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DIGITAL CONSENT

CONSENT ACCESIBILITY AND ACTIVISM IN THE DIGITAL WORLD

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PEOPLE IN THE SIXTIES:
I BETTER NOT SAY THAT OR
THE GOVERNMENT WILL WIRETAP MY HOUSE
PEOPLE TODAY:
HEY WIRETAP,
DO YOU HAVE A RECIPE FOR PANCAKES?

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CAN WE USE TECH RADICALLY?

BY KIRSTEN

I want the queering of anarchism to be full throttle; I want the radical power of care to overtake anarchist communities and I want this to look like more inclusion: more accessibility and less posturing. I want technology to aid us in destroying that which doesn't serve us.

When I first got the internet, it was not uncommon for me to spend hours cruising it. At this point, I'm not sure that I did anything but check my AOL mail, go into chatrooms and spend hours talking to friends on AIM (AOL Instant Messenger). The advent of personal homepages was the next step in my understanding of an "online presence" - eventually social networking sites like Myspace provided a space to try to shape my teenage identity with more cool than I was capable of in real life (IRL). I remember desperately wanting a beeper or pager like the cool kids, and when my mom got me a second-hand brick-sized cell phone that could only receive calls or dial emergency numbers; I was elated.

With that said, all this should have meant a full embrace of each new iteration of technology. But much like my dad, a tech guy who lost his job at Long Island Jewish hospital in the 90's, I couldn't keep up. Tech moved too fast and I became increasingly suspicious of my investment in that other world. But like my dad and the older generations, alienation crept in and I only recently (about two years ago) got my first smart phone. When I got an Iphone a few months ago, friends would text me that they couldn't believe it - and followed this news with a barrage of celebratory emoji.

This discomfort with modern communication technology does not mean I'm opposed to it in general; as a whole I love it and usually think that those who refuse to engage with tech are either overly idealistic of a pre-tech social apparatus ("People don't know how to talk anymore") or in denial about the security of their information (as if not being on the internet means your online presence doesn't exist).

Email, online forums and group chats make organizing and conversation easier and more accessible to people who can't meet up physically as much. Rather than falling into bureaucratic exhaustion as people try to make sure consensus is achieved (something that might end up being extended over the course of more time than is needed), ideally it means that everybody can chime in quickly and action can be taken sooner. Like wise, someone who wouldn't be as likely to talk in a group might feel more comfortable to say something over text or email.

However the rapid pace of technology pairs well with Capitalism, neuronormativity, masculinity and overly reactive radicalism. The tools capable of aiding our work can often reflect or magnify the same hierarchies we're trying to break down.

It takes me about two to three days to give up on participating a group chat and about two months (at most) to leave one. People who are more comfortable with group chats, for example, tend to respond often and quickly and are able to keep a conversational tone. I tend to get overwhelmed; working a job where I can't (and honestly don't want to) access my phone, coming out of work to watch my phone keep loading new messages - and just as I think I've read them all it seems I have missed another. Anything I would've wanted to say has probably been covered or seems to be beside the point, as the

conversation has usually moved on by then. Sometimes it would take too much time and energy to ask someone to explain something I'm not familiar with - and would seem beyond the point of the discussion. Given that I'm already pretty inactive in activist circles, I feel hesitant to criticize something that has been decided by folks that are more active.

Plugging back in or in at all to a movement or community requires a lot of things: familiarity with the lingo and jargon (YPJ, MACC, RAM, tankie, etc), physical ability, emotional energy to show up at meetings and actions, the understandable but intimidating security culture of radical spaces (including online/text), the intention to tap into or withstand the posturing of political righteousness and navigating spaces that aim to be inclusive but tend to attract manarchists as the most enthusiastic participants. There are so many folks who do find a way to get in there and do the labor of making these spaces more inviting to others. But there are those of us, like myself, who often give up, drop out, burn out or find another community where they feel more fulfilled.

In a movement where people are encouraged to reject authority and take action, empowerment can also mean people are quick to make impassioned choices without giving care to the thought. I hesitate to criticize this aspect - particularly of anarchism - because it's empowering to stop leaving it to the professionals and fight for a new world within this fucked up one, and to act rather than succumb to the complacency already so rampant. But I am a firm believer in utilizing structure in playful ways - and to me this looks like making space for different identities within a movement. This can mean asking cis-men and people who usually take up a lot of space to step back and check themselves, this can mean having greeters at general assemblies to provide a friendly face

for newcomers, it can also mean setting up fluid guidelines for how we communicate via text, taking a pause and restricting certain chats or emails to keeping on task rather than idle chatter (lolz). Can there be space for socializing outside of the organizing texts? Would that feel too up tight? What are we using these online/text spaces for? If we already acknowledge the value of taking a break from social media, can we also recognize the effect that other forms of digital communication have on us?

For myself, I am trying to remember that I don't have to respond to things immediately, even if it seems like things are moving rapidly. It feels important to me to speak and type with more care than I have in the past. As someone who always has all the opinions and wants to demonstrate how "aware" I think I am, I'm trying to learn how to listen and let things sit. As someone who is uncomfortable with technology communication, I have been trying to answer questions directly posed in group chats but not adding much more than the requested information (which is hard because I overthink everything.) I'm trying to embrace the constant flow of group chats; allowing myself to only look at them when I have a minute to digest what is going on rather than when I'm in a rush or feeling overwhelmed. I also try to remember that I don't always have to be super active and super productive like Capitalism needs me to be. I can participate as I need to and take space for myself so that my interactions are actually based out of passion, rage and an authentic desire to participate rather than a need to maintain my visibility and social recognition.

CYBERPUNK SELF PORTRAIT- MOHAWK

BOUNDARIES IN A DIGITAL WORLD
BY ALEX

My phone has many uses: gets me in touch with folks, helps me share memories, connects me with the world, keeps me sane with games/social media - and when there is no network available, I use it to write down the feelings as, for example, my uncle tries to sell me on a Bitcoin investment that he assures will make me rich... The need for distraction is real.

