverse range of activists, groups and social movement organisations could loosely knit together and coalesce in coordinated actions against the WTO summit both offline, in the streets, as well as online, in cyberspace. The Internet contributed to the organisation of activists' street blockades, disturbing the normal WTO summit, and attracting the attention of news media around the world. During the blockades, activists with portable computers connected to the Internet were constantly updated with reports from the streets and details of changing police tactics (de Armond 2001). At the same time the Internet was the site of anti-WTO action itself, with groups like ®tmark (Artmark) creating a sophisticated parody, a 'spoof site', of the WTO's homepage (Meikle 2002).

Also, in the advent of the Seattle protests, the first independent online media centre, Indymedia, was set up, allowing for real-time distribution of video, audio, text and photos, enabling activists to provide coverage, and especially the necessary analyses and context to counterbalance the poor US corporate media coverage of the WTO meetings and the claims of the Global Justice Movement (Kidd 2003; Smith 2001).

Although the precise contribution of the Internet is hard to establish, these examples show that the Internet has given civil society new tools to support their claims. In this chapter we will document how the Internet has shaped and is shaping the collective action repertoire of social movements pursuing social and political change. Two main suggestions can be identified in the literature. On the one hand, the Internet facilitates and supports (traditional) offline collective action in terms of organisation, mobilisation and transnationalisation and, on the other hand, it creates new modes of collective action. The Internet has indeed not only supported traditional offline social movement actions such as the classical street demonstrations and made them more transnational, but is also used to set up new forms of online protest activities and to create online modes of existing offline protest actions. By doing so the Internet has expanded and complemented today's social movement 'repertoire of collective action' (Tilly 1984; McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001). Virtual activities may range from online petitions, email bombings and virtual sit-ins to hacking the websites of large companies and governments.

Before we elaborate on the role of the Internet we will define what we mean by social movements and their action repertoire. Social movements, following Diani (1992), can be defined as 'networks of informal interaction between a plurality of individuals, groups and/or organisations, engaged in a political or cultural conflict on the basis of a shared collective identity' (Diani 1992: 13). Their 'repertoire of collective action' is, as Charles Tilly originally pointed out, the 'distinctive constellations of tactics and strategies developed over time and used by protest groups to act collectively in order to make claims on individuals and groups' (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004: 265; Tilly 1984). The repertoire of actions supported and/or created online that we scrutinise in this chapter thus are *collective* undertakings, either in terms of participants or in terms of outcome. The action repertoire of social movements is as broad as there are social movements and activists, goals and causes, claims and grievances. Here we explicitly focus on what has been termed 'unorthodox' or 'unconventional' political behaviour (Marsh 1977; Barnes and Kaase 1979): those actions and tactics that, on the one hand, are 'performed' on the non-institutional side of politics, outside the realm of conventional or orthodox political participation (i.e. voting, being a member of a political party, lobbying), and on the other hand, do not equal severe political crime: hijacking, terrorism, guerrilla warfare etc. (Marsh 1977: 42).

However, the boundaries between unconventional tactics and crime or illegal action remain diffuse and are often the object of discussion both between activists and official institutions as well as among scholars investigating them. Whether a particular tactic is defined as a legal or illegal action heavily depends on time and place. Organising a protest demonstration used to be an illegal practice in many Western countries and still is in many non-democratic

countries today. Since the 1960s mass street demonstrations have, at least in Western democracies, undergone a 'normalisation' (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2001) leading to what Meyer and Tarrow (1998) call 'the social movement society'. Also, the use of a particular tactic is often subject to a struggle of 'meaning' between activists, media and authorities. Take, for instance, the example of the notion 'hacktivism': some activist groups like the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) tried to introduce the less pejorative term of 'electronic civil disobedience' to describe the protest actions they perform on the Internet (Meikle 2002). Finally, also *within* social movements disagreement about the use of 'legal' or 'illegal' tactics can result in major disputes. In the early 1980s some peace groups in Western Europe rejected the use of 'illegal' actions such as train rail blockades ('trainstoppings') because they would likely marginalise the general peace movement's objectives (Van Laer 2009). At present these techniques are much more accepted, also by 'established' peace movements, which became clear during the mobilisations against (the build-up of) the military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2002 and 2003.

In this chapter we include forms of direct action and civil disobedience that cross the legal boundaries of society, because they are and always have been an inherent part of the social movement action repertoire. The constant innovation of action repertoires, touching the edge of legality, is an important aspect of mobilising a social movement's constituency and forcing its causes onto the mainstream media agenda (Klandermans 1997; Tarrow 1998). 'If there is one thing that distinguishes social movements from other political actors, than it is their strategic use of novel, dramatic, unorthodox, and non-institutionalised forms of political expression to try to shape public opinion and put pressure on those in positions of authority' (Taylor and Van Dyke 2004: 263).

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: in the next section we will elaborate on a typology of the 'new' repertoire of collective action. This section is the largest part of this chapter, since we will extensively illustrate our typology with a near endless list of examples that can be found in the literature. This section thus provides evidence of all the (new) *possibilities* thanks to the Internet. In a subsequent section we will then present important *limitations* about the use of the Internet and the impact of this new medium on social movement's action repertoire as well as on its democratising potential at large. We wrap up with a discussion and conclusion section.

1. A typology of a new digitalised action repertoire

The typology we present in this chapter is pretty straightforward and centres around two related dimensions: first of all, there is the distinction between 'real' actions that are supported and facilitated by the Internet, and 'virtual' actions that are Internet-based (Gurak and Logie 2003; Vegh 2003). Both the 'old' repertoire, supported by the Internet, and the 'new' or modified online tactics concatenate in a new 'digitalised' social movement repertoire of collective action. Secondly, we introduce a classic dimension that makes a distinction between tactics with low and high thresholds and show how

the Internet may have lowered action-related barriers. Figure 12.1 presents a broad overview of both dimensions and a selection of different types of action used or supported by social movements. Before supporting this typology with examples, both dimensions will be discussed within the broader social movement literature.

