Affinities of Dissent: Cyberspace, Performative Networks and the Iranian Green Movement

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Abstract:

This paper argues that the role of Internet activism in the Green Movement, a social protest movement that emerged after the contested 2009 presidential elections in Iran, lies in the creative configuration of complex networks that primarily interact through meaning-laden performances that carve out spaces of dissent. For social movements, especially under authoritarian rule like the Green Movement, cyberspace presents a kind of social space wherein imaginaries of self and other, resistance and power shape bonds of interactivity. Such bonds are described here as "social affinities" that are about contentious performances, actions that display intense emotions and narratives of protestation against power. Accordingly, the notion of "performative networks" underlines how the Iranian Green Movement, especially since the state repression that followed the elections, has compromised an interactive network organized around dramatic discourses and practices of contestation. In terms of structure, the paper is divided into three sections. (1) The first section shows how an electoral campaign was put together through loosely networked associations that (partly) operated through computer-mediated-communication that facilitated logistical resources for the actors. In the pre-election period, Internet played a prominent role in promoting and mobilizing a decentralized movement through offline and online shifting network connections, a phase of cyberactivism that is identified here as self-promoting networks. (2) The second section looks at what followed after the election results were announced, after which the regime unleashed its security forces to crackdown on the street protests. Cyberspace emerged as a set of other-offensive performative actions, contentious strategies like organization of street-demonstrations, hackactivism and website defacements that identified a more belligerent and aggressive strategy aimed at directly challenging state power, both offline and online. (3) The third and final phase compromises self-maintaining performative actions that largely revolves around memorial and mythical narratives for the maintenance of social affinities in light of state crackdowns in both physical and cyberspaces. The paper finally argues that Internet activism in the context of social movements involves dramatic performances of affective nature that form network associations and vibrant informal public spheres.

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The waves of protests that swept the streets of Tehran and other major Ira-
nian cities in June and July 2009 presented powerful performances of con-
testation that energized a large segment of the population into forming a
social movement with claims on state power. From the first days of the up-
risings, the diverse citizenry who participated in the street-protests in day-
light or rooftops at night rallied around shifting clusters of symbols, colorful
signs and slogans that articulated a vision of an alternative, more inclu-
sive politics (Gheytanchi 2010). Sound frames like "*Allahu akbar*" (God is
Great) or "*Ahmadi raft*" also called attention to a powerful citation practice,
largely in reference to the 1979 revolution, and identified a transformative
ambience wherein a new political imaginary was given form in an ongoing
event unfolding in the present (Manoukian 2010).

In a tight intertwining of meaning and social processes, the multiplicity of
expressions and ideals of the demonstrators signal, following Henri Lefeb-
vre, both a representational site and a representation of site (Lefebvre 1991).
In other words, dramatic expressions, in a meaning-laden sense, embody
the pluralistic politics that the demonstrators hope to have. The prevalence
of contested statements and visualizations of dissent in everyday spaces of
interaction mark the transformation that the actors seek to attain. More
precisely, the social dramas involve stories about the participants as a staging
"front" behind which the demonstrators convincingly portray their ideals
and express subversion, and hence creatively construct sites wherein resis-
tance is experienced and practiced.

In light of such emphasis on performance as a form of political action, this
paper describes the Iranian Green Movement, a protest movement emerged
after the disputed tenth presidential election in 2009, as a new social move-
ment thatcarries out resistance through networked associations that has
heavily relied on dramaturgical practices for collective action. The notion
"networked associations" implies distinct manifestations of collective action
that constitute dispersed channels of communication such as information
communication technologies as the core of the organizational and dissi-
dent practices. The central argument here is that the novel role of Internet
activism in the Green Movement lies in the formation of social networks
that primarily interact through meaning-laden performances that carve out
new spaces of dissent. For social movements, especially under authoritarian
rule like the Green Movement, cyberspace presents a kind of social space

wherein practices and imaginaries of self and other, resistance and power shape collective bonds of interactivity. Such bonds are described here as "social affinities" that take form in contentious performances, actions that display campaigns and dramas that address demands to state power (Tilly 1978). Accordingly, the notion of "performative networks" underlines how the Iranian Green Movement, especially after the state repression that followed the elections, compromises an interactive network with information technologies as both its innovative mechanism of contestation to mobilize protest and staging of identity formation.