But, and I think this is really the most important question: would I ever use my phone as a vibrator? I can imagine that there are people that might. They might even get one of those Bluetooth deelies they can use with their phone to discreetly pleasure themselves during a family outing. No judgment, no shame (but just out of security concerns, pick a product that values its security and updates its firmware because vibrator hijacking is a thing now. Safe sex is still important in the cyber world). In any case, at this moment in time, this is not my intention with this phone. But the phone has other ideas.

To be more exact, the people texting me have other ideas. Maybe they're hinting at something? That I should pleasure myself more? It's really none of their business, but I can't imagine why else they would force my phone to vibrate so constantly. Are they trying to get my attention? Well it's not working, because I'm 60 messages behind in a group convo, and I have no intention of catching up. At this point, I'm upset at all the scenarios: I am miffed that I have to read an essays worth of conversation when I get home, and I'm sexually frustrated.

And these texts, they're not all pearls: bad jokes, typos, people who are bad at communication, decisions made arbitrarily, some people are lllllllooooooonnnnngggg texters. But I have to keep up with them. I want to be in the loop, I want to be informed, I want to make decisions, I even want to be snarky about some silly shit someone said. But what if I am too slow? What if I can't keep up? Where is there room for the slow texters? The folks who need to be away from their phones sometimes? The folks for whom texting and certain apps are inaccessible? Where do they go when fast texters run the movement?

Now, I have to admit, if I were reading this, I would be thinking, "Great, another thing about how technology is making everything worse, how a whole generation of-folks need to go back to theway things were, bout how my Snapchat is responsible for the death of ALL LEFTIST POLITICS" I'm not a Luddite I promise. I don't believe in rewilding, though nature is awesome. I think tech has a role in our lives at the moment. It is not my place to say if it's for the better or not: I am sure some things are better, some things are not as great.Though I get cyber fatigue, I do not doubt Tech's influence on the culture, and its influence on organizing culture as well (i.e Signal is so hot right now).

And to me, that's just it: In the long run, I am not sure if things are getting better or worse. But I know things are changing. Tech changes things. Tech changes how we interact with the world, and yet tech comes from Capital. It doesn't have to, but in the iteration of the world we currently live in, it is a monied venture. Because Capital is in a hot-n-heavy quest for efficiency, the technology reflects that. We can communicate faster with one aother than ever before. We can plan things faster, make decisions faster, organize in a faster and maybe more organized way. We can organize a lot of things simultane-

ously very very fast! That's the benefit of Capitalist tech. That's our response to living in a world with too many fires to put out at any given time. With each generation, the devices get faster and faster, and the usability becomes more intuitive. We are at the forefront of speed, and the only thing stopping us from taking down systems of oppression is HOW MUCH BATTERY LIFE OUR DEVICES HOLD OMG I DONT HAVE A SPARE BATTERY AND I DON'T WANT TO LISTEN TO MY UNCLE'S RANT ABOUT HOW GENDER NEUTRAL BATHROOMS CONFUSE HIM!!

But that's not really how it is. We are not all on the same speed when it comes to tech. Some of us have it, some of us don't. Some of us can use it, some of us can't. Some of us can use it really well, and some of us can use it just ok. To put it plainly, our society is becoming more tech-centered, and some of us can navigate this world better than others. And yet it effects all of us. The digital world is no longer an abstract hobby, but it is more and more connected to how we live, our physical health, our mental health, and our emotional states. I would go as far to say that's true for heavy techies as it is for folks who just "aren't really into that whole social media thing". It has become an inescapable constant in our lives.

And so, if it is a constant, and we acknowledge that there are already hierarchies of access to it, and if we are trying to abolish hierarchies, what do we do to include those with less tech access, with less tech savvy within the Work?

The simplest answers can be the shittiest, the most priviledged "They just have to get the thing and learn how to use the thing and then it will all be better" Conversly there is no simple answer to this. Like any horizontal, inclusive discussion, it takes time, it takes understanding, it takes

feelings, and it takes some compromise. It takes digital consent.

For some strategies/threat models, it would be a missed opportunities not to take advantage of the benefits that tech gives us. But it would also be a shame that, as we use this technology, we aren't more critical of this Capitalist need for efficiency, and how adoption of this speed is effecting our organizing. We are critical of oppressive structures at every turn - why can't the exclusion that is created from different levels of tech-ability also be a part of that critique? How is that speed effecting the quality of our work? How is it affecting the safety and security of our work? Does it allow us sufficient time for us to be critical of our work? Does "instant gratification" exist, and does it effect our organizing? Efficiency is only relative to the goal sets and what gets done: has the speed changed the long/short term parameters of our objectives?

Heady questions aside, what this looks like on the ground is that some people can keep up with the rate of organizing, some people are forced to keep up, some people leave groups, and some folks don't even get a chance to try. I think we can agree that each individual has their own boundaries and limits, and that in group work, we should acknowledge and respect those limits (whether or not we are successful at doing so is a whole other essay). Why shouldn't this be true of the digital world? Why can't we have digital boundaries and limits?

Some questions for groups come to mind:

Just like physical meetings or phone meetings, is there a time of day in which folks prefer to have conversations (i.e. before 9, after 5, emergencies excluded)?

Does everyone have access to the app the group is using?

If a group member does not have a phone, how can they still be a part of conversations?

How often should we be texting vs. meeting in person or over IM or phone or video?