1.1. Dimension 1: Internet-supported versus Internet-based

Our first dimension distinguishes between ‘old’ and ‘new’ forms of collective action. We call these new forms ‘Internet-based’ because they exist only because of the Internet. Internet-supported actions refer to the traditional tools of social movement that have become easier to organise and coordinate thanks to the Internet. This *facilitating function*, lowering tactic-related thresholds and making traditional protest action more transnational, will be further discussed as part of the second dimension. This first dimension highlights more the Internet’s *creating function* of new and modified tactics expanding the action toolkit of social movements. This increase of available tactics online has opted some scholars to speak of an additional ‘repertoire of electronic contention’ (Constanza-Chock 2003; Rolfe 2005). These can be tactics, for instance, directed towards the online presence or activities of particular groups, governments or companies, pinning down their servers. Some of these tools such as the email petition can be seen as an extension of an existing protest technique, and

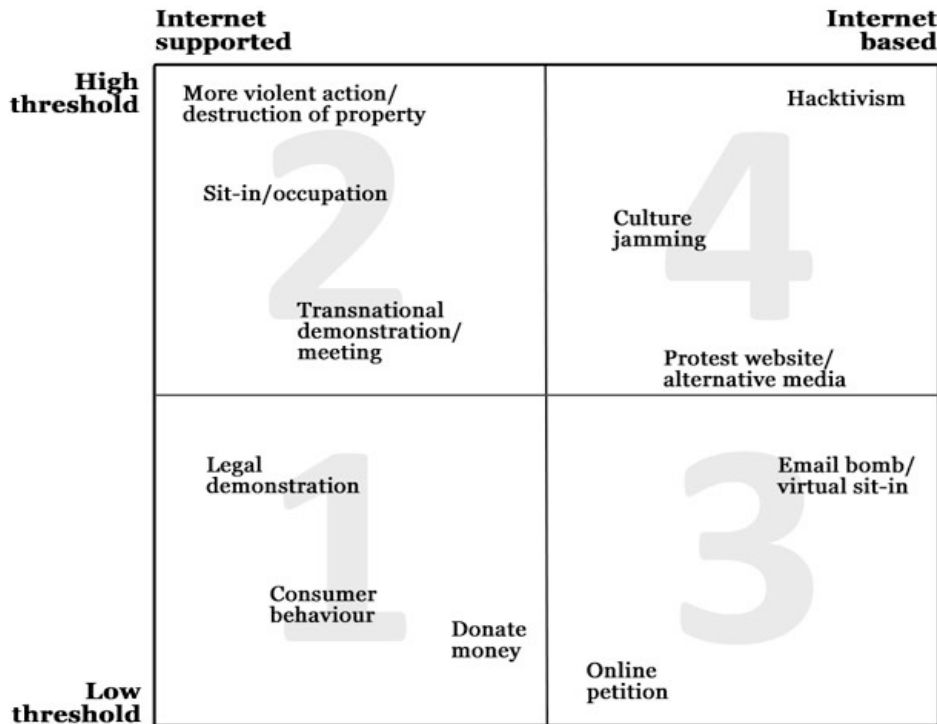


Figure 12.1 Overview of both Internet-supported and Internet-based types of action used by social movements

are therefore placed closer to the 'Internet-supported' side of the continuum. The same holds true for other action forms such as culture jamming, which illustrates that the distinction between Internet-based and Internet-supported actions is subtle and permeable. Moreover, the distinction is further blurred since action groups almost never use just one single tactic, but instead draw on a myriad of tactics both offline and online. 'Net activism has never been *exclusively* Net-centered,' Meikle (2002: 41) notes. And likewise offline actions today are almost always accompanied with tactics online. Some scholars even make a strong case to completely abandon the sharp distinction between the on- and offline worlds, since both spheres are heavily interdependent (Bimber 2000).

The development and expansion of the action repertoire can be seen as a mere result of the technological evolution that has given the civil society more sophisticated opportunities for their actions. As the history of social movements shows, the action repertoire only changes slowly (Tilly 1977, 1984). If the prevailing repertoire changes significantly at some point, the change is *prima facie* evidence of a substantial alteration in the structure of power, due to social, economic or political transformations. In the eighteenth century people targeted the power holders in their community with local rebellions likely claiming food and other stock supplies (Tilly 1984). In the nineteenth century this kind of 'mutiny' almost completely disappeared and the action repertoire changed to mass strikes and demonstrations, which was, according to Tilly, the immediate result of the rise of capitalism and the nation state. But since then, most of the tactics that were used 100 years ago are, at present, still widely known and used. The reason therefore is because 'people generally turn to familiar routines and innovate within them, even when in principle some unfamiliar form of action would serve their interests much better' (Tilly 1984: 4). In other words, the introduction of the Internet did not fundamentally change the contemporary action repertoire at large, yet it chiefly offers new opportunities to innovate and expand within the available toolkit of action forms. Tilly himself is indeed very sceptical about a far-stretched technological emphasis: 'Neither in communications nor in transportation, did the technological timetable dominate alterations in social movement organisation, strategy, and practice. Shifts in the political and organisational context impinged far more directly and immediately on how social movement worked than did technological transformations' (Tilly 2004a: 104).

The last decades and important 'repertoire shift' occurred from the national to the transnational level provoked by the increased influence that multinational corporations and global trade regimes have over national policy and regulatory decisions (Ayres 2005; Tilly 2004a). An impressive body of literature has started to deal with how the locus of (economic and political) power has shifted to a transnational and even global level, and consequently social movement strategies and actions (e.g. Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco 1997; della Porta, Kriesi and Rucht 1999; Bandy and Smith 2005; della Porta and Tarrow 2005; Clark 2003). And a prominent tool in this tactical but necessary reorganisation is the Internet (Bennett 2003; Ayres 2005). Carty (2002) and Stolle and Micheletti (2005) made a similar point when investigating culture

jamming as a new kind of protest tactic addressing corporate multinationals like Nike. However, the shift towards new Internet-based actions and tactics heavily related to the Internet has not resulted in the replacement of the old action forms, but rather complemented them. The existing tools are still used, and probably more than ever, as the Internet contributes to lowering participation thresholds. This will be explained in our second dimension.