The present study is divided into three sections. The first section shows how an electoral campaign was put together through loosely networked associations that (partly) operated through computer-mediated communication that facilitated logistical resources and communication platform for the actors. In the pre-election period, Internet played a prominent role in organizing and promoting a decentralized movement through offline and online shifting network connections, a phase in the movement that identified cyberactivism in terms of *self-promoting* networks. The second section looks at what followed after the election results were announced, after which the regime unleashed its security forces to clampdown on the street protests and Information communicative activities. Cyberspace emerged as a staging platform of *other-offensive* performative actions, contentious strategies such as hackactivism or website defacements that identified a more belligerent and aggressive strategy aimed at directly challenging state power, both offline and online. The third and final phase that followed the repression phase marks the *self-maintaining* performative set of actions that largely revolve around memorial and mythical narrative strategies in the maintenance of social affinities in light of state crackdowns in both physical and cyberspace. In this phase, the Internet has become a strategic space of meta-narratives for meaningful collective action.

Organizing the Spontaneous

Historically speaking, since the inception of the Islamic Republic and the institutionalization of theocratic order of the *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist) in 1979, elections have identified one of the only democratic institutions within the Iranian state. They have served as temporary instances of political openings during which competing candidates (though

carefully selected by the regime) and their supporters can participate in the political process. The element of competition and relative openness of political process, however, have always carried the risk of destabilization for the ruling elites. As the momentous victory of the reformist candidate, Mohammad Khatami, demonstrated in 1997, post-revolutionary Iranian elections entail the capacity to transform politics in ways that to encourage the electorate to seek change within the political system, if only done with a massive participatory force (Gheissari and Nasr, 2006: 132).

With the approach of the tenth presidential elections so grew a renewed sense of democratic hope for undermining the authoritarian politics of the dominant hardliner faction, best represented by the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had occupied the presidency since 2005. To many, it felt as 2009 can be a repeat of 1997. To others, even more hopeful in outlook, the new elections promised a new social change, one that would usher a new era of democratic politics.

While its origins can be traced back to various political currents in Iranian history, namely from the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911) to the student uprising in 1999, the Green Movement largely emerged out of the political ambience marked with such democratic exuberance. As Mir-Hussain Mousavi, the main reformist candidate with appeal to a broad cross-section of Iranians, announced his bid for presidency in March 2009, the mood abruptly transformed into a mobilized force. As early as April 2009, a new political culture emerged that quickly identified a growing campaign.

Mousavi's supporters compromised a cross-section of the larger society, including artists, university students, intellectuals, middle-class professionals, (unemployed) workers, reformist religious associations and women activists. Enthusiastic in capitalizing on the growing discontent, they began to participate in increasing number of campaign rallies organized in stadiums or streets, and characterized mostly with newly made repertoire of signs, slogans, songs, symbols and discourses.

They waved and wore green, a color that symbolically identified a new electoral politics, mostly known in its pre-election period as *moj-e sabz* or "the Green Wave". For the expanding campaign, the color green, associated with Iranian nationalism and Islam, served as a subtle but effective call for a

new beginning. Under the very watchful eyes of an authoritarian theocracy with a ban on festive activities under the regime law, supporters of Mousavi danced, sang and chanted anti-government slogans on the streets of Tehran and other major cities. The Green camp felt a momentum, that its members are riding the crest of a powerful wave of history into a more democratic future; that Mousavi, in words of Scott Peterson, the American journalist covering the pre-election period, was the "promise of change that he embodied for his supporters, whether realistic or not." (Peterson 2011: 487)

In May, the momentum had enhanced its visibility, as symbols of anti-incumbent movement rapidly spread through spontaneously organized channels of communication. Computer-mediated-communication played a key role in identifying this emerging decentralized social movement. At the electoral stage, the Internet empowered the Green campaigners mostly in instrumental ways, facilitating organization, mobilization and spread of information. Since Internet favors loosely organized associations of horizontally and participatory character (Warkentin 2001), the new media emerged to play a prominent role in the early developments of the nascent movement in heavily relying on a network of informal interactions between plurality of individuals, groups and organizations.