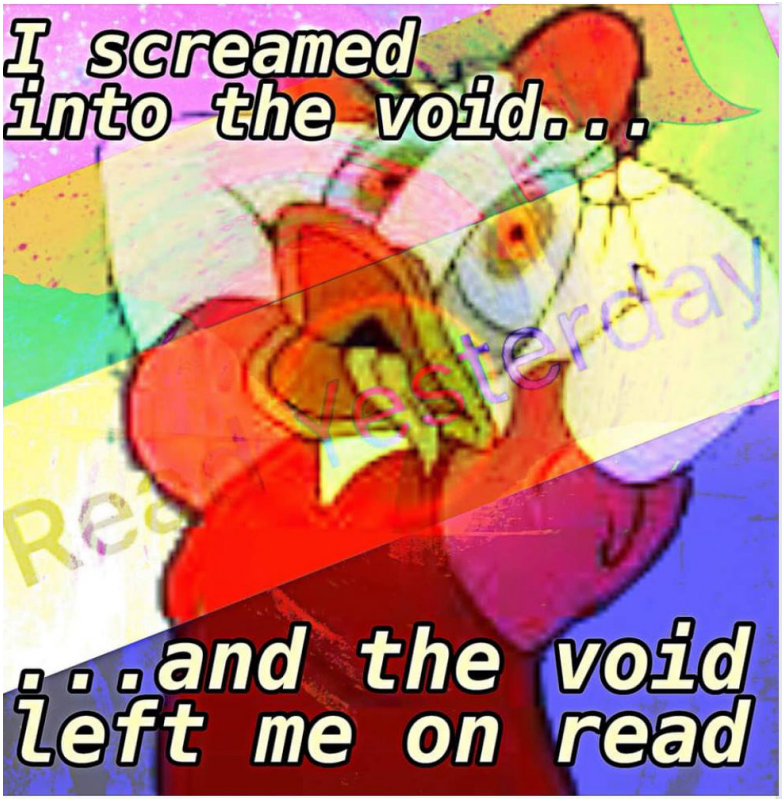
What types of conversations should/shouldn't be had by this group in the digital space?

This is not a call to be scared to communicate with one-another with all the tech. This is not another ask for digital renunciation. Rather, this is me wondering if we can be more insightful into what does and what does not work well for others, and come up with alternatives, so that we can work better together. More and more we are having conversations on the importance of consent in romantic and interpersonal/physical relations, and every now and then, we also add a word or two on the uncomfortableness that technology has brung with things like the invention of the unsolicited dick pick. This request is part and parcel with these convos: if we can begin to acknowledge the emotional and mental toll our IRL interactions have on each other, couldn't we also do the same with our cyber-selves, even outside of the worst case (and very real) scenarios of cyber bullying and online harassment?

I get that, even with consent and compromise, everything won't be perfect. There is, for better or for worse, a gratifying feeling in being freaked out about something, and instantly having a community at hand who can see and validate that feeling: it's cathartic, and it can feel freeing. This is, in a lot of ways how tech is engineered

to make us feel. While I'm not asking to put those very real feelings aside, maybe there are better outlets that we can organize to express these feelings, to share plans and hopes and aspiration in long form, to debate and to brainstorm, rather than solely relying on these devices that are available for some and are a complete difficulty for others.

Or, you know, just let me know beforehand if you want my phone to vibrate uncontrollably. Just stop with the mixed messages



FACEBOOK THINKS THAT BEING TRANS IS CRIMINAL
BY ENDER

There's a lot of writing about how tech monoliths surveil the general populace, but not many concrete examples of what companies do with that surveillance. Through surveillance, Google, Facebook, and Paypal found out I am trans and blacklisted me for it.

It's frustrating to have long history of being blocked by crucial services I need to survive in the age of the smartphone. While creating a developer account, Facebook blocked me completely, with no help from customer service, but then continued to send me emails about Facebook developer tools. I can't use the Google search engine, and Facebook has not let me create an account to deploy a Messenger chatbot simply because of Trans experience.

The nuance of living as a Trans person means that every time you log onto a social account, there are literally dozens of names you might be using. Having even a slight difference between the names on your birth certificate and the name on your Facebook is enough to block you from the service.

Even after changing your name, you can still show up in legal databases as your former name. In many US states, you can never remove your initial name from your birth certificate, only add your chosen name to a new page of it. Changing your name might create as many problems as it solves.

You can be blocked from the Apple Store because your

legal name doesn't match the name you want to release apps with, and because of that you change your name - seriously, imagine that being your main drive to change your name. Even after your legal name change, now imagine that you still show up in most databases with your birth name and get turned away for suspected identity fraud when trying to open a bank account.

There are endless reasons why Trans people are forced to use different names in different situations, but these monolithic corporations assume the only reason for using multiple names is dishonesty. An algorithm doesn't empathize with you when you explain that changing your legal name doesn't help.

Does Facebook know they discriminate against Trans users, or do they legitimately think they are blocking criminals and con men from their service?

These entities block Trans people from making technology that would be helpful to the same group of marginalized people.

It is not coincidental that the same people blocked for being Trans are unable to create their own web tools and apps for others in their situation. In the digital age, the means of production are limited to those with one name.

I feel sick seeing Apple release a Pride Month band for the Apple Watch while limiting Trans developers from releasing apps. I scoff at Google's two rainbow colored "o's" on the downtown building that were placed there for Pride Month. They preach diversity, but the only black people inside Google headquarters are hired to clean the windows. Facebook and Google completely. I do happen to be left of center, but I became blacklisted long before I cared about politics.

Google has blocked me from their search engine.
Facebook has not let me create an account.
And it is because I am Trans.

Every time I log onto a social account, there are literally dozens of names that I might be using because of the nuances of living as a Trans person.

There are endless reasons why Trans people are forced to use different names in different situations, but to these monolithic corporations I am simply a swindler and a liar.

Does Facebook know they discriminate against Trans users, or do they legitimately think they are blocking thousands of criminals and con men from their service? I suspect the former.

A MAP LIKE MOSS ON CONCRETE
BY EM HAICH

Ongoing reflections on how free and open source software vitalizes holistic relationships to technology for the benefit of communal autonomy.

The shape of maps has changed drastically throughout history, reflecting the political shifts and technological advances of their time. With today's ubiquitous digital tooling, how can we inform our sense of place using maps created by active communities - as opposed to indifferent corporations who act as dictators to our understanding of place?

I have never been good with directions. When someone asks me for directions, all they get from me is lost. I orient myself in terms of the relationships I have to a place, by what feels familiar. My memory is my compass. My gut is my North Pole.

This is, of course, a legitimate way we can comprehend space and place. It is based in my physical senses; my somatic, organic memories and experiences, which every living thing comes to know in their own way.