1.2. Dimension 2: low versus high thresholds

Since scholars have started to investigate different forms of actions they have noticed a 'hierarchy of political participation' (Marsh 1977; Barnes and Kaase 1979; Dalton 1996). Some action forms entail more risk and higher commitment than other tactics, thus providing lower and higher thresholds for people to (consider to) participate (McAdam 1986; Tarrow 1998). Tarrow (1998), for instance, makes a distinction between conventional protest tactics, disruptive tactics and violent tactics. Earlier, Barnes and Kaase (1979) have ranked political actions according to their 'intensity' (moderate versus militant), while Klandermans (1997) made a typology based on 'low effort' and 'high effort'. Asking people how much they approved or disapproved of a certain tactic, Marsh (1977) ranked different social movement tactics with low thresholds (signing petitions, legal demonstrations) to high thresholds (illegal demonstrations, violent action). Collom (2003) has put this logic of an 'activism hierarchy' to the test and found empirical evidence that people engaging in unconventional political activity with higher intensity (e.g. demonstrations) were most likely to have already participated in low intensity forms of actions, like signing petitions, leading to some kind of 'stepping-stone theory' of political participation (Verhulst and Van Laer 2008). This 'hierarchy of (offline) political participation' can of course be easily attributed to online tactics as well, with no or marginal thresholds towards signing an online petition and much higher thresholds when dealing with particular forms of 'hacktivism', like denial-of-service (DoS) tactics. Postmes and Brunsting (2002), for instance, made a comparable distinction between 'persuasive' (like email petitions) and 'confrontational' (like virtual sit-ins) online tactics, the latter entailing higher risks and thus higher thresholds.

The reasons why social movements may or may not use a particular action form, or why individual people decide to participate in a particular action form, are manifold. They might feel, for instance, unfamiliar with a specific tactic, or think some kind of action is inefficient to obtain the goals put forward and other means should be used instead. The 'tactical question' is persistent for social movements, and entails instrumental calculations as much as identity or ideological considerations (Ennis 1987; Jasper 1997). A pacifist group of activist, for instance, will probably refuse to take up more violent forms of action, even though this would perhaps be more effective to gain media attention or alter significant policy change. One crucial variable we will focus on here, however, is the practical participation costs inherent to a particular action form, thus, the amount of *resources* needed to engage in a particular tactic (e.g. time, money and skills). These costs also refer to *potential* costs, like the costs related to getting arrested. For instance, signing

petitions can be considered a tactic entailing minimal costs, because of minimal commitment and risk, thus consisting of a low participation threshold. But in order to participate in a street demonstration you need some spare time on a Saturday afternoon, and maybe money to pay your travelling expenses, which is especially the case with a transnational demonstration located outside your national boundaries. Moreover, you might risk a violent confrontation with police forces. Here, thresholds to participate are obviously much higher.

The reason why we focus on these practical participation *costs* is because of the Internet's principal potential to reduce the 'transaction costs' for groups and activists organising, mobilising, and participating in collective action (Bonchek 1995; Naughton 2001). Technically, with its global architecture, the Internet allows for collaboration and participation beyond time and space constraints. As a many-to-many medium it stimulates diffusion of ideas and issues on an unprecedented scale, significantly reducing mobilisation costs of social movement actors. Moreover, defining social movements as 'sustained interactions' (see higher) communication is key, which in turn explains the Internet's attractiveness as a tool for social movements to overcome often limited available resources (van de Donk, Loader, Nixon and Rucht 2004a).

Although the Internet can resolve participation thresholds common to particular action forms, it certainly creates new ones too. Especially regarding hacktivist tactics special skills might be acquired to be even able to engage. We will come back to this as we discuss the limitations of Internet use on action repertoires. First we illustrate the various possibilities of the Internet as a new space for social movement tactics, and lowering participation thresholds of existing tactics.

2. The 'digitalised' action repertoire: a snapshot of possibilities

In the next section we will support our typology by giving multiple examples of how the Internet created new or facilitated old action forms. The four quadrants depicted in Figure 12.1 will structure the discussion of these cases.

2.1. Quadrant 1: Internet-supported action with low thresholds

Traditional forms to support or engage in collective action are, among others, donating money, being active as a conscious consumer, or participating in a legal demonstration. In almost all Western democracies these kinds of actions have become quite 'normal' as ever more people participated or used them (Norris, Walgrave and Van Aelst 2005). This success can be related to their limited thresholds, but as we will show the Internet has made them even easier and more accessible.

Donation of money

Donating money is a way of active participation that involves no risk or commitment, only money (and sometimes even no money at all). Garrett (2006) sees great opportunities with the Internet for this particular kind of action.

Before the Internet, Garrett contends, coordination costs largely outweighed the benefits of small contributions. With the Internet, organisations can now 'more effectively pool small-scale acts of support' by using click-and-give websites (Garrett 2006: 206). A well-known example is The Hunger Site that initially promoted food programmes by asking people to click on a button and watch a new page with different ads from the site's sponsors. The Hunger Site warrant that 100 per cent of the money of these sponsors directly goes to their charity partners. So there is not a penny of donation money involved from participants themselves. After two years of operation the site reached a stunning 198 million donations (Meikle 2002: 11). The Hunger Site now has several other projects like The Breast Cancer Site, where you can click and give free mammograms, or The Rainforest Site where you can click and protect endangered habitats. Entering the term 'click-and-give' in any online search engine will give you an infinite list of websites promoting an infinite list of causes.