Several strategies were used in cyberspace and other electronic means of communication to promote Mousavi's candidacy. First, campaigners, many computer-savvy in their youth, coordinated rallies in the stadiums or streets through official campaign website (www.mirhossein.com), Balatarin (a Persian language community website), Flicker, Twitter, and cell phone text messages (Christensen 2011: 243; Kurzman 2010; Hashem and Najjar 2010:127). While word-of-mouth complemented the acceleration in the dissemination of campaign news, the new social networking sites, some of which unknown in the 2005 elections, became the backbone of the Green electoral campaign. With the state unblocking of the site in February 2009, Facebook emerged as a key campaign platform, promoting Mousavi, his image and ideas as the representative of a new reformist politics since the era of Mohammad Khatami's presidency. Specifically, through Mousavi's Facebook site, launched by Mohammad Sadeghi Esfahlani, a young graduate student based in Germany, the day before the inauguration of Barak Obama in January 19 2009 (Global Voices 2010), campaigners would organize public events that would, at times, spontaneously grow into major street-level rallies (Rahimi 2011: 158-160).

Second, social networking sites establish strategic forums for exchange of ideas and spread of news on both national and transnational levels. Sadeghi Esfahlani explains this creative strategic measure as the "process innovation to incorporate existing social network platforms into the Persian language media bandwidth (Global Voices 2010; see also Sadeghi Esfahlani 2010: 60)." In an attempt to shift periphery-center boundaries of information circulation, the new media's impact on mass media recalls similar strategies used by other social movements such as the anti-Capitalistic movements and Zapatistas by inserting alternative news reports into traditional news outlets (Bennett 2003: 153). In a transnational setting, campaigners and lay supporters benefit from the instantaneous transmission of information and news via blogs, websites, SMS, and other social network sites and invite each other not only to manage logistics, but eliminate the need for costly and time-consuming physical distribution of information (Gheytanchi & Rahimi, 2009). The primary objective, in many ways, lies in the attempt to influence mainstream local and global news coverage of the events on the ground and bypass dominant news gatekeepers to ultimately change public opinion. For example, Kalame-ye Sabz (Green Word), Mousavi camp's licensed print newspaper, with a large audience in its online version (http://kaleme.com/), circulated election news that were often ignored by the official print and televised media. As a cheap and a swift means of global communication, not limited to geographical distance, sites like Balatarin and Facebook, with links to other pro-Mousavi websites, had a transformative impact on the movement's communication strategies.By facilitating a flexible, horizontal and unmediated platform for promoting a self-image of the movement that would appeal to the larger public, such social networking sites enhanced recruitment, bolstered citizen's participation in the electoral campaigns and expanded the influence of the grassroots organizations in promoting the electoral campaign not only in Iran, but also on a transnational level.

Third, and in a significant way, the self-promotional strategy platform through social networking sites had also become a force shaping, in words of Bennett, "both the relation among organizations and in some cases, the organizations themselves" (Bennette 2003:156). Early in its development phase, Facebook emerged as the campaign's both means for organizing and staging a self-image of the movement as a polycentric association of ordinary citizens. The combined logistical and identification complex of cy-

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ber-social networking sites generated a dispersive mode of activism among a group of like-minded citizens, some of whom previously "unwired" activists, who now shared a cause and a common sense of political identity. With the approaching elections, on June 12th, online network campaign sites increasingly became a source of knowledge and a place to identify with a living collective movement that rapidly shaped an epistemic community, a collective composed of network of knowledge-based activists, many of whom unprofessional or "citizen staffs" (as the campaign called them), with well-defined problems and solutions (Bennett 2003).