We are living in an era where there exist tools capable of externalizing our thoughts into sharable gifts. The "Tech Industry" calls it "data," one of these words ubiquitously used but rarely parsed meaningfully.

"Data," deriving from the Latin datum, meaning "a thing given." Given: like a name, a point of reference, but also a gift. To give is to do so freely; giving is always

implicitly a choice. In the case of computers, data is not merely facts or figures, it is a chain of gifted names, thoughts with shape, thoughts whose histories can be traced down through the structures they informed. In this way, data is thinking itself objectified.

Of course, the same can be all be said of writing, one of the earliest technologies – the misty, winding bridge from one mind to another.

The only difference between writing in the traditional sense and digital writing — data — is their differing degrees of elasticity. Digital thoughts can be pulled, stretched, and broken down, utilized in many different ways in many different places at the same time. So it is that using a computer well is to do the act of thinking in multiple ways at multiple times, a manifested kind of pluralism.

What then, are digital maps?

At their most basic, traditional maps are inscriptions that attempt to answer questions beginning with the word "where."

The digital map, then, becomes a distant relative of its forebearer paper map — in truth, it is the product of the ever-glimmering chatter of an interconnected world. They are oceans of collective conceptualization of place. Maps are the portraits of places, and today, we have the capability to paint them collectively, simultaneously.

The truth of this has become ruthlessly obfuscated, and in order to de-obfuscate it, one must first become aware of how artificial institutions like Google rely on other artificial institutions, namely State apparatuses.

In a statement made on their Google Maps help pages, Google says that "in order to provide our users with the best, most up-to-date map possible, we must partner with the most comprehensive and authoritative data sources."

These "comprehensive and authoritative data sources" are specifically public records provided by cities and companies.

But then, where do the State infrastructures fail? Frequently, they fail in the face of the real institutions: earth and place; gravity and time.

In January 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, its epicenter only ten miles from the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Phone lines were downed, and buildings mainly designed to withstand hurricane damage collapsed completely. "Parliament has collapsed," announced Haitian President Rene Preval. "The tax office has collapsed. Schools have collapsed. Hospitals have collapsed." The disaster affected approximately three million people and claimed somewhere between 100,000 to 160,000 lives.

Aid efforts, most of whom sourced their knowledge through centralized channels — the same sources as Google if not Google directly — were badly disrupted, as the landscape had changed so dramatically that the maps created prior to the disaster were no longer useful. Roads that had previously been clear were now closed or blocked. Buildings and points of reference that had stood tall just hours prior to the quake were completely erased. Existing maps of the city of Port-au-Prince had suddenly become almost useless; the subject of the portrait had changed, the former no longer resembling the latter.

Enter OpenStreetMap (OSM), a Free Software begun six years prior to the Haitian earthquake as one man's attempt to map the roads of London. Today, it contains the data —gifted by individuals — that gives form to the local knowledge of dozens of thousands of people all over the world.

Using OpenStreetMap, a couple hundred volunteers were able to take what had been a virtually blank map of Port-au-Prince and populate it with vital information, far outpacing the utility of centralized tools like Google Maps. In just forty-eight hours, the work accomplished by these volunteers provided the accurate maps needed to enable aid procedures and disaster recovery efforts to progress. It would have been almost as possible to give to Google the same information. But that data, rightfully a resource of the public, is then legally "owned" by Google. In this way, giving transforms into taking; sharing into forfeiture. By giving your knowledge, your memory, to Google's servers, that knowledge becomes their tangible property, and you are only granted permission by them to view that data on temporary loan. Their copyright lawyers will attest to this in court.

When we give a thought to someone, we are often asking them to remember. Your name, your homeland, your best friend. When we gift data digitally, we are asking a digital memory to remember for us, without organic degradation or influence. To ask a centralized force like Google to remember place for us, economically, we make ourselves the unpaid laborers for that corporation. They remember for us, but knowing we need them to; and they cannot be asked to forget reliably.

Thus, just as the State heavily informs education, social decorum, and how we understand the land around us, Google determines not only that place-knowledge, but

how to think about place and how we think about memory of place; an effect which is infinitely dangerous because it is closer to the core of our experiences.
But if large systems rely on large fuel supplies like State provided data, then the mechanism of Google's silo sputters when it comes to small places. State records are not updated as frequently or completely in smaller towns and villages. Local businesses find less use in, or can avoid being pressured into, logging their finances with overseers than larger companies in larger cities do. Local knowledge is thus infinitely more valuable, lush, and detailed. Residents' conversation is the organism that informs place-knowledge. It is this mechanism that OpenStreetMap reflects.

A local OSM user knows by the community's discussion when the owner of a neighborhood business dies, or when a new road is opened, or when someone changes the name of a building. They know which businesses actually are wheelchair accessible and to what degrees, which ones have gender-neutral restrooms, and so on. Individuals will always be more invested in their home than a Google scraper can ever be.

If a thousand or even a hundred people used OSM regularly in their neighborhoods, their maps would be infinitely more detailed and up-to-date than Google's could be, no matter its technological force or reach.

OpenStreetMap allows users to determine not only how to have conversations or ask questions about their place, but also to determine the very language that comprises that conversation. Where Google limits our way of using a map, OSM allows users to develop a common vocabulary organically, to ask questions to a degree of extreme specificity, to allow room for whoever to do whatever

with the data that is readily and always available. In the case of mapping wheelchair accessible venues, for example, the project known as Wheelmap (https://wheelmap.org) makes use of OSM data to present a clear view of the map for the purpose of displaying known venues and to what degree they are wheelchair accessible. All this project has to do is read the map as it is shared with the world, then filter down for those locations who have been described to the map as being wheelchair accessible, and to what degree. That information is provided by visitors to the venues who take care to include this information in the map.

Unlike Google Maps, which would already require prohibitive licensing in order to do this publicly, OpenStreetMap provides a level of specificity that was designed and implemented by the community that uses OSM. It was the same people who needed and wanted information about accessibility who decided there needed to be a system not only to tag the accessibility of the venue, but what that meant. Is access limited to certain areas of the place? Are the restrooms accessible? And while you're at it, digital memory, can you show me only vegan restaurants who also serve coffee and have wheelchair accessible and gender-neutral restrooms? This is the kind of question that Google not only will not let a user ask, but cannot provide the answer to. OSM, however, allows users to search the data in this specific way, and can provide the answers just as well.