Consumer behaviour

Consumer behaviour as an action form has always been heavily related to the Fair Trade Movement, which is, at present, in terms of popularity and supporters, fast growing. For this movement the Internet provides important new assets to be exploited. If you intend to boycott certain products or to buy specific food or clothes for ethical or political reasons, you need to be knowledgeable about different alternatives. The Internet offers clear advantages in terms of information dissemination. A very young but successful example is the US-based fair trade organisation World of Good, Inc. (Krier 2008). Together with its sister organisation World of Good Development it has initiated a web-based tool which allows producers and buyers to calculate a 'fair' minimum wage for their product. Also this company is involved in a large-scale project with eBay, a popular online reseller, aimed at setting up a new online marketplace which should link Fair Trade producers and resellers to conscious consumers (Krier 2008). As such, the Internet lowers the thresholds for many potential conscious consumers to effectively buy specific fair trade products.

Legal demonstrations

Social movement organisations wanting to mobilise for a mass street demonstration make extensive use of the Internet to enhance coordination and mobilisation efforts (Van Laer 2007a). This concerns mainly the distribution of information, both about the reasons for and goals of the action, as well as more strategic information concerning the action itself. Via the Internet organisations provide detailed information on time, place, and perhaps even a practical field guide for activists to 'inform people on how to organise, on their rights and how to protect themselves from harm' as was the case during the FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) protests in Quebec city, 2001. This lengthy document took activists by the hand and guided them through all the obstacles to effective participation (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004). During the Seattle WTO (World Trade Organisation) protests, a main rallying point was the StopWTOround distribution list, which enabled subscribers to

receive detailed information on different aspects of the WTO (George 2000). A recent study among diverse types of demonstration (like trade unions, antiwar, immigrant rights, but also right-wing mobilisations), showed how activists use the Internet to cross movement and protest issue boundaries, thereby significantly increasing their mobilisation potential (Walgrave, Bennett, Van Laer and Breunig 2008). The processes of 'brokerage' and 'diffusion' these authors describe are important mechanisms that in cyberspace do not stop at national boundaries either, making every mobilisation call in theory inherently transnational. Carty's (2002) account of various anti-sweatshop movements offers a first example. She describes how groups like the NGO Global Exchange provide complete campaign starter kits via their website to organise rallies and demonstrations. In October 1997 this strategy resulted in more than 84 communities in 12 different countries demonstrating simultaneously outside of Nike retailers (Carty 2002: 135). These several 'national' demonstrations are thus transnationally linked via their similar cause and tactical choice. In another study, Fisher and colleagues (2005) show how, in the case of five Global Justice demonstrations (mostly directed against the powerful economic institutions such as the World Bank and the G8), the Internet was successfully used by social movement organisations to connect domestically grounded activists to transnational struggles, thereby spurring local, large-scale protest events. We provide a more extensive discussion about the Internet's transnationalisation function in the following section on transnational social movement demonstrations and meetings.

2.2. Quadrant 2: Internet-supported action with high thresholds

In this second quadrant we discuss action forms that have been used before but have far higher thresholds, both legally and practically. It concerns transnational demonstrations and meetings, and more obstructive action forms such as sit-ins and (street) blockades. Again we believe the Internet can lower especially the practical barriers by facilitating the organisation and coordination of these events.

Transnational demonstration

We started this chapter with reference to the Zapatista movement and the so-called 'Battle of Seattle', two well-known moments of transnational mobilisation. A more recent example is the worldwide protest against the imminent war in Iraq on 15 February 2003. On that day several million people took to the streets in more than 60 different countries around the world. Several authors have shown that this protest event would not likely have been as massive and diverse without the coordinating and mobilising capacity of the Internet (Verhulst 2009; Bennett, Breunig and Givens 2008; Vasi 2006). Van Laer (2009) contends that the Internet was especially conducive in terms of 'mesomobilisation', that is the efforts of groups and organisations to coordinate and integrate other groups, organisations, and networks for protest activities (Gerhards and Rucht 1992: 558). In a historical comparison of three eras of peace and antiwar mobilisation, Van Laer (2009) showed how several face-to-face international meetings each time served as the principal basis for

coordination and collaboration, but that in the advent of the second war in Iraq in 2003 the Internet was fundamental in 'spreading the fire', bringing the call for a global day of action on an unprecedented worldwide scale, among hundreds of other national anti-war networks and social movement organisations, with a speed and efficiency that was not possible before.

However, we should notice that this event was transnational because all around the world people took to the streets for the same reasons, but that the event was hardly transnational on the individual level. A survey among the participants revealed that only a handful of demonstrators travelled more than 200 kilometres to participate in an anti-war march, even in large countries like the UK, Germany and the US (Walgrave and Verhulst 2003). The barriers for people to participate in an event abroad remain high and difficult to overcome. In their efforts to get people from around the world to an international summit social movements have used the Internet to distribute useful information on how to travel or where to sleep (Ayres 2005), but often that has proven not to be enough to significantly lower the practical thresholds (Lichbach and de Vries 2004; Fisher *et al.* 2005; Bédoyan, Van Aelst and Walgrave 2004; Walgrave and Van Laer 2008). Perhaps this might be one reason that 'global days of action' appear to be on the rise as a tactic of transnational activists (Tilly 2004a). Thanks to Internet technology activists do not need to be in the same geographical location to protest against, for instance, climate change, but can link their dispersed protest actions effectively online. This may well lead to Wellman's (2002) so-called 'glocalisation' of communities, meaning the combination of intense local and extensive global interaction.

Transnational meetings

Instrumental advantages of the Internet have also been well documented in the case of transnational social movement meetings and summits, especially those of the Global Justice Movement. A recurrent key event of the Global Justice Movement, for instance, is the various social forums they organise both on a global level (the World Social Forum), the regional level (e.g. European Social Forum) and even the national and local level. In his study on the second World Social Forum in Porto Alegre (Brazil), Schönleitner (2003) found that the Internet was a major tool for mobilisation and organisation for this kind of event: the registration of the delegates and the planning of workshops are achieved through the Web; email bulletins keep delegates and others updated; and almost all internal communication and external liaison has been done via Internet and mobile phones. Without the Internet the WSF would hardly be possible in its current form (Schönleitner 2003: 130). Kavada (2006) showed how the use of mailing lists contributed to an effective division of labour, spurring deliberative coordination and discussion in the advent of the third European Social Forum in London. Finally, a study of Van Laer (2007b) empirically addressed the importance of the Internet as a tool that allowed activists participating in the fourth European Social Forum in Athens to contact fellow participants from other organisations and countries before the summit in order to meet each other and exchange experiences and information at the Forum itself.