In the field of social movement studies, this type of social cognition is referred to as collective action frames, schemas of interpretation as cognitive strategies lighting up specific or generic themes, issues, problems or solutions in to order to incite action (See for example Entman 1993; Gerhards and Rucht, 1992; Snow and Benford 1988; Reese, 2007). Such framing process is critical to understanding the Iranian Green Wave, especially at its initial stages of developing a network movement that largely expanded in communicative spaces. Social networking forums are among the key strategic sites where framing and rhetoric of injustice, stories, tales, news and new grammars of sociability would take place. In using frames and staging the scope of existing conflicts and possible changes to the political power, online network sites marked distinct spaces of shared identities as, in what Charles Tilly described, "joint action in pursuit of common ends" in correlation with perceived opportunity for action or threats of domination (Tilly, 1978: 84). Facebook most effectively underscored this political functioning of the framing process. Aesthetic practices of auditory-visual nature like Mousavi's campaign film, slogans and songs, circulated in various official and unofficial Mousavi Facebook sites, underscored an aesthetic mechanism to capture the terms of public discourse and widened the symbolic-discursive scope of electoral contestation. As multiple framing strategies, such cultural repertoires aimed to make ideologies and statements of the campaign more coherent and bolster solidarity in organizing association ties and identity.

The correlation between framing strategies, as performative actions, and organizational structure of the movement can be described primarily in terms of network ties operating in distinct types of micro-publics. Erving Goffman, the American sociologist, described such form of sociability

as ephemeral sites of interaction that briefly release individuals from their institutional embeddings (Goffman 1963). Such ephemeral publics mark a process of mitigation of boundaries that foster new relations of virtual interactivity on the basis of affective forms of sociability or what Mousavi has called *mohabbat va olfat-e ijtema'i* or "social empathy and affinity" (Dabashi, 2010: 132). According to Mousavi, social affinities operate in a collective force that closely resemble what Castells has famously described as a networked social movement, collective actions that interactively operate in the digitally processed information networks with both local and global coalition trajectories (Castells 2001).

However, Mousavi's notion of social affinity emphasizes the role of emotions more than information, together with the social imaginary of empathy that configures close ties with others organized in autonomous units linked through associations of felt experiences. As Hamid Dabashi notes, Mousavi's vision of such social organization operates on "further cultivation of the subterranean (Internet-based) social networking that was creating unprecedented modes of group affiliation (Dabashi 2010:134). The Internet, in other words, identifies a network of networks through which online activism promote a collective shared experience of participating in a collectivity. This emotive element would signal a network production of images of the collectivity that could be felt and imagined in absence of face-to-face interaction in physical settings. In doing so, felt experiences of affiliation (or affective bonds) promote a self-image of the movement in how outsiders should view it, and how insiders should reaffirm in idioms and symbols of solidarity. In terms of affective strategy, the early phases of the Green Wave sustained a nascent organizational effectiveness for precisely making certain emotions such as anger against the political establishment legitimate motivations for electoral participation.

Such emotive element served asstrategic action in constructing social capital based on hope, trust andeven rage. With increased capacity to form informal emotional ties, framing for change contributed to overcoming the perception that politics is as usual and that commitment is needed for change. Nevertheless, under authoritarian rule, the cultivation of social affinities in the process of building social movements entails a set of limitations, as it became evident after the 2009 elections.

Digitizing the "The Moral Shock"

In the pre-electoral stage, the relationship between offline and online network activism still remained ostensibly discernible. This is so since the Mousavi campaign was legally permitted by the state to coordinate activities through various strategic channels including the Internet to self-promote and logistically prepare for the day of elections. Moreover, since Internet was largely used for instrumental purposes, the relatively open environment of the campaign season helped distinguish offline and online activism in ways that strategic communications were overtly developed for winning the elections.