So it is that users not only determine which venues are accessible, but collectively define what accessibility means in the context of a larger community. By doing so, there is a kind of underlying conversation being had in the process of making the map. Sometimes, that conversation is made explicit — there are more than a few places online and in person where OSM users can and do come

together to discuss the viability of a tagging system, or of vocabulary. But a very beautiful thing about OSM is that there is no hierarchical system of approval, because there is no singular authority, only that by which everyone collaboratively agrees — explicitly, not invisibly — to use.

Thus, the OSM versus Google investigation yields testament to the power of automation. OpenStreetMap is a reminder that it is the tool put to best use — those tools which are decentralized and communal — that resolves in the most powerful outcomes. The usefulness of OpenStreetMap and tools like it, each of which could easily overshoot Google's variants, relies not on the State but on individuals who care to utilize the power they have at their fingertips. I appeal to people who desire more autonomy over their sense of place to use OSM in their work, or just for their own enjoyment.

If for-profit companies can automate their work to the degree that they no longer need employees, then people who choose to work collaboratively and intentionally outside of employment can leverage automation just as well, such that there is no longer a need employers; for this is not a real need, nor a real institution. Perhaps allowing for the elasticity of data to exist in free form, organic ways can result in the dissolution of the lie that tells us that we need governments at all.

For a crash course in learning OpenStreetMap, visit https://openstreetmap.org and create an account. Do not skip the tutorial; it is a great tutorial.

Android and iPhone users can use OsmAnd+ (https://osmand.net) to edit and view the map on mobile devices. It is our recommendation to Android users that they first download F-Droid (https://f-droid.org), and then acquire the full version of OsmAnd+ from F-Droid.

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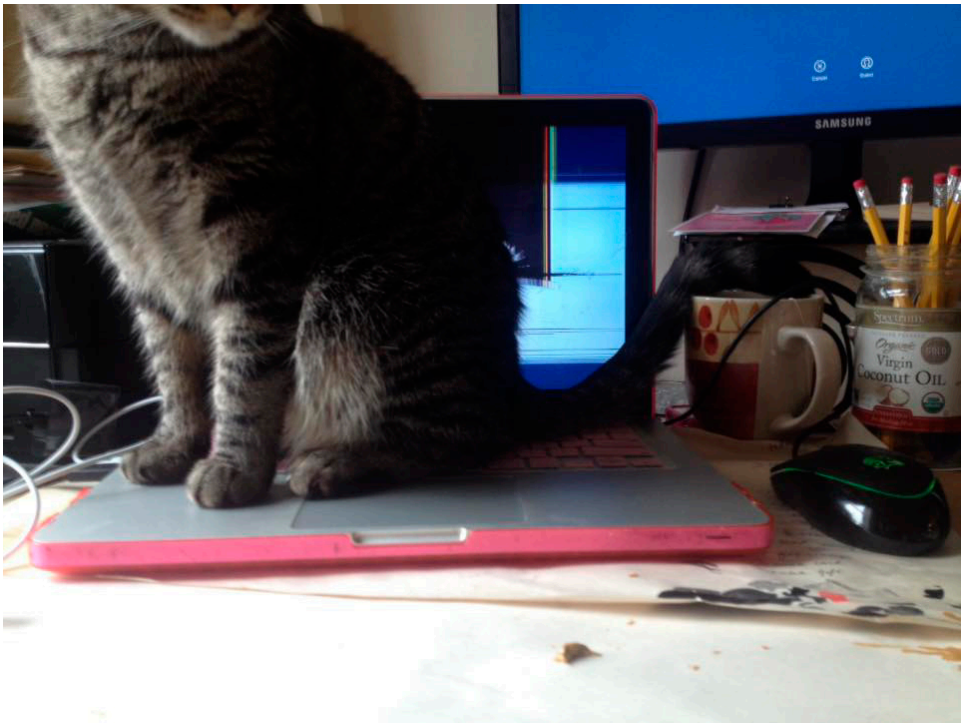

CATSPERSKY

DO YOU AGREE?

BY ELINOR CARMI

What #MeToo can teach us about digital consent

The conversation around sexual consent could radically change the way we think of consent online.

It started in the beginning of April. It was late at night, and I was swiping mostly left on the famous dating app Binder. One guy sent a message inviting me to experience his "enormous talent". Rolling my eyes to yet another tempting offer, I unmatched him. Bored and tired from these original solicitations, I decided to watch another Chelsea Handler comedy special online and go to sleep.

In the morning, when I opened Facebook I saw a new message from a person I didn't recognise. "Hi hotstuff, did u see what I sent you yesterday? I'm free toni8, let's meet! And here's a preview pic to help ur imagination ;)". Gross! Oh god I haven't even have my coffee yet, how the hell did this guy find my personal Facebook account? Then I remembered, that for some reason, we have mutual friends. He must have searched my name and found me. I blocked and deleted the "talented" guy, thinking this is surely a one time thing. But it wasn't, it was only the beginning. Suddenly, I started receiving messages from other guys: "hey, remember we dated that one time a decade ago? Let's stay in touch, here's a pic in case you forgot ;)". An hour later: "hey, remember we talked a couple of years ago in a pub? Let's hang out, k?". Pissed off and annoyed I decided to close my Facebook account, I might not remember anyone's birthday anymore, but I can't handle this shit. But then the next hour, I received a message in my Gmail inbox. Then

another message on Twitter and WhatsApp. They just kept coming, like zombies "haunting" me – "ghosting" was no longer a thing, apparently. Guys who I swiped right and left on, dated or even just talked to once in the past found all my online accounts, even my Hotmail. "THAT'S IT! I am deleting all my accounts!!! I'm going offline, they can't find me here!". Disconnected from everything, I sat in my living room and felt relieved. No more intrusions, I thought with a smile. And just when I was enjoying the silence, I heard a knock on the door…

Even if you don't participate in the wonderous world of online dating, if you have lived in Europe in the past year this story may be familiar in an altogether different light. During April and May, Europeans have been harassed by multiple websites and services which they previously visited or used. Bombarded by these uninvited intrusions to their private lives, people were left scratching their heads and trying to remember when did they actually interact with these websites? Did they actually give their details? Why did the websites still have their contact details after such a long time? And how do we make it stop? Oh yes, we only need to consent.