Sit-in/occupation and more violent forms of protest

McPhail and McCarthy (2005) contend that the Internet is also changing the way in which anarchistic groups like the 'Black Bloc' are engaged in more confrontational protest actions by providing access to email alert lists, schedules of planning meetings and marshal training sessions, information about protection against tear gas and pepper spray as well as legal information about rights of assembly, speech, etc. Especially, the Internet allows for the secure dissemination of messages about time and place of extra-legal and illegal activities, thereby significantly reducing the possibility of surveillance by the police and other opponents, and – during a protest event – Internet and other communication technology makes it possible to continuously document activists 'on the spot' about actions and interaction with the police. During the Seattle protests protesters made extensive use of Internet technology to tactically relocate groups of activists according to police locations. In the advent of the G8 protests in Genoa, July 2001, there were detailed city maps that circulated on the Internet with various 'battle grounds' coloured differently.

Another, less confrontational example, is that of the Harvard Progressive Student Labor Movement (PSLM) at Harvard College, in the United States, demanding higher living wages for the institution's security guards, janitors, and dining-room workers. In 2001 this movement started with the occupation of several university administrative offices, relying heavily on the Internet to coordinate the action and to fuel support among academic personnel, student parents, and other student communities on other university campuses in the US (Biddix and Park 2008). Via websites experiences about the sit-in were shared so that other student communities could learn and start a sit-in themselves. An interesting aspect of this case is that the 'real-life' sit-in at Harvard College eventually was accompanied with a 'virtual sit-in' in order to 'escalate' the campaign as media attention seemed to wither and administration officials continued to refuse to negotiate with the activists (Constanza-Chock 2003).

2.3. Quadrant 3: Internet-based action with low thresholds

In this section we discuss actions that are solely performed online: online petitions, email bombs and virtual sit-ins. The examples here clearly illustrate the advantages of the Internet in terms of mobilisation and reduction of participation thresholds.

Online petition

In a study among global justice activists della Porta and Mosca (2005) found that online email petitions were the most widespread form of action that was used online. Earl (2006) makes a distinction between online petitions that are performed by social movements themselves, and petitions that are centralised on a specialised 'warehouse site', like *ipetition.com*, *thepetitionsite.com* or *MoveOn.org*. *MoveOn.org* became widely known as the petition site opposing the impeachment of Bill Clinton in 1998 and the war in Iraq in 2003 (Earl 2006) and eventually become much more than a simple petition site, but

incarnated as a distinct movement appealing to a new generation of American politically engaged citizens (Pickard 2008). Especially these warehouse sites illustrate how the Internet can reduce costs of setting up or participating in an online petition: a social movement or random activist can easily make a new account on a warehouse site, choosing a cause and statement and then start to invite people to sign a petition. But with a little knowledge of html, you can easily start your own online petition as well. In May 2006, for instance, a union of French wine farmers in the region of Margaux quickly started with a blog and an online petition against a possible new highway across their precious vineyards. Also the Internet, as a medium that neatly integrates different kinds of media forms, offers new possibilities for setting up petitions, like, for example, the visual petition a 'Million Faces' initiated by the international campaign *Control Arms*. People sign this petition against the spread of arms around the world by uploading a picture of themselves optionally displaying a personal message. In July 2007 Friends of the Earth in the UK launched its 'Big Ask online march', a video wall of 'filmed signatures' to lobby for a climate change bill.

Today, popular social network sites like Facebook are extensively used to do similar things. Anyone with a Facebook profile can form a group against/ or in favour of a particular cause and invite other Facebook members to 'sign' this cause by becoming a member of this group. One such group, 'Hey, Facebook, breastfeeding is not obscene', was set up to protest against Facebook itself, asking to allow breastfeeding pictures that are now classified by Facebook as 'obscene' and removed from the network site.¹ Dubbed as the Mothers International Lactation Campaign (MILC), they also organised a virtual 'nurse-in', asking Facebook members to change their profile picture into a breastfeeding one. In January 2008 Colombian engineer Oscar Morales Guevara created a Facebook group, 'Un Million De Voces Contra La FARC' (One Million Voices Against the FARC), opposing president Chavez's request to the European Union to remove the FARC from the list of terrorist organisations, as well as protesting against the FARC in general. Within hours several thousand people had subscribed to this new group. This Facebook petition eventually resulted in a global day of action on 4 February 2008 against the FARC with over four million people protesting in dozens of Colombian cities and other cities worldwide.²

Email bomb and virtual sit-in

A more disruptive form of the online petition is the email bomb, which comprises large amounts of emails sent to email accounts of, for instance, a minister or corporate CEO, or to a target system in order to pin down the targeted mailing server, demonstrating the extent of support for a specific cause (Meikle 2002). A very similar tactic is that of the virtual sit-in. Here people do not send an email, but instead ask for information from a website but in such numbers that the server cannot deal with the amount of requests and eventually crashes. In fact, these tactics are often treated as hacktivist action forms. However, to the extent that it involves hundreds or thousands of people sending an email or requesting information from a website at the

same time, we believe this tactic is a collective action form still entailing lower thresholds than other kind of hacktivist tactics, like more specialised actions altering website source codes (see below) or using special software to disrupt Internet traffic, although the outcome (denial of service) indeed might be the same. On 30 November 1999, the day the WTO summit started in Seattle, several thousands activists requested information from the WTO website at the same time, which caused a crash of the WTO server. An early example of the use of email bombing is, for instance, *Workers Online*, the webzine of an Australian labour organisation, which organised in July 2001 a massive email jam session in response to legislation on workers' compensation. Within hours, a reported 13,000 emails were sent to the government (Meikle 2002: 163).