With the announcement of the election results on June 13, 2009, however, the Green Wave underwent a radical transformation both in terms of strategic activities and identity-formation. The defining turning point occurred merely two hours after the election ballets closed and when Ahmadinejad was declared the winner with a wide margin of votes.

The news came as shock to the Mousavi camp. Yet it was not the possibility of fraud that astonished the Green supporters, since claims of vote-tampering and electoral irregularities were also made in the 2005 election, but the differences in vote counts that aroused first shock and then anger. This affective reflex can be described in what Castells calls a "moral shock," meaning an incident or an event that provokes an intense feeling of indignation "in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action," the sort of emotion based on a moral understanding that would mobilize a movement to engage in confrontational activities with the powers to be (Castells 1997:106). The moral aspect of the shock is however more than the reception but the reaction to a critical event that could be deemed unjust by actors. The shock generates a disruption in the perception of reality and sense of expectation of how a political system should operate.

Consumed with outrage, the Green Wave underwent a substantive transformation as its performative network altered from campaign platforms to street-rooftop sites of demonstrations. Days after the elections, protesters engaged in collective action of contentious nature in the production and performance of multiple frames. Through images, slogans, songs and silent demonstrations that drew the media spotlight, the public protestations redefined the movement as an opposition current with new claims on the

elections and, accordingly, state legitimacy. In this performative process, the spectacles of street-protests in daytime and audios of chants and slogans on rooftops at nighttime became ends in themselves. When demonstrator chanted "where is my vote?" such rhetorical question not only served as a strategic means to think about the illegitimacy of theelections, but more importantly identified a new sense of solidarity now built around the shocking question of alleged electoral fraud. The affective aspect of the shock became the core of the movement's self-image, a central emotive event that defined the movement away from a mere electoral campaign and toward a social movement of significant subversive force.

In response to authoritarian measures imposed by the regime, in the post-election period the Green Movement increasingly engaged in innovative contentious practices that heavily relied on its network structure to express and communicate opposition. In this second phase, which spanned from the time when results were announced to the final series of harsh though successful crackdowns on the street-protesters in February 2010, the growing shift from offline to online activism began to take place not only because of diminishing opportunities to appear in public spaces but also increasing chances to engage in creative confrontational strategies with the power holders in digital space. Again, Internet generated activism entailed with various interactive features and political implications, as offline confrontational practices like street demonstrator's battles with security forces were recreated online through various offensive measures, aimed at undermining state legitimacy in its use of force against the demonstrators.

In terms of offensive strategy that immediately followed the elections, cyberactivismabruptly moved from a self-promotional mobilizing medium toward a self-generative media. As organized marches, some of which announced over Mousavi's official website or his Facebook site, grew in size amid bloody clampdowns, the protesters gathered video footages, posted news or cell phone videos of police brutality on various social networking sites. YouTube suddenly emerged as a central spectacle platform, as satellite news channels would download and show images of demonstrations to a global audience captured by the street protesters. With the captureof the death of Neda Agha-Sultan on a cell phone camera on 20 June, and its immediate posting on Facebook, social media facilitated the individuation of media practices to empower individual political involvement in the shap-

ing of mainstream media. The dissemination process operated as the viral communication spread through intra-media linkages that went from social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) to mainstream media outlets (e.g. Al-Jazeera) in just a matter of few hours (Assman and Assmann 2010: 225-242). Twitter, though marginal in the dissemination of news (Howard 2010: 9; Khiabany and Sreberny 2010: 174-76; Morozov 2011: 14-9), facilitated the instantaneous spread of stories such as the video clip of Neda's death to a global audience (Fischer 2010:105). Despite filters and slow Internet connection, Persian-speaking sites like Balatarin and Donbaleh, with multiple linking webs, provided protesters a clandestine network of activists who collaborated, mostly anonymously, in the dissemination of minute-by-minute information on the protests.