Those who have lived in Europe for some time might also feel a sense of deja vu. Since the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force on May 25, many websites have introduced pop-up boxes that ask for your consent to collect personal data. These requests are not dissimilar to those that started appearing on websites in 2009, following the revised EU e-Privacy Directive which required websites and third-party actors to get consent before sending tracking technologies (such as cookies, pixels and others) to people's computers. In addition, companies had to give a clear explanation of the purpose of any cookies they use and allow users to reject them entirely. The definition

of consent that was used in the Data Protection Directive was defined as "any freely given specific and informed indication of his wishes by which the data subject signifies his agreement to personal data relating to him being processed". The solution that advertisers, publishers and tech companies decided on was a pop-up dialog box, stating that the website you are visiting will store a cookie on your device. People were supposedly empowered by clicking 'agree', 'consent', 'accept' or 'OK' in response. Privacy campaigners rejoiced and the internet changed forever… right? Well, not quite.

What does consent mean?

The consent pop-up box was a bad cosmetic treatment that was supposed to cover up how people's data is used by companies, without making an actual change. It did nothing to stop data collection and it did not result in publishers and advertisers adding explanations of how cookies worked or what their purposes were. The business model adopted by most tech companies in the 2000s also remained unchanged. Websites continued to seemingly offer free services and content, while surreptitiously monetising both through the collection of vast amounts of user data. Internet users remained a captive audience; refusing to accept the consent pop-up boxes usually resulted in people being denied access.

With internet users left confused rather than empowered by these changes, in 2011 the Article 29 Working Party, the European Commission data protection advisory body, decided to clarify what consent online actually means. In a document clarifying the misunderstanding and flexibility of meanings of consent and how people can express it, the Article 29 Working Party identified several key characteristics: 'indication', 'freely given', 'specific', 'explicit' and 'informed'.

Inspired by western liberal thought about individual freedom and autonomy, the European Commission's definition of consent always assumes a rational person making decisions with all the information and facts available to them. But as historian Yuval Noah-Harari said in his recent Ted Talk "in the end, democracy is not based on human rationality, it is based on human feelings". In an online context, to make an informed decision people need to know first how the online ecosystem works: which companies are collecting their data? What is the value of their data? What kind of data do those companies use and for what purposes? How might that affect them in the near and far future? For how long will that data be used? Will these data be used in other contexts and by other companies? And much more. But when even the CEOs of tech companies such as Mark Zuckerberg admit they do not fully understand how their systems work, how can we expect internet users to make informed decisions?

People make decisions according to their emotions, cultural background, education, cognitive abilities, financial situation, family history, different media representations they engage with, health condition, religious beliefs, gender identity and many other parameters. To assume that a decision can, in the words of EU legislation be "freely given" and "informed", is misguided and simply wrong. As the 2016 US presidential election and 2016 Brexit referendum show, many important decisions are influenced by micro-targeting. As the recent report from the UK's Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee about disinformation and fake news concludes: "relentless targeting of hyper-partisan views…play(s) to the fears and prejudices of people, in order to influence their voting plans and their behaviour". Thanks to the design of online platforms, which conceal what happens in the back-end,

these messages are tailored, personalised and targeted through computational procedures to influence people's behaviour.

Many thought that following the Cambridge Analytica scandal people would leave Facebook and follow the #DeleteFacebook movement. But this didn't happen. This is because, as Siva Vaidhyanathan, a professor at the Centre for Media and Citizenship argues, "for many people, deleting their accounts would amount to cutting themselves off from their social lives. And this has engendered a feeling that resistance is futile". So why do we still get asked to consent to protect our online privacy and experience, when it is impossible to do so?

Binding contract

Consent has traditionally been used as part of a contract. You sign a contract for a house, job or insurance, as an indication that you agree to the conditions of the product, service or employment. But whereas these contracts are static and deal with one particular aspect, online contracts are far from it. In fact, it will take you days, if not weeks, to read the terms and conditions of all the contracts of the online services, platforms and apps you use. Even if you do read all these terms, and manage to understand all the legal jargon deployed, online services frequently change their terms without notifying people. In this way, people have no way of engaging with and understanding what they actually consent to.

But even if you do manage to make the time and read all the terms, and companies will follow the GDPR's Article 12 which requires them to be transparent about their procedures, it is still not enough to make an 'informed decision'. This inability to make sense of online contracts is what Mark Andrejevic, one of the most prominent scholars in surveillance studies, calls the data divide. As he

argues, "putting the data to use requires access to and control over costly technological infrastructures, expensive data sets, and the software, processing power, and expertise for analysing them". And as Zeynep Tufekci, a digital sociology professor, points out, given the constantly shifting nature of Facebook's data collection "consent to ongoing and extensive data collection can be neither fully informed nor truly consensual — especially since it is practically irrevocable". In short: we simply cannot understand how the data collected about us is used. We do not have the processing abilities and big tech resources to see the wider picture.

This inability to understand algorithmic procedures also renders the GDPR's 'Article 21 - the Right to Object' quite useless. The right to object enables people to refuse the processing of their personal data, including common practices used by digital advertisers such as profiling. But how can you object to something when you do not understand how your data can be used to harm you? In order to object, people first need to be aware how their data is being used. Withdrawing consent according to the GDPR's article 7 is also problematic for the same reasons, but also because companies make it very difficult to find the mechanisms that enable people to do so. So, once again, why are we still being asked to consent?