2.4. Quadrant 4: Internet-based action with high thresholds

In the last section we discuss actions that are made possible largely or totally thanks to the Internet, but demand more resources than signing a petition or sending an email. We will discuss examples of protest websites, culture jamming and hacktivism. It is important to note that culture jamming is not a totally new technique, as its origins can be traced to the 1960s, nor is it totally Internet-based, as it has offline versions. However, as it has grown together with the Internet and has its main features online we discuss it in this section.

Protest websites

The examples we present in this section are heavily related to what Clark and Themudo (2003: 110) have termed 'Internet-based dot causes', which can apply to any social movement or citizen group that 'promotes social causes and chiefly mobilises support through its website'. One of the earliest examples of a 'dot cause' is perhaps the Free Burma Campaign (FBC). Its website, initially created by exiled Burmese graduate student Zar Ni, generated unprecedented global attention to the Burmese military junta, worldwide support from scholars and activists, and even the withdrawal of global firms such as Levi Strauss and Texaco out of Burma (O'Neill 1999; Danitz and Strobel 2001). Another example is the McSpotlight campaign (O'Neil 1999; Meikle 2002), also claiming to be among the first to exploit the potential of the Internet into a successful grass-roots advocacy campaign against fast food giant McDonalds (Meikle 2002: 85). The heart of McSpotlight was its website which was launched in 1996 following the longest-running trial in English history: the McLibel case, where McDonald's took legal action against two individuals who distributed a leaflet accusing McDonald's of socially and environmentally harmful practices. The McSpotlight campaign offers a great example of how cyberspace acts as a new area of contention: in order to avoid censorship mirrors of the McSpotlight site were created in Chicago, London, Auckland and Helsinki, making it very difficult if not impossible for McDonalds to start legal action coordinated across a number of different legal systems and jurisdictions against the McSpotlight website (O'Neill 1999; Meikle 2002). Rosenkrands (2004) provides an extensive list of different Web-

based movements encompassing a wide range of different causes, like for instance *No Logo.com*, a website to support the movement against big brands and corporate globalisation launched by *No Logo* author Naomi Klein and a few other activists. Other examples include *CorpWatch.org*, *Nike Watch*, or *CokeSpotlight*, just to name a few.

Alternative media sites

A little bit different from the sites we described in the previous section, but taking advantage of the same possibilities of the new Internet space to publish and disseminate alternative points of view about political and cultural struggles, are those sites from of alternative media (activist)groups, such as Indymedia. Internet provides activists and social movements with alternative channels for the production of media, thereby circumventing mainstream media channels. The first independent media centre (IMC), Indymedia, was set up in the wake of the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, and soon after dozens of other IMCs were set up creating a worldwide network of radical social movement publics for the circulation of alternative news and information (Kidd 2003; Juris 2005). The ideas behind these alternative media sites are closely related to the open source movement that in turn very much intermingles with the global justice movement and its process of archiving and systematising their work and actions in 'memory-projects' like *Euromovements.info*. From another point of view, these alternative media sites are also struggling with information monopolisation and the production of meaning. And the latter is where we enter the field of culture jamming.

Culture jamming

Culture jamming 'changes the meaning of corporate advertising through artistic techniques that alter corporate logos visually and by giving marketing slogans new meaning' (Stolle and Micheletti 2005: 10). Culture jammers make use of techniques such as appropriation, collage, ironic inversion and juxtaposition through diverse tactics like billboard pirating, physical and virtual graffiti, and website alteration (Meikle 2002: 131; Juris 2008: 275). This action form is perhaps most vividly exemplified by the *Nike Email Exchange Campaign*, which started with one MIT graduate student emailing the Nike Company about printing the word 'sweatshop' on his personalised Nike shoes, but eventually generating unexpected media attention and thousands of other reactions worldwide (Peretti 2006).³ Humour, satire and irony are very important and powerful features of culture jam-like tactics.

Pinning down the roots of culture jamming is near impossible, foremost because many of the groups involved in this kind of cultural production predate the Internet era as well as the techniques they use (Klein 2002). Well-known groups like Adbusters (notorious for their 'uncommercials' or 'subvertisement'), the Yes Man, or ®mark, however, all credit the Internet for making the creation of ad parodies immeasurably easier and providing a platform to take their campaigns and artistic productions to a much wider and international audience (Meikle 2002; Klein 2002). By their online presence they are able to spur local offline action too, as for instance in the following

example. Although initially the idea to alter the voices of typical girls and boys' toys was posted by ®tmark on its website, it was a handful of war veterans that made the culture jamming more concrete: only days from Christmas Eve, the Barbie Liberation Organisation bought several hundred Barbie and GI Joe dolls, changed the voice boxes, and put them back on the shelves. You can imagine the surprised faces of parents and kids finding their Barbie saying, 'Dead men tell no lies' or GI Joe suggesting, 'Wanna go shopping?' (Rosenkrands 2004: 57–8).

Next to the alteration of specific ads online and offline, there is another often-used online technique of creating 'spoof sites'. These are clones of existing sites of, for instance, multinational corporations, governments, politicians and the like. During the WTO protests in Seattle, 1999, the group ®tmark set up a spoof site www.gatt.org, cloning the WTO/GATT home page with mock stories and quotes from WTO officials provided with 'helpful commentary' in an often ironic or cynical sense (Meikle 2002: 118).