The framing strategy of news covering the protests by the protestors aimed at capturing the emotive and visual scope of the global and national public opinion. But more importantly, the audio sound and visual imageries of the demonstrations helped energize the movement's ongoing attempts to challenge the state, prolong contestation and ultimately deprive of those in power of legitimacy. The framing process of information gathering and distribution produced by the new media require, in this sense, the rhetorical and symbolic ability to successfully define the events unfolding on the ground based on symbolic distinctions on the basis of adversity, what is justice and unjust, what is moral and not moral. As a response to the moral shock effect, the postings and circulation of images, signs, shouts, cries from the protests through the Internet would operate as shocking mechanisms themselves, an emotive strategy of inciting public support and mobilization against the external other, namely the state.

Meanwhile, as the repression of demonstrations and surveillance of electronic mediums of communication grew in operation and effectively spread fear in the opposition's camp on the street-level, such boundary-making operatives began to become mostly manifest online. Hackactivism, the subversive practice of digital re-appropriation of cyberspace through assaults on websites deemed to represent power, provided visible indication of the boundaries beyond with which the Green activists sought to delegitimize and hence distinguish from an imagined moral order. The defacement of certain government websites such as Far News, Keyhan News and Ahmadinejad's homepage, provided aneffective way to undermine adversary's

flow of communication, and also served as a symbolic attempt to dramatize what is external and lacks identity (or visibility) in terms of moral authority. Defacement marks the performative social field that differentiates between "them," hence denying the entity or the adversary's identity and its legitimacy to exist and "us." Boundary-making would also involve other hacking processes like Google bombs or redirecting official state websites to an anti-government slogan, all of which would underline a process of distinction between vying actors, between good and evil, between what can legitimacy exist and what cannot.

Boundary construction entails other significant performative implications for the identity of the movement. Internet activity can enhance the performative repertoire of the post-election movement in the course of networking activism, as a distinct social reality, that constitute new relations between displays of contentious practices and their meanings. The core of such identity transformation lies in configuration of a hybrid reality between human and computer worlds, which Bruno Latour has identified as the blurring boundaries between technology and social reality constructions (Latour 1992). Such blurring effect can be characterized in the dynamics of deconstruction of social boundaries, a transformative process of destabilizing the limits of the known (social) reality into a new sense of existence to reshape everyday social relations (Rahimi, 2011: 169). The transformative (subjective) impact here lies in the type of social relations that are primarily identified in the idiom of dramatic practices.

In the case of post-election Green Movement, protesters who obscured their offline identities by engaging in dissent activism in various online networking sites tended to see politics not merely in the physical but also a liminal realm of social network interaction in mediating technologies like computers and cell phones that dissolve the everyday accepted boundaries between the "real" and the "virtual" worlds. Dabashi described the liminal element as the "exponential expansion of the public domain into cyberspace, to the point that it has had a catalytic, and arguably overwhelming, effect on physical space (Dabashi 2010: 135). In this view, the collapse of cyber with physical space highlights a performative staging of contention that reconfigures the way politics is perceived and representational practiced in "real" life. As Manoukian notes, this reconfiguration identifies a "crisis of representation," in the the confluence of street-protest participation and

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new media representations in the form citizen reportages that construct alternative "spatiotemporal coordination" and new ways of inserting meaning to the events unfolding on the ground (Manoukian, 2010: 247-50).

Cyberspace, at this stage of the movement's development, exceeded its functional role as a means of mobilization and became a communicative network of meaning-laden performances. These performative practices, operating in disperse, can be described as the core of movement of network activists, operational and visible in the virtual public sphere as an "Internetworked social movements." (Langman 2005)