Power and control.
Default control

The current definition of online consent transfers responsibility to the individual under the guise of offering users choice. But the way it effectively works is as a control mechanism. As Becky Kazansky, a cyber security scholar and activist argues, this kind of 'responsibilisation' is "[e]ncouraging an emphasis on the individual as the primary locus of responsibility for protection from harm… [and has] the convenient effect of deflecting attention from its

causes". As in the offline domain, when you sign a contract you are responsible for abiding by the conditions, and if you do not then you are liable for breaching that contract. And yet the legal and tech narratives frame it as if people are empowered to make decisions and are able to control the way their data is used and will be used.

This line of thinking is predicated on the assumption that a person's personal data is a tangible and clearly bounded, singular object that people supposedly have ownership and direct control over. But the way our data is assembled online is more like an ever-evolving "data-self" than a piece of personal property. After all, the data people create, or the traces they leave online, outlines some of their characteristics and behaviours. For example, your mobile phone knows where you have been, who you talked with, when you are awake, the websites you visited, the videos you watched, the songs you played, the food you ordered and much more. But as Erving Goffman argues in his famous book 'The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' back in 1956, we perform our selves differently in different contexts. Importantly, we never reveal all the aspects of our lives. Our data-self is incomplete, inaccurate and consists of multiple messy representations.
How we present ourselves in different social media platforms

The way we present ourselves in different contexts is fluid, evolving and never fixed. Data points about us are enormous and ever-growing, and they can be reshuffled, recombined and assembled in multiple ways over stretches of time. But the way that consent is applied online is static; we are asked only once to consent to multiple procedures often with little or no choice. More than that, our data-self is attached to the profile that companies assemble on us, and is usually connected to our given

birth name. This is partly done to improve commercial and advertising potential by connecting our data-self and offline self. But another reason is that it makes us legally responsible for our actions, something that benefits commercial and governmental bodies.

Some of you might wonder at this point: what's the big deal? How can the processing of my data cause me any harm? The Time's Up movement is relevant here, and this is also the reason why I opened with my fictional story. The string of sexual harassment cases brought to light by the movement has prompted an important discussion about the fluid nature of consent. Context is crucial to consent, we can change our opinion over time depending on how we feel in any given moment and how we evaluate the situation; the controversy over Aziz Ansari is a case in point. Just because you kissed someone or dated them does not mean you are interested in anything more than that. Consent is an ongoing negotiation and not a one-time signed contract.

The global response to the Weinstein scandal revealed how widespread sexual harassment is both within the film industry and at large. It became clear that rather than individual cases, sexual harassment is a structural problem. The power of these men was possible not only because of their hierarchical position but also because of a network of people, standards and norms. It is an environment that is designed for sexual harassment to exist and flourish. Ultimately, these actions are about directing, narrowing and controlling women's agency.

Although they are two different cases, the abuses of power that occur within the film industry and on online platforms share certain similarities. Both rely on a power structure that exploits people, and usually those who are less privileged and marginalised get hurt the most. In the

past few years we have seen examples of how data is used to exploit poor people, people of colour, the LGBTQ community, activists and people with a chronic health condition. And even if you think you have nothing to hide, the diffusion of digital technologies, artificial intelligence and the internet of things combined with the privatisation of services, mean that all of us will become vulnerable in various ways. Importantly, the asymmetrical power relation that this architecture creates teaches people what is their position within a particular system. It is about controlling people's actions, individualising their actions and importantly – narrowing their agency, controlling their data-self.

Rather than empowering people to negotiate and decide on their own conditions of service, like people do when they sign contracts, we see a strategy to control our actions in these datafied environments. The contractual approach leaves people in a passive position, preventing them from having the opportunity to demand other things from online services. Under EU legislation discourse, our actions online are still dictated by the standardised and automated architectures provided by browsers, publishers and advertisers. In this way, the concept of control mechanisms, in the shape of the consent banner, is used against people not for people. The options available are pre-decided, limited and designed in a way that narrows and manages the way people could use and, ultimately, understand the internet.

The old with the new

Is a better internet possible, one in which privacy as a value and right is internalised by its architecture? By requiring that data protection is built into systems "by design and by default" " as Article 25 indicates, the GDPR could be a first step towards this aim. But apparently, when it comes to technology companies respecting con-

tracts, or laws, things get more flexible, and much darker. Calling out the design fail following the transposition of the GDPR, the Norwegian Consumer Council – Forbrukerrådet - released a report on June 27, 2018 that criticised tech companies for using "default settings and dark patterns, techniques and features of interface design meant to manipulate users… to nudge users towards privacy intrusive options". During May and June 2018, the council examined the messages Facebook, Google and Microsoft sent to users in order to comply with the GDPR. Some of the "dark patterns" that report identified include: preselecting default settings with the least privacy friendly options, hiding and obscuring settings, making privacy options more cumbersome, and textual and colour nudges towards data sharing. In other words, what these companies do through these designs is trying to discourage us from exercising our rights to privacy. This is precisely why the council titled their report "Deceived by Design".
(Deceived by Design Report, Forbrukerrådet, Page 3)
As I mentioned in my article about the regulation of behaviours in the European Union internet, we can trace these design strategies to the early days of web cookies. In the late 90s, Netscape Communication released a version of their Navigator 4.0 browser which enabled users to reject third-party cookies. But as Lou Montulli, the Netscape developer also credited with inventing web cookies admitted, the feature did not affect the online advertising industry because people didn't bother to change their default settings. As I argue in the article:
This is how advertising, tech and publishing companies have been controlling information flow on the internet, the design of the architecture where it flows, but also users' online behaviour and understandings of this environment. Spying on users' behaviour and distorting their experience if they express their active rejection of cookies is presented as necessary procedures to the internet's existence. This notion of 'consent' naturalises and normalises dig-

ital advertising and technology companies' practices of surveillance, and educates people about the boundaries of their actions. It also marks the boundaries of what users can demand and expect from commercial actors and state regulators. Portrayed as control, autonomy and power, consent actually moves responsibility from the service or technology providers to individual users. Consent is a design fail that should not be engineered into our online lives any more. But what are the alternatives, then? A good place to start is with the legal scholar Julie Cohen's latest article, where she challenges the current functioning of privacy legislation. As Cohen argues, instruments that are meant to have operational effects, such as notice-and-consent, do not work. Ultimately, as Cohen argues "data harvesting and processing are one of the principal business models of informational Capitalism, so there is little motivation either to devise more effective methods of privacy regulation or to implement existing methods more rigorously". To tackle this, one of the first steps towards a change of the current ecosystem is a need to rethink this business model and invest in alternatives that would make the current model undesirable.