Hacktivism

Finally, the Internet has also created a new space for confrontational activities like denial-of-service (DoS) attacks via automated email floods, website defacements altering the source code of targeted websites, or the use of malicious software like viruses and worms. These are all actions that touch the boundary of what is seen or held as legal and what as illegal. Depending on the point of view these tactics are than labelled as 'electronic civil disobedience', 'hacktivism' or as 'cyber-terrorism' (Denning 2001; Vegh 2003). Meikle (2002) provides a detailed account of one of the first social movement hacktivist groups: the Electronic Disturbance Theatre, which became active in response to the solidarity call of the Zapatista movement in Mexico. Via a Java applet called *Floodnet* they initiated several automated 'virtual sit-ins' against, among others, President Zedillo of Mexico's home page, and the Pentagon site. The Floodnet software makes use of the server and bandwidth of individual participants that downloaded and activated the software on their computers. This kind of software is used to perform a DoS attack forcing a website to shut down or rendering a server system inoperative, or to leave politically tinted messages on the server logs. Another tactic is to alter the source code of a particular website in order to reroute visitors to another website. In July 1998 a group of international hackers succeeded in probably the largest homepage takeover ever (Denning 2001: 273). They changed over 300 websites, redirecting possible visitors to their own site, greeting them with a message protesting the nuclear arms race. This tactic was also used extensively during the WTO protests in Seattle. Another often-used tactic is more like 'cybergraffiti' (Vegh 2003). By hacking into a website's source code a hacker changes the homepage or leaves a 'statement' (a slogan or picture) on the original homepage. F-Secure Corp, a Finnish Internet security firm, reported in 2003 that over 10,000 websites had been marred with digital graffiti by protesters and supporters of the US-led war in Iraq.⁴

That some of these tactics make it very complicated to delineate what is 'acceptable' and what should be labelled as 'crime' is illustrated by the group *Condemned.org* who broke into the servers of a number of child porn sites and

erased their hard drives (Meikle 2002: 164). We do not engage in a full outline of this discussion but refer readers to Chapter 17 in this book, which deals with this subject.

3. Limitations of internet and the action repertoire of social movements

The numerous examples discussed in the previous section are somehow anecdotal, yet they show that the Internet has improved and broadened the toolkit of social activists. However, we should not be blind to the limitations that accompany these new technological opportunities. There is the 'classical' problem related to unequal Internet access, also referred to as the digital divide. Other shortcomings are more directed to social movements and their particular use of actions. In some cases the Internet has made collective action still not easy enough, while in others it has made it perhaps too easy. Finally we will argue that the new media seem to lose their newness quickly and more fundamentally are unable to create stable ties between activists that are necessary for sustained collective action.

3.1. Still a digital divide

The term *digital divide* refers in the first place to the inequality in Internet access between the rich industrialised countries and the developing countries in the South (Norris 2001). According to recent estimates around 75 per cent of the people living in North America can be considered as Internet users, while this percentage drops to hardly five in Africa.⁵ Besides the clear geographical variation also within (Western) societies certain people remain behind in the digital evolution; not only because of the absence of a computer or Internet access, but also because they lack the skills to use the new media technology. In that respect social movement actions may fail to reach the socially weaker groups in society if they rely too much on the new media to organise their protest events, which is even more the case for pure Internet-based action forms. The digital divide argument goes to the core of many social movements as it weakens their democratic potential (Tilly 2004b). And this is even more apparent in the light of the global digital divide, which seriously endangers the representation of a 'global civil society' in the repertoire shift from the national to the transnational level.

There is also a digital divide within cyberspace, what Norris (2001) has termed the 'democratic divide' between those who use the Internet for political aims and those who do not. In this sense, the Internet will chiefly serve those activists and groups that are already active, thus reinforcing existing patterns of political participation in society. In this sense the early 'cyber-enthusiasm' of the Internet's potential to reinvigorate democracy (see for example Rheingold 1993; Davis and Owen 1998; Coleman 1999) has gradually been replaced by more sceptical and even pessimistic accounts of the Internet's democratising potential (see for example Scheufele and Nisbet 2002; Margolis and Resnick 2000; Hill and Hughes 1998).

3.2. The Internet makes it not easy enough

As mentioned before 'real' transnational demonstrations, getting people from different part of the world to protest against international institutions and world leaders has remained difficult. Most international protests are in fact overwhelmingly local, or at best national demonstrations (Fisher *et al.* 2005). And in the rare cases that protests were able to get an internationally diverse public to the streets, it was not so much because of the Internet but rather because of 'stronger' mobilising factors. These can be resources such as time (to travel) or free transportation (provided by an organisation involved) (Bédoyan *et al.* 2004). The fact that information on these events is distributed easily and rapidly is certainly helpful, but often not enough to lower the practical barriers significantly.

As indicated, the Internet certainly creates new thresholds too. Meikle (2002) noticed how the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT) explicitly warned potential participants of possible risks in a virtual sit-in, which they organised to raise awareness about the Zapatista struggle in Mexico:

We're met with a set of instructions ... and warnings: 'This is a protest, not a game, it may have personal consequences as in any off-line political manifestation on the street.' We're warned that our computer's IP addresses will be collected by 'the government', in the same way that our pictures might be taken during a street action. We're warned of possible damage to our computers, in the same way that 'in a street action the police may come and hurt you'. (Meikle 2002: 144)

Finally, although the bits and bytes are hard to repress in cyberspace, in some cases the use of the Internet seems futile in light of enduring barriers related to political constraints. Earlier we gave the example of the exiled Burmese people protesting against the military junta in their home country. However, despite raising global awareness it became very clear that in late 2007 still nothing fundamentally had changed. Thousands of people, among them many Buddhist monks, took to the streets again in the Saffron Revolution (referring to the colour of the monks' habits). The junta's first reaction was to block any possible Internet traffic in the country, making it impossible to blog about the demonstrations and the way the junta repressed them. In 2003 millions of people demonstrated against the imminent war in Iraq, in many ways thanks to the Internet, commentators and scholars said, but voices were deadly silent in mainland China.

3.3. Internet makes it too easy

As some action forms still demand high efforts of participants, the opposite argument can be made for some new online tactics. At first glance, the email petition seems a brilliant continuation of its offline predecessor since it is a familiar tactic, can be easily used, set up, and immediately forwarded to an infinite number of people across time and geographical boundaries. Yet, decision-makers may likely be 'unimpressed by a haphazard list of names that arrives piecemeal, with repeated signatures or pseudonyms from people well

outside their jurisdiction' (Meikle 2002: 25). Does a hardly personalised email show the same commitment as a handwritten letter? Many power holders believe it does not and so potential subscribers may also feel that this kind of tactic is not appropriate. Again, what are we to think of the idea of pursuing social and political change by clicking on a button and watching some ads?