The Myth of Return

With the Internet playing an integral role in the dissemination of subversive information, proliferation of dissident interactive relations and emotive linkages within a networked movement after summer 2009, it is no wonder that the regime saw online activity as a serious threat. From the day of elections, the regime engaged in several strategies to defuse Internet activism and the potential to impact offline activism. One method was to slow down the Internet and bolster filtering techniques, already a measure implemented since the late 1990s when the new medium began to become popular among Iranian dissidents (Gheytanchi and Rahimi 2008). Another method was to hack and deface pro-Mousavi sites and, subsequently, limit the activists' communication links with mainstream satellite TV programs like Al-Jazeera or CNN. Insertion of conflicting or misleading information in the real-time accounts of I-reports of protesters was also an effective way of diffusing the significance of a potentially harmful story (like the death of Neda) that could help the opposition gain support from the national and global publics. But the most effective strategy appeared in the extension of online governance. As a feature of the securitization process that dates back to 2006 when the intelligence units of the Islamic Guard Corps (IRGC) became more engaged with Internet activism (Rahimi 2011: 171), surveillance marked the most effective way to gather information and document the opposition's activities.

Just months before the elections, the newly formed intelligence unit, known as the Iranian Cyber Army, introduced the Gerdab (vortex) project, an intelligence gathering scheme with the capacity to identify dissident activities and their network ties. Various advanced technological espionage devices

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were employed, including Nokia Siemens System's deep packet inspections, with the ability to monitor and change online communication (Chao and Rhoads 2009). By August 2009, after the regime had successfully limited the size and frequency of the antigovernment demonstrations, surveillance over the Internet became an effective soft measure against the activists. The key strategic element in the state's soft war against the Green Movement, viewed by the regime as part of a larger CIA-led Velvet Revolutions around the globe, was not the attempt to collect information but, more importantly, the ability to arouse fear within the opposition. Such strategy would operate in the idiom of rumors, misinformation and capitalize on the movement's weak, informal ties based in the Internet as a way to create suspicion and paranoia. Nevertheless, such emotive strategy facilitated the disruption of the coherency of perceptions and self-images that would set the stage for solidifying a collective identity. Undermining trust is at the core of this soft measure, a way of dislocating meaningful relations that can be made in both offline and online network communities. By destabilizing the shared sense of belonging, surveillance practices would undermine the motivational framework for participation and, ultimately, decrease resistance.

By early 2010, the intelligence-security forces were finally able to realize the effectiveness of their soft strategies by using the anonymity of the cyberspace to infiltrate and spread rumors, fears and misinformation within the movement. Though the regime was unable to prevent the Ashura demonstrations in December 2009, the surveillance and sabotage activities finally saw success in a major day of state-run demonstrations on February 11, 2010, marking the thirty-first year of the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. The so-called "Trojan Horse strategy" used by the Green activists to promote the idea of infiltrating the pro-government demonstrations and expressing dissent amid the rallies back fired, as news of the dissident strategy became known in cyberspace prior to the events, hence enabling the intelligence services to prevent such subversive activities prior to the rallies. In the aftermath of the failed 2010 demonstrations, the Green Movement was declared dead by the regime with its leading figures imprisoned or detained at home.

The return of the Green Movement on February 14 2011 in response to the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings, however, came as a surprise to the authorities. While Internet still played the sort of logistical means to organize the

2011 demonstrations, the framework of cyberactivism in terms of collective action and identity building had now shifted its focus on commemorative practices, performances that largely revolved around calls for action based on past models of heroic actions, together in being inspired by the current anti-authoritarian movements in the region. The Green movement had now transformed from a street-political movement towards a community of remembrance built around a repertoire of memorial performances that recalled the earlier protest days and the movement's fallen members, known as martyr activists like Neda, Kianoush Asa, Morad Aghasi and Sohrab Erabi. Nostalgia would now function as a type of affective commitment with the aim to renew the social affinity of the movement. As an archival site, social networking sites like Facebook and Flicker would have a collection of photos, videos, statements and symbolic depictions and poetical narratives of the movement, its fallen members and leading figures. A photo of Mousavi, giving a speech in the middle of a crowd just days after the elections, recalled the period when many still expected an eventual recount of votes that would ensure their victory in the elections.