These are some other possible solutions:

1. Breaking monopolies of big companies such as Facebook, Alphabet (Google), Amazon and Microsoft.
2. An internet tax which is funnelled to creating public services and spaces.
3. Promoting decentralised systems such as peer-to-peer.
4. De-individualising use of technology.
5. A live communication platform that connects users to national and EU data protection authorities so that they can complain, discuss, negotiate and monitor how their rights are applied online.
6. A real-time and dynamic terms and condition panel where people can get updates on changes, and can

control and negotiate the different clauses without being denied access. This panel should also connect people to their networks so they can make collective decisions about settings and see the wider impact of those decisions.

7. Developing education programmes, television shows and radio programmes to teach people about algorithms, data-harvesting and processing, data ethics and their rights.

8. Enabling a control panel that is part of web browsers and cell phones, which shows what is happening in the back-end and enables people to have real-time negotiations with services. This panel, again, should also connect people with their networks.

These are just some ideas, but none of them should be seen on their own as the only answer that provides the 'ultimate solution'. Multiple solutions and approaches should be made and promoted, primarily to change the way we use, think and understand the internet. As many media historians show, there are multiple ways in which technology can be used, developed and designed; the default setting is never fixed. The moment we create more possible ways for the internet to function, we can think of alternative ways to engage with it. Ways which really empower us, and not only give us 'control', but agency, autonomy and meaningful choices – individually and collectively. Don't you consent to that?

COPS IN YOUR HEAD- JOSH MCAFFEE

TECHNOLOGY AS A COMMODITY AND THE TECH NO-ACTIVIST SCENE

I still remember that time when back in university I had to write a relatively simple program as part of the lab of one of my first year subjects (intro to programming). I recall being at home, in the living room, and getting super excited when I managed to create a couple of input boxes that did some sort of mathematical operation, popped up the result in a box, and asked the user if they wanted to exit or keep working. I turned around, showed it to my family hoping to see a big smile in their faces, but... all I got was a very fake "that's cool!?".

Like it or not, technology is just a commodity for most people. This is something fundamental to understand for those of us that are somehow related to technology, and are also part of the activist community. We do put a lot of effort and time behind our tools and new cool projects, but that is opaque to the eyes of the average user. Most of us use "simple" things such as shoes, tooth brushes, beds, light bulbs, tap water, etc. Those are things that we all take for granted, without giving any thought to all the effort that people have put over the years, the hard work to come up with simple enough systems so anyone can use them - but that at the same time provide something useful. Why should it be different with technology?

Technology-savvy people within the activist world have the advantage of knowing a bit more than the rest about something so crucial in our current society, but those people also have the duty of sharing with others, of spreading knowledge and developing tools that people can understand and use. Education has always been at

the core of certain ideologies such as Anarchism, education as a way of giving people the tools to be free, to take decissions based on what they know, and not on what they ignore.

What we know is little, but what we (purposely?) ignore is a lot. We know we can talk or message with anyone in the world almost in real time, but we ignore that what we say can - and in many occassions is - monitored. We know we can see what our "friends" are doing every minute, but we ignore that the minute we decide to share on-line parts of our lives with others, they do not belong to us anymore, at least not completely. We know that we can instantly access vast amount of data and news, but what we ignore is that we can be - and in many occasions are - manipulated. We know that when it comes to choosing between convenience and privacy, convenience wins, "they" know that, because then again, technology is a commodity,not something people want to get a headache from.

The fight is going to be long and restless, this we know, but we will not be ready to put up any resistance until we make an effort to understand people, because "they" have already made the effort, done the math, and come to the conclusion that there is profit in it (monetary, control and obedience, etc). A profit based on the ignorance of the people. Let's shed some light on the lives of those people so they have the opportunity to take informed decisions.

THE RIOT IS ONE NIGHT...

COVER YOUR FACE AND HAIR • THINK BEFORE YOU TEXT • ENCRYPT YOUR SHIT • WEAR GLOVES • DON'T USE FACEBOOK, PERIOD • WATCH OUT FOR GOOGLE TOO • USE PUBLIC COMPUTERS OR ENCRYPTED NETWORKS • DON'T SPECULATE ABOUT WHO DID WHAT • WATCH OUT FOR RFID TAGS • DON'T PUT YOUR PICTURE ONLINE • DON'T BRAG • LEAVE YOUR PHONE AT HOME • REMEMBER THAT THE NSA READS YOUR EMAIL • BE CAREFUL, NOT PARANOID • NEVER SNITCH, EVER

...BUT METADATA LASTS FOREVER.

Cybersecurity Resources

Events

CyPurr Collective- Cybersecurity workshops and events!

NYC CryptoParty- Folks organizing cybersecurity events around NYC!

CryptoParty- Global listing of cybersecurity workshops and events

I/O- Offering weekly classes in Ridgewood (Schedule at shiftctrl.space)

Rad Tech- Monthly event on cybersecurity at Bluestockings Bookstore

Online

Holistic Security- A guide to Threat Modeling by the Tactical Tech Collective

Data Detox- Day-by-day guide to get your cybersecurity on!

SSD by EFF- A bunch of great 101 cybersecurity guides by the Electronic Frontier Foundation

HackBlossom- Feminist cybersecurity guides/resources

Privacy Tools- A list of Free Open Source Apps to use

CrashOverride Network- Crisis helpline ad resource hub for folks experienceing online abuse

Prism-Break- List of Free, Open Source alternative apps

Security In a Box- Handy lil cybersecurity starter guide!

About the Authors

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Alex likes to write to stress a bit less on topics of anarchy, nihilism, activism, mental health and whatever. Check out their blog (that needs some tending) at nolife.postach.io

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