3.4. The new media lost their newness

When social movements as 'early adopters' started to use the Internet more than a decade ago their opponents were taken off guard. Some people indicate the failure of the MAI⁶ agreements on free trade as the first example of a new style of Internet-based contentious politics (Ayres 1999: 133). Yet, whether this first, obvious success indeed heralded a new era of activist repertoire is not sure. The example of the MAI may well illustrate how politicians and negotiators were somehow overwhelmed and surprised by the enormous attention to the MAI and the rapid diffusion of critical and substantial information about the exact content of the agreements. Today, more than 10 years after the MAI, the Internet is widely introduced and used in all kinds of different life spheres, and new opponents are probably not so easily taken by surprise any more. Furthermore, targeted companies or authorities do not passively wait for future online hacktivist actions, but proactively invest in software to hinder new attacks. This means social activists are forced to renew their action repertoire ever faster, only to spark the same amount of public attention or political pressure.

3.5. The Internet only creates weak ties

The Internet is a 'weak-tie instrument' par excellence (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll and Rosson 2005); as such it is able to attract easily and rapidly a large number of people to join an action or event. Walgrave and colleagues (2008) have pointed to weak ties crossing movement and issue boundaries as an important asset for social movement actors expanding their mobilisation potential. However, critics have noticed that this growth in support is often followed by an even faster decline in support. Earl and Schussman (2003) noticed that in the rising era of e-activism 'members' have become 'users', who after the action they supported is over often choose to move on and don't feel a need to get permanently engaged. According to several scholars the Internet is unable to create the necessary trust and strong ties that are necessary to build a sustainable network of activists (Diani 2000; Clark and Themudo 2003; Tilly 2004b).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter we have focused on how the Internet has changed the action repertoire of social movements in two fundamental ways. First, by facilitating existing actions forms making it possible to reach more people, more easily, in a time span that was unthinkable before. Second, by creating new (or adapted) tools for activism. We have tried to capture this 'double impact'

in a typology of collective action with two dimensions. The creation of new e-tools for activism was represented in the first dimension ranging from Internet-supported to Internet-based actions. The second dimension referred to the (practical) thresholds that have been lowered, but not broken down, by the Internet. On the basis of these two dimensions four quadrants of activism were discussed and illustrated with numerous examples. However, the dimensions should not be seen as clear and stable divisions between the different forms of activism, but rather as fluid lines that are permanently redefined by technological innovations and the creativity of activists.

In our discussion of the typology we have tried to build a strong case in favour of the Internet as it has given social movements new and improved opportunities to engage in social and political action. At the same time we have avoided a naive Internet-optimism, by pointing out several limitations. However, those limitations do not outweigh the advantages, as we believe the overall balance is positive. This does not mean that social movements have suddenly become a more powerful force in society or that the power balance has shifted in their favour. As mentioned before political and economic power has gradually moved to the international level. The Internet enabled social movements to follow that transition and operate more globally. One could state that the Internet has made it possible to maintain the status quo, but has not changed it. What has changed is that powerful actors such as multinationals, governments or supranational institutions can be held accountable at any time. Civic groups with little resources can mobilise support and public attention against a far more powerful competitor more easily and independently than in the past. Although Goliath can use the Internet as well, the relative advantage of this new technology is bigger for David. Several authors have indeed shown that social movements, being networks of diverse groups and activists, are especially keen on using the Internet because of its fluid, non-hierarchical structure, which 'matches' their ideological and organisational needs (Klein 2001; Bennett 2003; van de Donk, Loader, Nixon and Rucht 2004b). This is far less the case for organisations or actors that have a more hierarchical and formal structure, where the Internet is often seen more as a threat and less an opportunity.

In this chapter we have tried to explain and illustrate how the Internet has changed the action repertoire of social movements. By focusing on the action repertoire we have not been able to discuss the much broader consequences of the use of electronic media for civil society. As stated by McCaughey and Ayers: 'Activists have not only incorporated the Internet into their repertoire, but also ... have changed substantially what counts as activism, what counts as community, collective identity, democratic space, and political strategy' (McCaughy and Ayers 2003: 1–2). As such activists and social movements have now often found straightforward ways to reconnect with ordinary citizens, and especially with youngsters, in the face of apparently ever-increasing public disengagement from formal political institutions and processes (cf. Dalton 2008). The interested reader still has a lot to explore, and so have social movement scholars that try to keep up with the new developments in the Internet age.

Notes

- 1 Link to Facebook group: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2517126532>
- 2 Mario Vargas Llosa. 'No más FARC.' *El Pais*, 10 February 2008, available online: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/opinion/FARC/elpepiopi/20080210elpepiopi_12/Tes. Link to Facebook group: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=6684734468>
- 3 By adding the word 'sweatshop' to his shoes Jonah Peretti wanted to address the issue of child labour. The complete correspondence between Peretti and Nike can be read at <http://www.shey.net/niked.html> (see also McCaughey and Ayres 2003).
- 4 Brian Krebs, 'Hackers Plan Attacks To Protest Iraq War', *Washington Post*, 1 April 2003.
- 5 <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>
- 6 Multilateral Agreement on Investment, negotiated between members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Further reading

In addition to the References for this chapter we would like to highlight a few useful articles and books for the interested reader.

Recommended introductions to social movement activism and the impact of new communication technology are van de Donk, Loader, Nixon and Rucht's (2004) reader, *Cyberprotest. New Media, Citizens and Social Movements* and McCaughey and Ayers' (2003) reader, *Cyberactivism: Online Activism in Theory and Practice*. For more on electronic civil disobedience, with lots of interesting examples, certainly read Graham Meikle's (2002) *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet*. On culture jamming and new sites of activism the work of activist-researcher Naomi Klein is suitable, but recent interesting accounts can be found in Christine Harolds' (2007) *Our Space: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*, or the ethnographic work of Jeffrey Juris (2008), *Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization*.

For general reading, empirical as well as theoretical, on social movements and contentious action, the following two readers are very helpful: Goodwin and Jasper's (2003) *The Social Movement Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Blackwell Readers in Sociology) and Snow, Soule and Kriesi's (2004) *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*.

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