Through emotions based on complex moral understandings, social movements have the capacity to reinvent. Remembering the past would provide an imaginary path for a new start. In their course of shifting identities, movements require new definitions within a powerful language that incorporate a direction towards a new beginning, a new framework of thinking, constructed through interaction and demands for renewed emotional investments in a given situation marked with new opportunities. The late Italian sociologist, Alberto Melucci, described this identity (re)construction capacity, inherent to all collectivities, especially new social movements, as "an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the *orientations* of their action and the *field* of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place (Melluci 1996: 70)." While the "field" represents the situations wherein political actors find themselves, "orientation" identifies meaningful actions that enable actors to feel they are part of a collective identity that can be reshaped according to the emerging opportunities for action. Orientations define the symbolic direction and the meaningful capacity for actors to create new ideas, concepts and expectations of themselves and their movement amid shifting situations.

In this creative process, expectations of what the movement can (or should) do entail orientations of action with affective traits. Hopes and promises of emancipation sustain a balance between how a movement adapts to "reality" and how it, paradoxically and perpetually, seeks to undermine it. Internet marks a distinct interactive site wherein such sentiments gain currency within an unmediated space of communication. In his *The Digital Sublime*, Vincent Mosco argues that cyberspace both represents and creates myths and symbols of human action, empowerment and experiences of space and time, which "animate individuals and societies by providing paths to transcendence that lift people out of the banality of everyday life (Mosco, 2004:3). Myths, in this sense, play a central performative-discursive role in movements like the Green Movement that continue to operate in cyberspace in the dynamics of Internet-network complexes. As flexible frameworks for reasoning about reality, stories, rumors, hopes and expectations of a possible return or resurrection carry a mythic force that operates in disjoint time and space, in foresight of a future time of confrontation with the possibility of victory, and a new way of *thinking* about social reality.

Political myths, French theorist, George Sorel, writes, "are not descriptions of things but expressions of a will to act" (Sorel 1999: 28). As an interpretative performance, myths frame the scope of action with the authority to foretell of a battle marked with morality, a struggle between good and evil that eventually will be won in justice. Yet in anticipation for spontaneous combat, myths operate as moral frames that retain a sense of shared identity despite fragmentation of social affinity in light of state measures to undermine the movement. Such self-maintaining strategy identifies combined commemorative and future-oriented practices embedded in discursive practices of dramatic quality. In performative networks, activists communicate with social dramas of commemoration and spontaneous action in order to preserve a shared sense of belonging to the movement. The Internet, in this sense, not only communicates the memories of injustice and myth of return to its participants, but also serves as a staging strategy for such narratives to upholdthe living promise of a future yet to be realized.

In this third phase of development, the relationship between cyberspace and social Movement lies in the capacity to sustain affinity of networks that have lost much of their offline public visibility as a result of repression. Accordingly, they sustaincontentious performances of highly dramatic signifi-

cance grounded in what Sorrel described as the "sublimity" of action (Sorel 1999: 269). Staging the movement online captures the political participants by the awe of a mythical notion of a return that can be recalled and reenacted in the sublime spaces of virtual interaction.

Although the discussed three stages differ in their level of intensity and durability in shifting circumstances and in close connection with how the state (or perceived external threats) react to diverse contentious activities, Internet continues to serve as both a means of communication and a staging of action by social movements. Likewise, in both informal and formal network ties, cyberactivism enables political action to operate both on individuated and collective levels, shaping the relations among political actors and how they define the movement in contention with the state. In this light, however, an obvious risk in building a movement through cyberactivism lies in the very decentralized nature of the Internet. This is so since political activism operating in complex online practices carries the challenge of coherency of subversive mobilization and maintaining durability in time. Such risk is more pronounced with increased repression, imposition of a surveillance regime and, subsequently, spread of distrust among Internet-users for political purposes. As the Iranian Green Movement has shown, distrust of the Internet has undermined so much of the efficacy to mobilize and maintain a community of dissidents; and yet such element of distrust has also undermined the total control of the state over the fluid life of cyber sociability, an alternative domain where various expressions of dissent could lead to a wide range of potential political outcomes.

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